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Editorial Note

Kaiser Haq, a versatile professor with many hats, brought his characteristic humor to a webinar at Ashoka University in India. Tasked with defining modernity in Bengal, Haq adopts three avatars – audience, performer, and critic – in a delightful exploration of what he coins the "catwalk of modernity." Through witty reflections, he not only addresses canonical voices from Bangladesh that often go unnoticed across borders but also sprinkles in soundbites from popular media, leaving the audience with both laughter and a profound contemplation of the intertwining dynamics of culture, identity, and the contemporary global landscape. This engaging occasional paper sets the stage for the 14th volume of *Crossings*.

Remaining true to our commitment, *Crossings* continues to serve as a scholarly discursive platform for language, literature, and culture. Within the literature and culture section, our contributors delve into major societal issues involving trauma, identity, gender, environment, and homelessness. Spanning across time and space, these articles underscore humanity's broader appeal and offer profound insights into the complexities of our existence.

Ali Afridi delves into the rupture of body and mind in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, exploring Resnais's crafted trauma narrative. Shantanu Das identifies laughter as a form of *Écriture Féminine* in Manto's short story "The Insult," while Elham Hossain uncovers the knowledge and power nexus in J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands*. Nusrat Jahan reflects on the intricate interplay between identity, place, and the human condition in Jibanananda Das's poetry, and Nazia Manzoor analyzes sexual autonomy in Heinrich von Kleist's *Betrothal in San Domingo*.

Subrata Chandra Mozumder highlights the resistance of first-generation African American feminist Mary Ann Shadd in *A Plea for Emigration*, while Afsana Rahman critiques the portrayal of women as mad in the fantasy world of *Game of Thrones*. Raihanur Rahman connects capitalism and environmental precarity, while Debjani Sengupta sheds light on the lingering shadows of Partition, understanding historical legacies that defined neighbors across the eastern borders of Bangladesh and India.

The language section initiates with Tanvir Hassan Anik, Mohammad Golam Mohiuddin, Md. Didarul Islam, and Muhammad Kamruzzaman's discourse analysis of street hawkers and the registers they use, unveiling coded jargons that make readers alert to their inside jokes. Md. Jahurul Islam, Abdulla Al Masum, and Md. Sayeed Anwar's article on speech production contributes significantly to understanding why Bengali speakers face challenges in pronouncing certain English vowel sounds. A stylistic reading of *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Radia Al Rashid provides a fresh perspective on accent reduction through the lens of multilingualism. Additionally, Md. Nurullah Patwary's paper on peer feedback proves invaluable for readers in the teaching profession.

The volume fittingly concludes with a review of Amitav Ghosh's recent publication, *The Living Mountain*. Emphasizing the importance of treating our environment and its culture as living entities, it encourages us to preserve these invaluable aspects for posterity beyond time and space – a sentiment that aligns with the ultimate aim of *Crossings*.

Happy reading.

On behalf of the Editorial Board,
Shamsad Mortuza, PhD
Chief Editor

Occasional Paper

The Perpetual Catwalk of Modernity: The Show Seen from Bangladesh

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While lazily channel browsing some years back, my attention was caught by an ongoing discussion on a now defunct Kolkata-based channel. In fact, that particular program is the only one I vividly remember from the short and distinguished life of Tara TV. Several participants had been marshalled to talk about "adhunikata," modernity. The session was in its final stages, and seemed to have been an informal for-and-against debate. The only speaker I could watch had begun his spiel. I do not remember his name but I was struck by his cheerful countenance, and his engagingly animated and fluent delivery. He was of modest build, which might have been a consequence of a hyperactive metabolism. This is a retrospective observation I make in passing because, if we were to personify "modernity," one of its conspicuous physical attributes would be a hyperactive metabolism.

The participant in question was an unabashed votary of modernity. I was immediately fascinated by his enthusiasm. He was a connoisseur of both the delights and discontents of modernity. As an example of the delights he mentioned FTV. Could he have been inspired by Roland Barthes' *Mythologies,* the essay on "Striptease" in particular, I wondered. Perhaps, perhaps not; it didn't matter. And further back, of course, there were the figures of Mallarme and Baudelaire. If I may paraphrase from what I doubtless can only recall imperfectly, FTV offers us continuous titillation, an endless catwalk of delectable figures, female and male, draped in divers ways, from the splendidly elegant to the excitingly louche. Being male, the speaker breathlessly described the always partial revelations of the female body that mesmerized the male couch potato. The breasts almost but not quite popping out, the slit in the skirt that goes up almost but not quite all the way, such are the pleasures proffered by modernity to the male gaze. Correspondingly, a woman commentator might easily wax lyrical about the pleasures offered by FTV to the female eye.

The champion of modernity did not ignore its supposedly unsavory sides either. Yes, we are beset with anxiety, neuroses, melancholy, but these are to be embraced as unavoidable aspects of the human condition. He descanted on melancholy, "bishonnota" in Bengali, and, with visible jollity, welcomed it into his life. I was reminded of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* where the rapidly maturing sensibility of Stephen Daedalus experiences the pangs of adolescence. At a children's party, Stephen sings his song and then, "withdrawn into a snug corner of the room he began to taste the joy of his loneliness."

Teaching modern poetry to undergraduates, following a syllabus I helped design, I find myself trying to impress on them the darker aspects of the modern world. They are generally receptive, and can write appropriately depressive answers in tests, and make suitably pessimistic comments at the viva voce that concludes a course. At one of these, one of the

girls whom one would describe as demure and personable, and academically middling to fair, who in class always avoided getting into discussions, remarked in a refreshing gush of pent-up feeling that she didn't understand why the poems about modern city life painted a gloomy picture, poems like "Prufrock" and "The Waste Land," "Acquainted with the Night," "The Great Figure." Wasn't city life more enjoyable than living in the country? There were more places to hang out with friends, more fun things to do, etc. etc. I could not but agree that she definitely had a point, and said she ought to have broached the matter in class so that we could have a jolly debate weighing the pros and cons, and hopefully arrive at a satisfactory synthesis. I wished she had seen the Tara TV program; it would have struck a chord, and perhaps given her the confidence to speak up in class. I am sure she would enjoy watching FTV, which was on the menu of all servers until a few years back. I am inclined to believe it was taken off the general range of channels in response to the complaints of prudish and puritanical elders.

She would also have found a nuanced synthesis of the positive, pleasurable, aspects of modern city life and its negative, disturbing ones in the personal lives and attitudes of the modern poets in her own city, Dhaka. But first these poets need to be historically contextualized, socio-economically and politically. If I may use my own life as a temporal frame of reference, in 1950, Dhaka city, capital of the eastern province of the infant nation-state of Pakistan, had 335,000 inhabitants, a new-born me being one of them. Unbeknownst to me, there was an embryonic milieu of modern poets and writers too. We grew up together, the postcolonial city, the modern writers' milieu, and myself. By the time I reached my mid-teens I had a slight acquaintance with modern poetry, in English and Bangla, and in time would get to know many of the modern Bangla poets well. My Exhibit A, in the context of my student's critical comment, would be Shaheed Quaderi, who died in 2016 in New York.

Most readers would endorse the view of the poet-critic Syed Ali Ahsan that among Bangladeshi poets Shaheed Quaderi is the only one imbued with a truly urban sensibility (*Adhunik Bangla Kabita*, 144). Born in Kolkata to a West Bengali mother and an East Bengali father who was a senior journalist on the *Star of India*, a Muslim League mouthpiece, Shaheed had vivid memories of the wartime city, with GIs kicking their heels as they waited to be posted out. Come Partition, Shaheed's father took the advice of his spiritual preceptor, a pir, and decided to opt for India. He died suddenly, and with communal riots breaking out, the family, comprising, besides Shaheed, his elder brother, younger sister, and mother, moved to Dhaka; from a city of over four and a half million to a provincial town that would take more than a decade and a half to reach a population of a million. Shaheed, still a schoolboy, was quick to adapt, urban sensibility and all, and make himself at home. Even after he left Dhaka in the late seventies, never to return, it remained his spiritual home, object of a poignant, unrealizable, longing to return. He was never prolific as a poet, though he was precocious, publishing a poem in Buddhadev Bose's *Kabita* in his mid-teens. He told me, with evident relish, about his youthful flânerie, reciting Eliot and Dylan Thomas and Buddhadev Bose's Baudelaire translations as he looked upon the city crowds or the Buriganga river flowing past with sailboats or chugging motor launches; and

occasionally hitting a local bar to order, as one might in a Hollywood film noir, "Scotch and soda, make it double." And yet, in his poetry, the mood is elegiac, melancholy, marked by alienation from the consumerism creeping into society.

The young Shaheed Quaderi exemplified the modern Bohemian poet and left a lasting impress on a generation of writers and poets in Bangladesh. The memoirs of two of his contemporaries are worth highlighting. The first is Belal Chowdhury (1938-2018), himself a poet and man of letters of note, who interestingly lived illegally in Kolkata from 1963 to 1973 or thereabouts. A close friend of the two leading Kolkata poets of his generation, Sunil Gangopadhyaya (1934-2012) and Shakti Chattapadhyaya (1933-95), he was a much-loved figure on the Kolkata literary scene, and edited four issues of the avant garde journal of their coterie, *Krittibas*. To Belal Chowdhury, Shakti and Shaheed were the arch Bohemian poets of the two Bengals.

Belal Chowdhury was a fellow Bohemian companion of Quaderi's in the Dhaka of the late fifties and early sixties, and for some time in Chittagong, the country's second city with a history going back to the times of Sindbad the Sailor, where uncharacteristically Quaderi allowed himself to be put into a suit for a brief spell as a medical representative. In Dhaka Shaheed's day would begin at midday, and he would spend the time until the dawn of the following day moving unhurriedly from café to café, most famously at a still extant one called Beauty Boarding, which was what Kolkata's coffee house was to its literati, or Café de Flore to existentialist Paris. In fact Shaheed was instrumental in turning Beauty Boarding into an adda hub for Dhaka's literary and artistic milieu. His perambulations would end at the railway station, where he would hang around till the tea-stalls started frying "jelabees" and preparing the first round of morning tea. These would be his "chhota hazri" before he headed home.

In considering Quaderi's Bohemianism vis-à-vis Shakti Chattopadhyaya's in Kolkata or that of the Beat Generation in San Francisco and elsewhere (including Kolkata, of course, where Allen Ginsberg sojourned for a long spell), it is worth remembering that Quaderi's Dhaka was a small town of half a million people, and not the megacity it is today, with a population of more than twenty million, exceeding that of Kolkata. If Kolkata-centered modernity provincialized Europe, Dhaka carried the provincialization a degree further. If it wasn't a provincial capital I would have introduced the term "mofussilizing Europe," but I will save that for an extension of the process of adaptation to the mofussil level. For now I would like to claim that "mofussil modernism" is a term with considerable critical potential. Indeed I would go so far as to claim that the greatest modern poet in Bengali is a mofussil modernist. It is, of course, Jibanananda Das, whose genius was firmly rooted in mofussil Barisal and its surrounding countryside. But whether modernism, Bohemian or otherwise, manifests itself in a metropolis, a provincial city, or a mofussil town, it deserves to be considered on the same level. There is no hierarchy here. A trend or movement may originate somewhere and travel, but each of its manifestations is distinctive (if it is not crude and shameless imitation), and all its forms, so to speak, exist on the same ontological plane. No matter where an interesting modern work is published, it is from a strange and sublime address.

Quaderi's coeval, Abdullah Abu Sayeed, also Kolkata-born, in his memoir *Bhalobashar Sampan* ("Sampan Filled with Love"), gives a vivid picture of Quaderi's Bohemianism as well as his literary influence. "Many of the young writers of the first half of the sixties imbibed their modernism from him," Sayeed declares. And further, "What everyone, from senior writers to young aspirants, looked upon with fascination – that deracinated psyche of western modernity, the unworldly Bohemianism of Baudelaire or the American Beats, the Outsider of Camus' fiction, Eliot's Hollow Man – all these Quaderi absorbed and made his own, and thereby became an enigma to us … But he belonged to no group or coterie; he stood alone; he was the supreme leader of his one-man band …. Utterly devoid of any sense of home, Shaheed was the first Bohemian personality in the new Dhaka that was then taking shape."

Not that organized coteries and manifesto-driven movements were unknown in Dhaka. While the Beat Generation hit *Time Magazine*, and the Hungry Generation stirred up Kolkata, Dhaka came up with the Sad Generation, and following on its heels, Na (No). The Sad Generation announced itself in 1964 with a bilingual 16-page bulletin of the same title. It opened with a manifesto in rather shaky English by the poet Rafiq Azad (1941-2016) and ended with a sort of prose poem by Prashanto Ghoshal, also in bad English, addressed to Rafiq Azad, and titled "Champabati: A Catharsis of Pent-up Passions." The poems in the middle, in Bengali, were by half a dozen poets, of whom two are still active, although the movement was short-lived. Few, even in Bangladesh, know about the movement, so a few excerpts from the manifesto may have some curiosity value:

> We don't know what we are doing….
> We have no friends….
> We hate conventional life. We cannot tolerate the conventional notions of private and public morality
> Life is meaningless, we are living meaninglessly. We are constantly living in anxieties. We know the intensity of our anxieties to feel and know that we EXIST and that is the root of all our anxieties.
> …
> I should warn the headless conventional gentleman and the bloody critics in this connection that we are not sex-driven youths. We are faithful to ourselves and to our 'SADNESS'. There should be no doubt in it.
> We are not beatniks or angries, remember we are 'Bipanna'. And that is why we are sad.
> We are for no time interested in politics and newspapers. Then, what do we want? NOTHING, NOTHING, -- we want nothing from our bloody society. We are exhausted, annoyed, tired and 'sad'.

Here's a large part of Prashanto Ghosaal's prose poem:

> Champabati, a lady excommunicated by the cruel stroke of society for no fault of hers is a boon companion. In her, I recognize a perfect juxtaposition of peace and destruction. Rafiq, a sincere friend of mine, remains always depressed in this

> age of reason, what with insecurity and what with hell-fire of the earth. And I, a middleman between the two, with my deceitful existence, am in a mysterious process of decay…. Women (except Champabati), FOXY and SEXY, do not know the meaning of life. Rafiq, don't pay attention to a lady.

There is youthful nihilism here in a brash, naïve form, and an underlying misogyny; these can be explained with reference to the small town, puritanical social context. But why the two pieces in English, when Bengali was the obvious literary language of the writers, the language they habitually wrote in. Perhaps, the use of English, a language cultivated by the educated classes, heightened the intended shock effect. But it is noteworthy that Rafiq Azad inserts into his English manifesto the Bengali word "Bipanna," "imperiled," the key word describing the mental state of a suicide in one of Jibanananda Das's best known poems. Abdullah Abu Sayeed, who was one of the poets in the bulletin, notes in his memoir: "Innocuous in appearance, [The Sad Generation bulletin] proved to be a bomb-shell that shook the town. The quiet town of Dhaka, hurt and flabbergasted, reacted by hurling abuses." Apart from its nihilism, the Sad Generation bulletin "created tremors for another reason as well. Its pages were reeking with the raw smell of sexuality. In this respect, the young poets were as reckless as they were immature."

Rafiq Azad was also loosely associated with "Na," whose more active advocates were a group of engineering and architecture students, and an artist fresh from a spell of training in Paris. The novelist Mahmudul Haque declared solidarity. Somewhat Dadaist in orientation the group published four issues of their journal, which was, of course, titled *Na* (No). Each issue had a different, unconventional format. The second issue, of which I once had a copy, was printed on brown wrapping paper, measured five and a half inches across and at least half a yard long, with covers cut out of jute sacking. One issue was circular, another had a number of sides. The most Dadaist of the group, Kazi Shahid Hasan, provocatively declares in a note: "It is my personal belief that in order to rescue poetry from its present state we need to compose poems with the skeletal remains of (1) letters, (2) news, (3) detective stories, (4) novels, (5) advertisements, (6) adversarial thought, (7) the imagination, etc. Such poems may draw the reader." A longer manifesto, promised for the fourth and final issue, didn't materialize. Both the Sad Generation and Na have become forgotten chapters of literary history.

However, the brash and naivete of these movements ought to be seen in a positive light. In the socio-cultural context in which they emerged, they were a rebellious force that shook up the staid, government-patronized literary establishment, which was encouraged to drum up publicity for the official religion-based nationalism. This ideology had already been challenged by the "Bhasa Andolon" of 1952, the student-led movement to have Bengali recognized as one of the state languages. The aftermath of the movement saw a cultural resurgence, in which the modern poets and writers were key contributors. In 1953, one of the noteworthy modern poets, Hasan Hafeezur Rahman, put together an anthology titled "Ekushey February," among whose contributors was Shamsur Rahman (1929-2006), the greatest of the modern poets in Bangladesh. Songs were written and sung, pictures painted,

plays written and produced. The Language Movement acted as a catalyst that turned the modern poets into political activists.

Not that there was a happy marriage of modern writers and political ideologues. Some in the Leftist camp looked askance at what they considered to be decadent aspects of modern literature. Abdullah Abu Sayeed ruefully recounts in his memoir that when he launched a journal of modern writing, titled *Kanthaswar*, he hoped for the approbation of an upcoming young academic. To his dismay, the scholar, an orthodox Marxist, poured scorn on the venture.

And yet, as the pro-democracy movement gathered force, and a progressive cultural forum dubbed "Lekhak Shibir" (Writers' Camp) was launched, among those who joined it were writers who combined political commitment with modern modes of writing. Among them were two of the best known modern fiction writers of the country, Hasan Azizul Huq and Akhteruzzaman Elias, whose novel *Khwabnama* (The Book of Dreams) has been described by Supriya Chaudhuri as "perhaps the greatest modern Bengali novel."

Shamsur Rahman, who is an urban modernist rooted in Old Dhaka, shared Shaheed Quaderi's penchant for flânerie, though not to the same extent. He mentions spending the whole night walking about with Quaderi on hearing of the death of Jibanananda Das. As the democratic movement, which would culminate in the war of independence, gained momentum, Shamsur Rahman captured the strange alteration brought to the cityscape by a general strike, a "Hartal," as the title has it. The viewpoint is that of a flaneur who notes that the city is like a child asleep at its mother's breast, or perhaps like Rodin's Thinker. He compares the quiet of the city to that of Prophet Muhammad as he made for the cave where he used to meditate. Fancifully, the speaker replaces the advertisements on hoardings with his favorite poems.

To put these random notes on modern writing in Bangladesh in perspective a general consideration of modernity is called for. That takes us to the problems outlined in Amit's concept note. First, the Indian sociologist's discomfited dismissal of modernity as a conference topic. I would have loved to hear the sociologist speak at this webinar. I will not, however, speculate on what he might have said. Instead, let us note some of the problems that arise when we use the term "modern."

The modern has to be seen in contrast to the not-modern. If the modern is represented by A, and the not-modern by not-A, we will find that lists of disparate items and phenomena can be placed under the terms in binary opposition. If we put all the poets mentioned above under A, we may oppose them with puritan and anti-democratic ideologues, writers engaged in promoting the official ideology of the day, and also orthodox Marxists. Common binary oppositions are set up between modernists and Romantics or Victorians or realists. And yet, if we broaden the perspective, and place the historical category of Modernism, a movement that is said by some to have flourished between 1890 and 1939, we will have to consider it as a subset of modernity, the concept that the Indian sociologist found uncongenial. A few rough and ready comments on modernity should therefore be apropos.

Modernity encompasses numerous varied, if not exactly, opposed trends and movements. The overarching opposition, according to many critics, is that between modernity and the medieval. When the Middle Ages slowly ended, modernity steadily emerged. The Renaissance was its first cultural configuration. But this is not a water-tight distinction, as Umberto Eco engagingly argues in the essay "The Return of the Middle Ages." The reason for revivals of aspects of medieval culture in the modern and postmodern age is an underlying connection. According to Eco, "looking at the Middle Ages means looking at our infancy, in the same way that a doctor, to understand our present state of health, asks us about our childhood, or in the same way that the psychoanalyst, to understand our present neuroses, makes a careful investigation of the primal scene."

"Our return to the Middle Ages is a quest for our roots and, since we want to come back to the real roots, we are looking for 'reliable Middle Ages,' not for romance and fantasy."

Nor is this a phenomenon of our times: "Immediately after the official ending of the Middle Ages, Europe was ravaged by a pervasive medieval nostalgia."

So the Middle Ages get on the catwalk of modernity.

What about further back? The ancients never lost their appeal, but we look upon them now in a different way. Take the last works of Michel Foucault, and their break with the earlier studies of the conventionally recognized modern era. As Frederic Gros notes in his foreword to the recently published "Confessions of the Flesh," the final volume of *The History of Sexuality*, "The plan to study the modern biopolitical *dispositif* [plan of action] of sexuality (sixteenth through nineteenth century) … was dropped in favor of the problematization -- through a rereading of the philosophers, physicians, and orators of Greco-Roman antiquity – of sexual pleasure from the historical perspective of a genealogy of the desiring subject and under the conceptual horizon of the arts of existence" (6). With the phrases "the desiring subject" and "the arts of existence," we are in our times, and now must accept that we have a vital connection with antiquity.

The ancients too get on the catwalk of modernity.

And even further back, the primitive too has long been inseparable from modernity. Primitivism is a vital aspect of modern art and literature.

There are some piquant oppositions within modernity as well. In the penultimate episode of *The Big Bang Theory*, when Sheldon Cooper is complimented for his Renaissance mind (if I remember rightly), he snorts, "Huh, the Renaissance! I am an Enlightenment person." Or words to that effect. Despite the critiques of some postmodernists, "Enlightenment Now" is an indispensable aspect of the scientific worldview. Steven Pinker equates Enlightenment with modernity, and the Romantic and the postmodern as its enemies. But Romanticism and postmodernism too are simply further twists in the evolution of modernity. One can get into a leotard and hop on to the catwalk of modernity.

What distinguishes modernity, then? Perhaps simply that its opposite is the view of reality *sub specie aeternitatis*, under the aspect of eternity, whereas in the world of "anitya,"

impermanence, we exist under the aspect of modernity. Like it or not, we need the concept of modernity to make sense of human reality. It may have come soiled by colonialism, but postcolonialism cannot be articulated without recourse to modernity.

It seems to me now that historical time as we know it is the catwalk of modernity. Of the four yugas, Satya, Treta and Dwapara seem to be prehistoric. The Kali yuga brings us into history and is our catwalk. Those of us who try to write must get on the catwalk of modernity and perform their Monty Python silly walks, while others play the critic or simply watch. Like many, I enjoy all three catwalk-related activities.

Note: This is the text of a talk given at webinar on February 25, 2022, organized by Amit Chaudhuri at Ashoka University, India, on the theme of modernity, "On Not Mentioning the Modern."

Literature and Cultural Studies

Rupture of Body and Mind in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*: Apperception of the Historical Malady in Resnais's Trauma Narrative

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Abstract

Alain Resnais has devised a narrative of fractured identity, trauma, and incommunicability in *Hiroshima Mon Amour.* With its minimal aesthetics, intricate movement and jettisoned conventionality, the film becomes a new map for theorizations in literary, cultural, and psychoanalytic spaces. This study uses these spaces for a phenomenological inquisition of "rupture" by positioning the subjects of the narrative within them, thus creating a spectrum for identity analysis as well. By delineating the characters as fragments and totalities, it strives to provide a critical reading of trauma and the separation it postulates in the corporeal identity. Kristevan conceptualizations of "abject" and "melancholia," Freudo-Lacanian postulation of "spatial geometry," and Kantian "spatiality" are used as modalities for the demarcation of new narratives within literary, social, cultural, and epistemological dialectics. The study further aims to structuralize rupture as generating new cartographies of spatiality while hinging on the film's narrative framework of storytelling through the body and the mind.

Keywords: spatiality, rupture, abject, trauma, melancholia

Introduction

Alain Resnais, an acclaimed experimental filmmaker of the 20th century, made *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (henceforth, *Hiroshima*) from the screenplay of Marguerite Duras in 1959, which is considered a cornerstone of the French New Wave movement.[1] The story depicts a short-lived romance between two passionate lovers that transcends the frontiers of traditions, cultures, races, and histories. The narrative contains two protagonists, one French woman and one Japanese man, and is set after fourteen years of the nuclear holocaust in Hiroshima, Japan. Resnais deliberately refrains from taking a historical route in his narrative as it is "impossible to talk about Hiroshima. All one can do is talk about the impossibility of talking about Hiroshima" (Duras 151), and rather appropriates a modernist narrative technique in his film.

As the film starts, the audience are immediately assaulted with waves of images from the cold pits of historical debris to the warm embraces of the lovers. The lovers are unseen as of yet; only in a highly calculated frame are seen the shoulders and the arms of two racially distinctive figures whose bodies coincide with the backdrop of documented footage of ruin. The tone of the film is further set forth with the accompaniment of the staccatos of

1 Nouvelle Vague or French New wave was an experimental film movement in the late 1950s that explored fragmented forms and styles as means to express abstract thoughts in cinema, akin to contemporary literature and painting.

Giovanni Fusco's nocturne that stupefies the audience into a new modality of cinematic narrative which would eventually accelerate the Nouvelle Vague movement in France in the late 50s. The narrative of the film contains an apperception of trauma, a transgression of memories, a remapping of desires, and a transnational vision of a historical malady.

This study adapts a cross-disciplinary approach in delineating the characters in the film as inquisitors of symbols as victims of trauma, and their search for space where identification could be rendered possible, thus, providing a narrative of new spatiality where interactions are sublimated to concepts like spatiality, desire, abjection, and melancholia. The study seeks to examine the "rupture" that renders the mind and the body as autonomous spaces of identification and narrativization.

Rupture in Identity Formation: Space as a Psychosomatic Device

This film could be studied as an earlier exercise in trauma narrative where both of the protagonists are afflicted with the parade of time and their desire to escape from it. Memory and forgetfulness play a vital role in the development of the plot as they disparage the narrative elements of a linear plot. As the film begins, the characters are intimately engaged in what would rather be pronounced as a duet than an actual conversation. This performance, overlain on the images of dilapidation, should immediately transpose the role of the audience as voyeurs of mass destruction. The characters are already seen as engaged in their transferences: the Japanese man denounces the illusory Hiroshima as being described by the French woman and the French woman relegates from her confirmations of having actual memories of the historical catastrophe. Their dialogue goes along the lines of absurd dramatic exchange rather than a real cinematic performance as was expected by the modern audience. In the lovers' exchange, the bodies are seen as fragmented limbs covered with the elementalities of war, atop the superimposition of Hiroshima footage shot by Akira Iwasaki. The French woman, after being negated of her war memories by her Japanese lover, defeatedly admits, "The illusion, it's quite simple, the illusion is so perfect that the tourists weep" (*Hiroshima* 00:07:18-00:07:22). There is nothing else for the tourists or the documentarians to do except weep for a cataclysmic past. The role of the audience is that of grievers of an event that never existed for them.

Resnais has pledged a poetic narrative in his film, all the while maintaining a rigorous framework where words, timelines and identities are juxtaposed and highly premeditated. Rosamund Davies recognizes the difficulties with synchronicity in the interactions of the characters on both personal and historical domains by acknowledging the critical stances while saying, "the film problematizes memory, history and indeed representation itself" (151). Resnais was portraying the characters within the limitations of subjectivity, negation, and spatiality. By doing so, he exhibited a trauma narrative in which the mind got doomed by historicity whereas the body stopped receiving signification from the mind, becoming a site of multifaceted spatiality, resulting in rupture. What affected the lovers in the film was war but as subjects of different wars, the symbolizing zones of personal experiences were different for each of them. The Japanese man was fighting as a soldier during World War II, leaving his family in Hiroshima while the atomic bomb hit the city whereas the

French woman encountered an urban battle in the same war. Both subjects are remnants of a grand war that affected the lives of millions, surviving and dead, and are castrated by it.

Rupture, a result of this castration, gives the film its movement; not only are the characters' bodies and minds splintered, but the space of the narrative itself is plagued with its effects. The penetrating shots of the lovers, the close-ups of cityscapes, and the clinical detachment from its historical setting add to the diffusion of rupture in the lives of Hiroshima. A city incapacitated by the ruins of war becomes the nightmare of an unhinged collective psyche; a narrative in this setting turns into a tale of alienation and deterritorialized bodies. The body's history remains somewhat faithful to the past while the mind makes up its own account of what has occurred. Resnais's refusal to turn to a historical narrative furthers the efficacy of rupture that marks the body and haunts the symbols for signification. In this ambiguous storytelling, Resnais provides an astute statement of the historical calamity by limiting and personalizing the totalizing history. Communication of history through language, for the characters, becomes an impossibility whereas communicating through bodies becomes an essentiality.

Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience*, notes the function of imperceptible narrative in the text:

> It is indeed the enigmatic language of untold stories—of experiences not yet completely grasped—that resonates, throughout the film, within the dialogue between the French woman and the Japanese man, and allows them to communicate, across the gap between their cultures and their experiences, precisely through what they do not directly comprehend. Their ability to speak and to listen in their passionate encounter does not rely, that is, on what they simply know of one another, but on what they do not fully know in their own traumatic pasts. (56)

In her book, Caruth dignifies the trauma narrative of *Hiroshima* and expedites the possibilities of "a new mode of seeing and of listening—a seeing and a listening from the site of trauma" (56) by addressing that "*Hiroshima Mon Amour* opens up the question of history, I would propose, as an exploration of the relation between history and the body" (26). In the narrative, the site of decimation becomes a space for the French woman to realize her own personal history of trauma – a site of trauma functioning as a site for recuperation and salvation. After the death of her German lover, the woman becomes a vacant site without signification – becoming the body that negates the mind as a mode of survival through trauma – only to materialize her new spatiality in the setting of trauma. She gets banished to the cellar (French for "cave") which is a required space for her to make communications with the world possible by dislocation; the cellar becomes a site for new knowledge of herself and the world – alluding to the mythic cave of Plato – which would provide her corporeal identity an anchor. Here, "Forgetting is indeed a necessary part of understanding" (Caruth 32).

A crucial reading supplementary to *Hiroshima* would be Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* where memory is delineated as an unforgiving and relentless factor in the formation

of individual identity and in "Volume I," he writes, "reality takes shape in the memory alone" (Proust 260). The cruciality is also acknowledged in the resourceful article "Summer Was Inside the Marble: Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour*" by Carol Mavor where she claims, "*Hiroshima mon amour* is a post-nuclear reading of Proust" (Mavor 37). She has worked on the functions of memory in the post-nuclear narrative of *Hiroshima* from a photographic perspective that includes several film and critical theories to bring out the binaries of the text to provide a register for reanalyzing history as a narrative of mass memory, and also on the incantation of Proustian "involuntary memory" in the characterizations of the text. The article simultaneously affirms the importance of representation and the impossibility of it due to the unreliability of a memory at the aftermath of a traumatic encounter.

Memory plays a critical role in the characters' identity formation throughout the course of the film. Memory is regained, savored, obliterated, and reformed in the characters' contestation for space for re-identification. For a space to emerge for new signification to take place, the lovers reevaluate each other's spatial memory and look out for the possibility of creating a new one where the new memory would offer new symbolizations.

Abjectal Dialectics

> You're destroying me. You're good for me … Please, devour me. Deform me to the point of ugliness. (*Hiroshima* 00:15:26-00:15:39)

Only a few moments into the film and Resnais sets the dialectics in motion – the French woman's exigency for cementing her identity in destructiveness, thus becoming a "fascinated" – if not a "submissive and willing" – victim of the "abject." Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, theorizes the non-spatial, yet borderline, and immoral territory of "affects and thoughts" as abjection, from which the subject "strays" in terror but identifies it as a space for jouissance all the same. She postulates that abjection "disturbs identity, system, and order. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4). Abjection launches an existential threat to the subject and yet the subject pines for "signs and drives" in it. Separating it from the object, Kristeva pronounces that the abject possesses "only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I" (1) and "is radically excluded and draws [me] toward the place where meaning collapses" (2). In *Hiroshima*, the two protagonists as subjects are terrorized by their abjects: bleeding hands and mutilated bodies become the source of their abjections. Kristeva remarks, "all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (5). The French woman's account of her German lover's death in Nevers provides the origin of her abjection:

> He grew cold beneath me little by little. He took so long to die! When? I don't know exactly. I was lying on top of him … the moment of his death actually escaped me, because even at that very moment, and even afterwards yes, even afterwards – yes, I can say afterwards – I couldn't find the slightest difference between this dead body and my own. His body and mine seemed to me to be one and the same. (*Hiroshima* 00:59:36-01:00:32)

Her abjection gets territorialized with her lying over the dead body, therefore, she turns into the "deject," as Kristeva characterizes – "the deject—the one by whom abject exists, who places, separates, situates, and therefore strays instead of getting her bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing" (8). The separation from the lover's body, which now territorializes her abject, castrates her being and, at the same time, facilitates polymorphous systems of significations against which she can now project her spatiality. Kristeva writes, "Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance" (15). The French woman's identification with the dead body as homogenous to her own living body represents the death of the ego, and with it, a "metonymy of desire" (Kristeva 49) occurs, trajecting desire from *objet petit a* to the Kristevan abject: "To each ego its object, to each superego its abject" (Kristeva 2) – the death of the ego brings forth the superego into motion, immediately designating the death as the point of abjection and, imminently, jouissance has now infiltrated this space, as Kristeva puts it, "the advent of one's own identity demands a law that mutilates, whereas jouissance demands an abjection from which identity becomes absent" (54).

Both the French woman and the Japanese man are subjects of abjection in their representation of the progressiveness of the age: "the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture. Its symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages" (45). Both of them are engaged in artistic or creative occupations – the woman is an actress and the man is an architect. Kristeva calls the deject "A deviser of territories, languages, works, the deject never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly questions his solidity and impel him to start afresh" (8) and this is personalized in the two dejects of the narrative who are persistently looking for significations to solidify their existences within their creative outlets but are repeatedly impeded – which can be seen in their familial relationships – and terrorized with their abjects since abjection draws them towards meaninglessness.

The lovers' communication is highly intellectualized and contains stylistic departures from the existing modalities of interaction and is contrasted in the meeting with the Japanese stranger at the Casablanca and the old Japanese woman in the penultimate scene at the station that appear ordinary. The Japanese man's abject has been determined at the beginning of the film with the footage of Hiroshima where he vehemently negates the memories of his lover so as to assert his "repugnance" towards the catastrophe, thus, identifying his abjection. The abjections of the lovers become the space for them to connect, not despite it but because of it: both lovers identify the need of the Other for a space, out of the ambiguousness of abjection, to make transgression permeable and jouissance to occur:

> jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [on en jouit]. Violently and painfully. A passion. And, as in jouissance where the object of desire, known as object a [in Lacan's terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. (Kristeva 9)

The relationship between the deject and the world is essentially created within the unsolidified territory that is not totalizable in which the desire of the deject for one pseudo-object, for lack of the original object, after another is confirmed as its straying from the abject, thus from their destruction. In the abjectal dialectics, rupture becomes performative, for the body – in its own identification of the lack from experiencing rupture – searches for signification in the nothingness that arises from the semiotic-symbolic dialectics and, as a result, misrecognizes itself. In case of the Japanese man, the Other is obliterated by the war and for his signification to take place, he has to turn to the mainspring from where the Other was manifested in the first place to find signifiers. At this juncture, he finds the demarcations of the semiotic from the symbolic order – traces of primacy start hovering in his conscious appeal to meaning. In his search for meaning from the object (his otherness), he gets pushed away time after time until he misrecognizes the abject as his object and a new space is created, marked by the abject. The French woman's abjection of corpses is projected onto the Japanese man's abjection of war: both becoming each other's destruction. The two lovers are severed from their internalized abjections and territorialize each other's abjections in a single space to search for lost meaning in the land of oblivion, thus spawning a performative space of production in place of loss.

Melancholia, Desire, and Corporeal Identity

Melancholia can be seen as the constructive and perpetuated space of rupture in which the body-mind duality is essentially fractured into distinct spatiality. The theorization of melancholia, especially in the post-war females, is a topic that has also been illustrated by Julia Kristeva in her book *Black Sun* where she dedicates a chapter titled "The Malady of Grief: Duras" to Marguerite Duras' narratives and her female characters. She theorizes melancholia in the political spectrum as such: "Duras' melancholia is also like an explosion in history. Private suffering absorbs political horror into the subject's psychic microcosm" (234). Melancholia is represented both as an outcome of trauma and an affect which is especially apprehended in her discussion on "melancholy woman" when she says, "modest, silent, without verbal or desiring bonds with others, she wastes away by striking moral and physic blows against herself, which, nevertheless, do not give her sufficient pleasures" (30). This is apparent in the characterization of Emmanuelle Riva as the French Woman: Duras adds in her notes, which were intended to complete the original text, to the original screenplay, "my mind was already confused by different standards of morality" (104) and "in my dreams morality and immorality were so intertwined that soon I couldn't tell one from the other" (106), which almost adds an additional layer to the female protagonist as simultaneously being extremely aware of herself and not understanding herself at all. Kristeva would identify these traits as a sign of melancholia and an exercise in comprehending the politicization of the body and the mind that has been rendered impossible with the post-reality of war.

The French woman would certainly try to accomplish a vision of reality for herself that soothes her utterly ruptured sense of one but the devices engaged in the process – the same devices that are supposed to make identification possible in the first place – obliterate any credibility of it. Loss, trauma, and catastrophe function as mechanistic instruments

of severing the body-mind duality and reconstructing body and mind as individualistic spaces of signification that concoct melancholia. For the French woman, the loss of her German lover castrated her, threatened her with the loss of ego, and rendered her entire psychic and symbolic spaces of signification unfunctional. Until her confrontation with the Japanese man in the café, the source of the French woman's melancholia was unknown to her – it was still unconscious. It is also at that instance that she unconsciously identifies with the Japanese man as her lost object – the source of her melancholia from the loss of the German lover. The cellar becomes the melancholic space for her in the lack of a social space. While talking about the differences in acting out in melancholia and being entrapped by it, Khan Touseef Osman records, "melancholy implies the impossibility of moving on. The melancholic state traps a person in an obsession with a loss, where s/he keeps acting out the scene of loss" (134). With the remembering of the past events that forged the French woman's identity and desire at the café, she is confronted with her provenance of melancholia – in an attempt to inoculate herself to the experience. In the act of remembering, she finds out she is also forgetting, for the topography of desiring symbolizations is shifting. She has reduplicated the lost object (the German soldier) in the Japanese man that has propelled time and space to a momentum of temporality – extracting, perpetuating, and projecting loss onto a subject for her identity's inherent yearning for suffering.

The lovers' severed bodies from their minds, and hence the epistemological abstractions of the world, function as Deleuzoguattarian deterritorialized spaces which "make the outside a territory in space; consolidate that territory by the construction of a second, adjacent territory"; here, each of the characters "deterritorialize(s) oneself by renouncing" (Deleuze and Guattari 353). These spaces are vacant of the significations of the external world at a given time for new significations to take place through the operational process of reterritorialization. Kristeva declares the formation of new history as expropriating old ones when she says "the horror of Hiroshima somehow liberated her from her French tragedy" (232). The Freudian Eros and Thanatos dynamic calls for action in Kristeva's inquiry into the nature of love in *Hiroshima*: "A love crippled by death or a love of death? A love that was made impossible or a necrophiliac passion for death?" (232). Here, she encourages a phenomenological investigation into the ancient dualism that has mapped the human unconscious: only with the loss of her German lover could the French woman fall in love with the Japanese man, the mark of death on whose body lingers and perpetuates. Love and death become the territories of signification for the lovers.

Death is where the body of the German soldier shuts off and the French woman's embrace of the dying soldier becomes an effort to externalize her death drive (Thanatos) into the world, but with no reciprocity. This vacant site becomes her new spatiality – the preface to new signification is written and the reconstruction of her corporeal identity finds inception. The tasting of her own blood and the licking of the saltpeter in the cellar are vapid manifestations of the lack of that reciprocity in the external world which she could, then, only internalize with someone who has been similarly marked by death, the Japanese architect, the reciprocity of whose death drive would make her whole again. The Japanese

man comprehends the immediacy of this exchange which can be seen in the dialogue with his lover about Nevers: "I somehow understand that it was there, that you began to be who you are today" (*Hiroshima* 00:43:32-00:43:42).

The film's personalized account protracts the trauma narrative where the personal and private worlds of the lovers are relegated from the objective and external world of body-mind dualism. Thus, the body-mind rupture creates dislocated subjectivity where identities are formed in the social sphere through intercession: the sudden slap of the Japanese man entertains this space, for instance, with which the destruction of the overlaying past narrative is urgently committed so as to clear an immediate space of desire in the rupture of the French woman. Points of rupture become the breach of the characters' identification in which they would want to revel in each other but these domains are permeated with symbols from their personalized histories. The unsanctioned territories of the lovers are the source of their romantic melancholia, marking both of them together, bonding them in ambiguity and imprisoning their desires for each other. Time and the obliteration of any sense of it perpetuate melancholia for the French woman whereas a total denouncement of the past is the scourge of the Japanese man's existence, both causing desire to manifest in a state of abandoned hope and absconded reality. The affective spatiality of their jouissance lets them move towards a transgressive present where desire is sidelined to a reification of the rupture. The melancholic couple's fulfilment of desire for each other is an exercise in demarcating new body narratives that amends their pasts and pretermits the future; an enclave of desire is manifested in their union where time and space are transcended into performative dimensions of reality – striving to attain new territorialities in the lovers' uncommunicated space.

In "Desire, Duras, and Melancholia: Theorizing Desire after the 'Affective Turn'," Kristyn Gorton suggests the transformative aspect of desire, that it does not limit but liberates the body, by assessing the Deleuzian "becoming" of the body through desire. She talks about *Hiroshima* thus:

> Desire is embodied in the characters and expressed in various ways: as something that can release the past, as something that is contained in the past, as something that produces connections and forges new bonds and as something that is destructive and annihilating. (23)

The movement of desire creates the space for the body's "becomings" and "unbecomings" and in the case of *Hiroshima*, it works as a locomotive for the body in creating points of departure in the existing body narrative to enter newer ones. In deliriously positioning herself as a subject of trauma, and hence melancholia, the French woman finds out the images, symbols, and memories that fixed her identity ever since. She is confined in her melancholia, the freedom from which now appears to her in madness. When she looks at herself through the mirror at the next scene of the film and chastises herself, she is driven by the need to exorcise herself of not only her memory but also of her desire and her identity. Trauma ruptured her identity; melancholia incarcerated it. Since the separation from the German soldier's body, her body has been configuring the language of desire

in the modalities of alienation, secrecy, and shame. It is not until the spatio-temporal reduplication of the Japanese man is completed through transference that the remapping of desire in the flesh becomes plausible. But the mind, persecuted by melancholia, is still mystified by the desiring symbolizations of the lost object of love. At the recognition of the need for demystification of her desire, she acknowledges the reification of it. She is, finally, prepared to manifest her desires onto the Japanese man, thus creating a space of desire for the two, shattering previous connections to memory, the entrapment of desire. The rewriting of memory and loss refigures her melancholia and desire into a new spatio-temporality in a chain of spatio-temporalities where her corporeal identity would find stasis in the symbolic order.

The rupture is already playing its role in severing the sanest parts of the memory from the body's capacity to inhabit history, thus, lacerating the personal identification at the onset of new spatiality. The lovers' connection to this body narrative, which is marked by ruin, death, collapse, and misidentification, is reinforced with the prerequisite of association through trauma.

Spatial Geometry

To turn to psychoanalysis, a mode of analysis that deters the body-mind dyadism, *Hiroshima* becomes fraught with spaces of thought and matter where thoughts are seen as actions in the linguistic field, thus affecting the space of matter (body) of the subject. In the historical spectrum of trauma, the subjects are displaced, disfigured, and negated from their historico-cultural space and thrust into a new spatial topology. While talking about memory and its role in the French woman's psyche, Freud's concept of Nachträglichkeit (translated as "deferred action") becomes apparent. The death of her German lover and the subsequent events preclude her signification of the tragedy in the outside world. The lack of signified, while she stays in the cellar, perpetuates her psychical trauma while she suffers. Where the world of external signification fails, she resorts to language – where the world of objects is metonymized into mere signifiers, thus heightening her alienation. Even then, the only language she avails while staying there is the language of touch, as she momentarily thwarts her memory from taking over at the aftershock of the traumatic event, and the limited objects she has access to are fixed, with the exception of the rolling marble which she feels with her lips – she feels warmth as opposed to the cold and deadness of her lover's corpse. It is also at that moment that she feels her "hatred left" her and learns to avoid present afflictions, for otherwise she would "suffocate".

The café scene where she accounts for her memory becomes the first instance of her remembering, against the fourteen years of repressing. This is also where Freud's Nachträglichkeit is seen in play: the woman retroactively living the same event that begot her trauma; only the actual event that marked her did not exact her trauma, rather the expressing of it is what made her memory haunted with trauma. This association of a past traumatic memory to a present state of consciousness is not merely reliving an old wound but a complete construction of trauma in a space that was only inscribed with images. Complete dissociation is an effect of trauma and it is one of the defensive mechanisms

the mind creates to protect itself. The French woman's choice of career as an actress, in which she does not have to be herself for an extended period of time, epitomizes her dissociation. The association could only ever be possible with the belatedness of the subject's projection of the initial memory in what Freud calls a "hypnoid state" in which the rest of the consciousness is momentarily bracketed off while a genuine introspection of the unresolved incident finds action in speech, in this instance. Anticipation is also an aspect of the creation of trauma: the subject anticipates signification of the actual event but remains in search of the signified.

Freud's Nachträglichkeit is understood further in the Lacanian framework: Lacan proposes concatenation of signifiers and the incidental meaning at only a given frame of reference. Hence comes the notion of asubjectivity – the subject being unaware of an event's traumata until the chain of signifiers come in association with the corresponding signified. In case of the French woman, the signified is a lover. Her language reshuffles around it and both signifier and signified become accessible to her with the contact of her lover, the Japanese man with whom she shares the most intricate details of her traumatic overture, thus, constituting trauma as she shares and realizes. The moment of her most crucial suffering actualizes into the most defining trauma of her life. She accepts her trauma with the utterance: "I had no doubt you'd cross my path one day" (*Hiroshima* 01:16:59-01:17:02). Until this realization, the lovers were incarcerated in a different relationship in which the devices that construct memory did not come into play; they were intoxicated in a borrowed heaven until the truth became the most intimate aspect of their relationship. The Japanese man is, unwittingly, now a device of her trauma, the realization of which makes him leave her alone. The perverse implication of the Japanese man when he mentions "a war" while talking about a next time they might meet underscores his lack of understanding of his personal trauma. The signification of the Japanese man after the war has yet to take place and does not find its grounds in the confines of the film; he suffers in limbo while anticipating the full process of Nachträglichkeit to take place.

At this point, the lovers could not be more distant from each other and their reconcilement is not perceived as a possibility in the narrative but through a montage of fragmented images, Resnais shows the internal psyche of the French woman. Through fragmentation, she discovers the separation of the mind and the body narratives. The bodies become the place for the lovers to remember the signification of what love once was for them. The body's memory is celebrated in Resnais's vision of jarring materiality at the end of the film where the woman walks and thinks, and the town's depictions are, perhaps, seen through her eyes. It is in Hiroshima she found her Japanese lover in his physicality and thus confirms his name as "Hiroshima" at the final scene whereas the Japanese man, in his reductive identity as a subject still in search of signification, finds a place in her body's memory of Nevers, thus naming her "Nevers". In "Body, Memory, and Irrelevancies in *Hiroshima mon amour*," Christopher Hamilton yields a description of the memories as experienced by the body:

> It is as if she moved in Hiroshima as if it were Nevers, as if her bodily memory

> of Nevers were found again, here, in Hiroshima. Hence, she finds startling "meeting-in-Hiroshima" or possibly "getting-to-know-one another-in-Hiroshima [se connaître-à-Hiroshima]" —the hyphenated phrase emphasizes the necessity of place, of the body's sense of place, of its memory of place, for the erotic attraction she feels toward Lui and which becomes indistinguishable from that which she felt (feels) for her dead German lover … reveals her memory in her body, in her body's possibility of erotic encounter, of its need for erotic encounter and the way in which this is her way of remembering. (80)

The giving of space by the French woman and the taking of it by the Japanese man are the last spectacle of spatial identification – a metonymic, infantile recognition of the fragmented self in the illusory totality. The memory of the body is the space where recognition at this level takes place with its own language – movements, nakedness, and stylizations. That the Japanese man is often perceived as being the German soldier's replacement is a phenomenon enacted by the body where the damages of the trauma have been somewhat ameliorated – healed hands and healthy hair of the French woman are testaments to this. The Japanese man, on the other hand, is not acquainted with his trauma, still awaiting the deferred meaning due to a massive lack of signifiers. The signifiers for him would be, ironically and peculiarly, available to him with his confrontation with a subject similarly branded by war which is exactly what he perceives the French woman to be. But to avail signifiers from her, he needs to enter into her linguistic domain and the most personalized experience of war, otherwise it would simply be a historical calamity, which might be inflicted with the signifiers that he lacks in his personalized space of war to understand. The need for each other is thus described as a "glove" fitting a hand several times in the narrative. That the lack of space in one's fragmented self is promised to be gratified by the other is what Lacan calls "geometrical" or "kaleidoscopic" – the reciprocity of space in identity.

The two protagonists of the narrative are seen to have been advancing with "the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality" (Lacan 3). Their identifications with each other and the world are fraught with significations constituted of this lure and it is always in progress, rendering the spatial identity assimilated – just now – invalid, towards marking new territories for exhibiting newer spatial geometries until a sense of totality is accomplished. The totality will always be elusive in the living space and but a form of it is still promised by the lure. The positionalities of the subjects get projected onto the realization that the modalities of their identification in the social field are only ever diminishing, with the unavailability of significations.

The concomitant effect of trauma is the lapse of personal memory in the face of a historical one. In case of the relationship portrayed by Resnais, memory, an essential component of the mind and body-mind dualism, is seen as being severed from its receptacle, the body that it inhabits. This severance provides a singular memory narrative of the minds that strive to consolidate their obfuscations into one corresponding memory: a space made out of psychological fissure and its effects, that is being restructured with incantation,

exoneration, and assimilation. In the film, the memory of the Japanese architect is almost absent which is only essential after the nuclear fallout, after which his identification cannot exist with symbols from his world that has been conspicuously annihilated and, thus, has created a lack and a negation in his identification. His search for a memory that would anchor his identity, hence saving himself from the malady of history, is coalesced with the French woman's need for the actualization of memory. Both find a space where they can play their roles as fabricators of their memory narrative and that space becomes grounded in the site of innocence, which has not yet become the site of trauma, for the French woman: a space forged out of time and is now inhabited by the lovers. But that space is not creating new spatial arrangements for the French woman who needs it as much as her Japanese lover; this realization is unmistakable in the following exchange of affirmation and negation:

> SHE: Like you, I am endowed with memory. I know what it is to forget.
> HE: No, you are not endowed with memory.
> SHE: Like you, I too have struggled with all my might not to forget. Like you, I forgot. Like you, I longed for a memory beyond consolation, a memory of shadows and stone. (*Hiroshima* 00:12:05-00:12:35)

The space in the French woman's memory is getting devoid of signifiers, which is identified as an opening of new space for the Japanese man and as a betrayal by her; so, the motif of betraying memory comes into motion in the narrative. The film becomes a ground for negotiation between the two lovers for this space through negation; the rupture between the body and the mind is only getting perpetuated throughout this process. As Žižek puts it:

> the true choice apropos of historical traumas is not the one between remembering or forgetting them: traumas we are not ready or able to remember haunt us all the more forcefully. We should therefore accept the paradox that, in order really to forget an event, we must first summon up the strength to remember it properly. (22)

The French woman's memory of Nevers posits a ground for her and her Japanese lover to live in forgetfulness and through this mutual participation, the memory starts to become haunted with images from the present which is marked by the procession of the historical malady that she has been trying to escape in the first place. The Japanese man is unable to ascertain the destructiveness of the situation, of the dangers of misrecognizing their pasts, so he persists in chasing his newfound ecstasy in the space in her memory; but she rejects, constantly. By the end of the film, they are seen to come to an understanding that their spaces of new signification should be carved out of each other's in order for the external world to make sense for them. They assert the existence of their corporeal bodies again through proclamation (in Duras' screenplay, the names are hyphenated):

> SHE: Hi-ro-shi-ma.
> Hi-ro-shi-ma. That's your name.

> HE: Yes, that's my name. And your name is Nevers. Ne-vers in France. (*Hiroshima* 01:29:47 -01:30:29)

The pauses in their speech accentuate the concreteness of their identification; and the memory narrative is now replaced with negotiated spaces, namely the spaces devising their corporeal bodies.

Narrative of New Spatiality

In *Hiroshima*, we see the protagonists striving for cognizance at two levels: the psychical and the corporeal, both of which has been rendered dismissive by the traumatic backdrop of the story. The endeavor to corporealize spatiality is one of the foundations of epistemology, especially Kantian Transcendental Idealism. Immanuel Kant, in "Inaugural Dissertation," says,

> Space is not something objective and real, nor a substance, nor an accident, nor a relation; instead, it is subjective and ideal, and originates from the mind's nature in accord with a stable law as a scheme, as it were, for coordinating everything sensed externally. (397)

Kant points out in this dissertation that space and time are both *a priori* and give an external object cognizability, that is to say, space and time are the part of consciousness that can be categorized as what Kant refers to as intuition which is devoid of sensibilities. Space is not to be realized, elaborated, or comprehended in the corporeal world but the corporeal world is an extension of that *a priori* which renders the venture from the abstract to the corporeal, the absolute to the subjective, intelligible. Kant continues:

> Space and time are conceived as though they contained within themselves all the things which in any way present themselves to the senses. Thus, according to the laws of the human mind, an intuition of an entity is only ever given if that being is contained in space and time. … Whatever exists, space and time are in it; that is to say, every substance is extended and continuously changed. (409)

What Kant posits as the "principles" of the physical world can be incorporated into the understanding of the body and the mind: the mind being the abstract and the body being the corporeal, conjoined by the confinement of physicality and positionality of the subject. The characters in *Hiroshima*, as Kantian subjects, are seen as torn between this confinement and the desire of the subjects' occupation in the grand abstraction of creating new spatiality. This web of relationalities has been further understood in Merleau-Ponty's concept of "spatializing space" which "disintegrates and re-forms before our eyes" (219) with a catalyst; in *Hiroshima*'s case, the catalyst being the traumas experienced by the characters. Albeit functioning in different spaces and experiencing trauma from what might appear as two distinct sources, historical catastrophe and personal loss, their individual search for a new spatiality might appear entirely distinct but when looked at carefully, the film is so well-constructed and craftily narrated that the confusions in the narrative regarding histories, identities, and spatiality resolve themselves. Duras writes in the "synopsis" of the script, "she remained in a cellar in Nevers, with her head shaved. It was only when the bomb

was dropped on Hiroshima that she was presentable enough to leave the cellar and join the delirious crowd in the streets" (12). Duras essentially analogizes the two protagonists' separate histories and consolidates them into one single history overarching their conscious and unconscious existences.

The girl from the bank of the Loire – which could easily be recognized as a metaphor for the Lethe: the mythological river of forgetfulness – is affected by the same catastrophe that destroys the entire family of her future Japanese lover. Here, spaces are transgressed and transformed with historical events that have affected the lives of millions who could be seen, not unlike these characters, as searching for new indexicalities in their spatiality. The French woman's shaved head also alludes to the loss of hair due to radiation in Hiroshima's survivors; this is contrasted in Resnais' film where he shows the documentary footage of a victim of Hiroshima's atrocity losing her hair and later, in her memory, the French woman is seen getting shaved while suffering from the traumatic loss of her German lover. Thus, the characters are, what Heidegger calls "de-severed": "'De-severing' amounts to making the farness vanish—that is, making the remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close" (139). The juxtaposition of the images in different settings and timelines in the story provides the audience an insight into the characters' quest for an anchor in the ever-expansive corporeal spatiality.

Conclusion

Hiroshima is a narrative set against a historical malady which makes it a ground for an upheaval of older narratives and embarking on new theoretical frameworks. In this study, the subjects are set against a kaleidoscope of critical theories to bring forth the elements of rupture that stimulate the possibilities of radical abstraction in the cultural space. It has strived to illustrate a panorama of analogies in Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* by assimilating theories on spatiality, psychoanalysis, and finally, epistemology, where the concept of spatiality finds its emergence. By mapping new cartographies through the conceptualization of "rupture," it delineates how *Hiroshima Mon Amour* functions as a narrative of abjectal dialectics, spatial geometry, and new spatiality.

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She Laughs, She Speaks: *Écriture Féminine* in Manto's Story "The Insult"

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Abstract

Saadat Hasan Manto in his story, "The Insult," portrays Saugandhi as a prostitute who is capable of speaking of her choices, yet she speaks in a language designed by a patriarchal system that can be read as "phallogocentric" from Hélène Cixous's perspective of poststructuralist feminism. Saugandhi's desire to be loved by a man confines her to the passive, non-speaking position that this "phallogocentric" system has fixed for women in the Lacanian structure of the Symbolic Order. However, the rejection by a customer one night rids her of the desire for patriarchal recognition. She starts speaking in a language new to the phallogocentric system which upsets Madho, who is portrayed by Manto as a speaker of that phallogocentric language. In the last conversation with Madho, Saugandhi laughs hysterically and that threatens Madho with the fear of losing control over her. Manto writes her laughter as her language, which can be analyzed by Cixous's idea of écriture féminine. With a qualitative approach, this paper examines how Manto, through the portrayal of Saugandhi, writes a deconstructive language that decentralizes the phallogocentric structure in Urdu short fiction and contributes to the *écriture féminine* in the subculture of Urdu stories even before the phrase was coined.

Keywords: *Écriture féminine*, phallogocentric, language, laughter

In a world of the twenty-first century, where objectification of women's bodies and men's participation in it are normalized through the "men will be men" tagline in commercial advertisements like that of the whisky brand, Imperial Blue, Manto's stories about prostitutes and their claim of a fair share in the structure of language will never be old. The seemingly innocuous tagline is often taken by many women in the advertising field as "a justification, for bad, at times overtly sexist behaviour" (Sharma). Manto's sincerity as a progressive writer who is into reporting the real story of how men objectified women in his time mocks that sort of tagline and rips through "society's garments and unveil(s) deceit and hypocrisy" as his friend, Abu Saeed Qureshi writes about him (123). As a writer, he has always been sympathetic to the prostitutes of his city. In a lecture at a college in 1944, he said, "My heroine is the cheapest of whores … whose heavy eyelids are weighed down by years of missed sleep. That's what I write about. *Her* desperation, *her* illness, *her* anxieties, *her* insults— … that's what I write about, not the housewife's pleasant banter, good health, and high-mindedness" ("Lecture" 264). This shows that Manto's choice of characters does not portray women the way men want to see them, but rather women whom men do not

count as ideal. This paper takes "The Insult" as an example of that. Here the protagonist, Saugandhi, is a prostitute who has been working in Mumbai for the past five years. Initially, she is shown as a clever and confident prostitute who knows her way with her customers. She is also portrayed as a naïve woman in her relationship with Madho (a customer/boyfriend) who extorts money from her with false promises of a family life. Manto's portrayal of Saugandhi's emergence from this situation and his narrative both advocate for women's rights. His portrayal of a prostitute can be read through Hélène Cixous' poststructuralist feminist theory expounded in her essays, "The Laugh of the Medusa" and "Castration or Decapitation?" Manto, a member of the Urdu Progressive Writers' Association, has often been subjected to accusations of obscenity. However, what seemed obscene to the court at that time (and to many of his fellow progressive writers) offers more scopes to read Manto as a writer whose works show traits of poststructuralist feminism even before such ideas were made popular in Feminist Studies in the Western world.

Hélène Cixous expresses her poststructuralist feminist ideas in her essays as a response to the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of the Symbolic Order and the position it has given to women in it. In Lacanian definition, the Symbolic Order (the structure of language) is entirely patriarchal as it calls the center of the structure the Phallus. It is not the penis, but rather "the patriarchal order of the culture" as Mary Klages puts it (86). So, the Phallus is a patriarchal synonym of the Law-of-the-father/the Name-of-the-Father in Lacan's theory which is analogous to the Freudian castration anxiety (84). Mary Klages, in further analysis, says, "The Phallus, as center, limits the play of elements and gives stability to the whole structure. … The Phallus stops play, so that signifiers can be connected firmly to signifieds" (84). Also, in Lacanian discourse, a boy and a girl enter the structure of language in different ways based on their genders. Since the boy identifies himself with the Phallus because of the presence of his penis, he is posited somewhere nearer the Phallus (nearer the center, hence nearer the power as an agent capable of speaking), and since the girl "lacks" the penis (the presence), she is posited further away from the Phallus (away from the center, hence away from the power as an agent incapable of speaking). Poststructuralist feminists argue that gender is a social construct intertwined with the concept of power, and thus the theory of different ways for boys and girls entering the structure of language is problematic in itself. According to the poststructuralist theorists, "gender is a set of signifiers attached to sexually dimorphic bodies, and that these signifiers work to divide social practices and relations into the binary oppositions of male/female and masculine/feminine" (Klages 91-92). In poststructuralist feminism, such a social construct, based on the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified, is prone to be deconstructed (92). Hélène Cixous in her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" ("*Le Rire de la Méduse,*" translated in 1976) and in her 1976 essay "Castration or Decapitation?" ("*Le Sexe ou la tête?*" translated in 1981) proposes a theory that supports such possibility. She calls the patriarchal structure of language a phallogocentric system (something that is simultaneously phallocentric and logocentric) and coins the expression *écriture féminine* (feminine writing) as a weapon to deconstruct that system. Cixous writes, "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, … Woman must put herself into the text—as into the

world and into history—by her own move" ("The Laugh" 875). Her statement underlines the idea that a woman must write about her true feelings (*jouissance*, as she puts it) which only she understands as a living body so that the phallogocentric language that constitutes the binary oppositions in society can be broken and destroyed. She argues that writing has been governed "by a libidinal and cultural-hence political, typically masculine-economy;" that "this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously" in a manner in which "woman has never *her* turn to speak;" hence "writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, … the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (879). She also mentions "male writing" that women can produce by writing "the classic representations of women (as sensitive—intuitive—dreamy, etc.)" (878). Though, in this argument, Cixous emphasizes on women writing about themselves and on reducing the phallogocentric representations of women by women writers, she does not ignore the possibility of male writers writing for women and representing them as beings capable of *speaking*. She also proposes an "*other bisexuality*" based on the "non-exclusion either of the difference or of one sex" (884). Mary Klages considers this "other bisexuality" as something which "rather than taping masculine and feminine together, … would dissolve the distinctions, so that sexuality would be from any body, any body part, at any time" (104). Such scope of transcending a socially constructed gender-based authorship of male writers and female writers supports the gender-neutral authorship where a male writer or a female writer is just a writer. From this perspective, Manto's stories contribute to the *écriture féminine* in the Urdu narratives.

Along with the concept of *écriture féminine*, this paper takes another idea of Cixous—laughter as a mode of speech for women—to analyze Manto's "The Insult." Cixous shows that since women are kept at a distance from authority (the Phallus), their position is capable of escaping that system more freely than men who stay closer to the Phallus and thus, remain more confined and shackled in meaning with the signifiers. Mary Klages explains Cixous's idea in this manner: because of such a position, women "have more freedom to behave as they choose, rather than as the center dictates" (100). Hence, women are capable of producing a "more fluid, more flowing, more flexible" language (100). So, a flexible language, free from meaning and stability contains its lucidity in a simple expression like laughter. Cixous characterizes language as being able "to break up the 'truth' with laughter" ("The Laugh" 888). The Medusa myth becomes more appropriate with this connection between language and laughter. Medusa, a classic case of victim blaming, is used as a strong metaphor in Cixous's theory to highlight the non-speaking position of women in the phallogocentric structure of language. However, Medusa is also shown by her as a mythical figure capable of laughing away that phallogocentric structure when her gaze turns men, not women, into stone. Cixous tells women, "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (885). In her essay "Castration or Decapitation?" Cixous draws a Chinese anecdote from Sun Tse who, in his manual of strategy, devises a way to teach the inattentive queens a lesson for always laughing during his training sessions (42). The punishment set for them is to be decapitated—too heavy a punishment for too light a "crime". Cixous points out that

while a man, from the psychoanalytic perspective, bears the fear of castration, a woman is expected to bear the fear of decapitation to keep her fixed in meaning in the phallogocentric order. She writes, "It's a question of submitting feminine disorder, its laughter, … to the threat of decapitation. If man operates under the threat of castration, if masculinity is culturally ordered by the castration complex, it might be said that the backlash, the return, on women of this castration anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution, of woman, as loss of her head" ("Castration" 43). So, the discrimination lies in the system – when men fear losing just a genital organ, women fear losing their life, their very existence. Cixous's reference to this story accentuates the passivity woman is defined with in the phallogocentric structure of language. So, she ends her essay with this proposition of laughter to be the language of woman, "Laughter that breaks out, overflows, a humor no one would expect to find in women—which is nonetheless surely their greatest strength because it's a humor that sees man much further away than he has ever been seen" (55).

Considering these ideas of *écriture féminine* and laughter as language, "The Insult" can be read as a text (or *sext*, according to Cixous) that establishes its protagonist, Saugandhi as a woman who starts speaking with her laughter and shakes the phallogocentric order that Madho has been holding her into as a passive, non-speaking being. Gail Minault classifies the Urdu-speaking womanhood in the early twentieth century with a daring linguistic identity while defining the concept of the "earthy, graphic, and colorful" *begamati zuban* (women's Urdu), in which "women are not worried about whether the men think them 'ladylike' or not, since men are not party to the conversation" (119). Though men of that time, as also seen in Manto's story, hold women in passivity and silence, women do hold, in their own linguistic sisterhood, a potential power of disregarding men from the socio-cultural perspective as is made clear in Minault's point of view. This resonates with what Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard opine, "Cixous makes it clear that her project involves more than a defiant rejection of the existing order. It is also a profoundly creative political engagement with the way things could have been" (3). To contextualize this line of discussion, it can be said that Manto addresses the potential power of speech in a character like Saugandhi and writes a criticism of his time. Also, the very portrayal brings out the sexuality of Saugandhi that contributes to the *écriture féminine* in the tradition of Urdu fiction.

The story begins with a tired Saugandhi falling asleep in her bed after attending to one of her regular customers, "the official from the city's Sanitation Department" ("The Insult" 46). She calls this customer Boss and this sets the tone of passivity in her character. Her lying in bed calls to mind Cixous' statement in reference to the story of Sleeping Beauty in her 1975 essay with Catherine Clément "*La Jeune Née*," of how women characters have "a strong chance of always being found in one position: in bed. In bed and asleep …" ("Castration" 43). This association might make the beginning of Manto's story look like another phallogocentric depiction of woman. But Manto, famous among his contemporaries for his irony and twist in language, clears that confusion with the last line of the paragraph: "He [the customer] could have stayed the night, but he professed great concern for his lawfully wedded wife who loved him very much" ("The Insult" 46).

The ironic combination of the official of the Sanitation Department and the disloyal husband in the same man highlights the germophobic tendency that Manto's society holds toward prostitutes. Also, this line introduces the reader to what Khalid Hasan, in the introduction of his translation of Manto's works, calls the "bite and sharpness" of Manto's narrative technique (xii). Manto's witty style of breaking the traditional ways of portraying prostitutes in negative roles points to the poststructuralist trait in his writing. This further establishes him as a writer who shows gender-neutral authorship that has already been mentioned earlier in the paper.

Manto's description of Saugandhi's room spells out the phallogocentric language that Cixous says can be deconstructed through *écriture féminine*. Her room can be taken as a concrete existence of the Symbolic Order. To begin with, there are "four picture frames hung on the wall" and "each held a man's photo" ("The Insult" 47). They are all Saugandhi's customers whom she adores and desires to be loved by. These four picture frames can be taken as the position of men in the phallogocentric Symbolic Order; their being fixed in photo frames symbolize men being fixed in stable meaning in the structure of language. There is also "a brightly coloured picture of Ganesha" adorned with "both fresh and withered flowers" in the room "at a short distance from the photos … in the corner on the left" (47). This photograph of Lord Ganesha, a male god in Hindu mythology who is worshipped for wisdom and knowledge, can be taken as the center or the Phallus in this context—the photographs of the four men are closer to it, thus reflecting upon its being a representation of the Phallus, the center, with all its godly attributions of holding the wisdom of the universe. Manto's description extends this symbolism further with the small lamp in front of the deity with "its flame standing erect like a flick of paint on a devotee's forehead" (47). Also, the deity's photograph being "on the left" is a reminder of what Toril Moi refers to as the "patriarchal binary thought" presented in Cixous' works in which man is always on the left side of the slash (102). In Mary Klages' opinion, Cixous' criticism of the phallogocentric structure of language is "based on the primacy of the terms on the left-hand side of the slash in any array of binary opposites" (98). Though the picture of Lord Ganesha is "in the corner on the left," its importance as the center of attraction in Saugandhi's room, with the extents of worship through flower, oil lamp, incense sticks, etc., cannot be ignored ("The Insult" 47). In this discussion, it is interesting to note that the four photographs are hung on the wall; that means they can anytime be taken down, thus denoting the possibility of restructuring the apparently stable position of men in the structure of language. It is also interesting to note that Saugandhi herself has framed and placed the photographs on the wall; she herself has placed the picture of Lord Ganesha in the niche and regularly worships it. This points to her desire to be loved and approved by a man. In her conversations with other prostitutes, she shares all her tactics of handling the customers (49-50); yet Manto expresses her naivety in these words: "she knew countless ways to keep her johns in their place. While she had resolved many times not to accept their vulgar demands and to treat them indifferently, she would always get caught up in the moment and give in. She couldn't control her desire to be loved" (51). The effect of a phallogocentric system is so intense that women often think like men that they are incapable of speaking for themselves

and they need to be protected by men. Cixous underlines this nature in women and says,

> For as soon as we exist, we are born into language and language speaks (to) us, dictates its law, …: it lays down its familial model, lays down its conjugal model, and even at the moment of uttering a sentence, admitting a notion of "being," … we are already seized by a certain kind of masculine desire, the desire that mobilizes philosophical discourse. ("Castration" 45)

In Cixous' terms, a woman is born into this phallogocentric system. It is not the woman who speaks the language of the system, rather the language, being phallogocentric in nature, speaks to the woman and defines her. The "masculine desire" in Saugandhi's case is to be loved and rescued by a man with whom she can have a family. Here comes Madho as an agent of this phallogocentric system with all his false prospects of fulfilling Saugandhi's desire as the Prince Charming in her life.

Madho speaks the phallogocentric language. He is a head constable in Pune (interestingly a man who is to enforce the law) and Saugandhi has a relationship with him that, according to her pimp, Ram Lal, is "a strange affair" ("The Insult" 48). He visits Saugandhi whenever he is in need of money; he comes, has sex with her, talks her into giving him ten or fifteen rupees, and leaves; it is like a routine that Saugandhi is used to. Saugandhi does realize that Madho is extorting money from her, but she cannot give it up as she needs to be loved. It is also true with her other customers as Manto writes, "It seemed like every night some john would proclaim his love to her. Saugandhi knew they were lying, and yet her emotions would overwhelm her and she would imagine they really did" (51). She has offered her love to all four men in the four photographs in her room, Madho being one of them. So, she has four men as her Prince Charming, none of whom really loves her back. The Prince Charming factor is important here to understand Saugandhi's position as a passive existence in the phallogocentric structure of language. One of the prominent French Feminists and predecessors of Cixous, Simone de Beauvoir, states that the waiting for the Prince Charming episode starts in a girl's adolescent period as "she has always been convinced of male superiority; this male prestige is not a childish mirage; it has economic and social foundations" (352). Saugandhi, coming from a society in which "the ideal Indian womanhood" is designed in the frames of the mythological figures like Sita and Savitri," as R. K. Gupta puts it in his essay, "Feminism and Modern Indian Literature," might have had the same dream since her childhood (179). Cixous, too, brings in the point of Prince Charming in her discussion of how psychoanalysis has defined women ("Castration" 46). Since psychoanalysis focuses on a woman's lack of penis, in Cixous' satiric interpretation of it she says, "without man she (woman) would be indefinite, indefinable, nonsexed, unable to recognize herself: outside the Symbolic. But fortunately, there is man: he who comes … Prince Charming. And it's man who teaches woman … who teaches her to be aware of lack, to be aware of absence, aware of death" (46). So, Saugandhi's search for Prince Charming in Madho and her other customers is not only emotionally caused but also socially constructed. In Manto's depiction of the beginning of Saugandhi and Madho's relationship, he shows Madho in the position of a man "who teaches woman." In their first

meeting, Madho gives her a long lecture which contains high-sounding utopian statements of a lover,

> You don't feel ashamed? Do you know what you are selling me? … *Chi, chi, chi*. … For seven and a half rupees you promise to give me something you can't give, and I've come for something I can't just take. I want a woman, but do you want a man? … What's our relationship? It's nothing, nothing at all. … You're eyeing it, and I'm eyeing it. Your heart says something, and my heart says something. Why shouldn't we make something together? … Stop doing this. I'll buy everything for you. What's this room's rent? ("The Insult" 52-53)

Madho's imperatives and interrogatives strengthen his position as a dictating agent of the phallogocentric structure of language which defines Saugandhi as a woman incapable of speech. Though Saugandhi and Madho have talked for three hours after his tirade, she cannot be taken as a woman who can speak, according to Cixous' idea of speech. Cixous makes a distinction between talking and speaking from the psychoanalytic viewpoints of Freud and Lacan, "It is said, in philosophical texts, that women's weapon is the word, because they talk, talk endlessly, chatter, … but they don't actually *speak*, they have nothing to say" ("Castration" 49). The very word "nothing," which is also found in Madho's lecture to Saugandhi, is associated with the "nothingness" that both Freud and Lacan have associated with woman in their theories. Cixous reads Freud's question regarding woman "What does she want?" as "What could she want, she who wants nothing?" or "Without me, what could she want?" (45). So, to *speak*, in Cixous' terms, would be to shatter the very idea of nothingness. Madho, too, poses such questions to Saugandhi in his apparent wooing. Yet his words leave "a strong effect" on Saugandhi ("The Insult" 53). He also tidies her room, complains about the unhygienic conditions, and shows great concern for her health (53). Such attention from a man who promises love and domestic bliss compels Saugandhi to form a relationship with him in which both of them are aware of each other's lies—Saugandhi's continuation of her profession and Madho's exploitation of her money. This means she is ready to be in a "strange affair" if it gives her the patriarchal approval of a domestic life and proves Madho to be her Prince Charming.

Drawing on the Lacanian statement of a woman's inability to speak of her pleasure, Cixous shows how psychoanalysis has equated being unable to speak of pleasure with not having any pleasure ("Castration" 45). Hence, Cixous' entire concept of *écriture féminine* stands on writing about female *jouissance* or female pleasure. Manto's portrayal of Saugandhi includes a depiction of her sexuality and how she enjoys it. Not only does she adore her firm breasts and round thighs but she also likes her profession because "her body liked it very much" ("The Insult" 50). Manto's depiction of Saugandhi's feelings about her sexuality and her mind shows the poststructuralist approach to writing about female *jouissance*. While describing how she dreams of the delightful fatigue after having sex, Manto writes, "That type of unconsciousness that wraps around you after being utterly wrung dry of your last ounce of energy—what pleasure!" (50). The fluidity of woman's position near the margin of the Symbolic Order becomes evident in Manto's use of the bird images in the

portrayal of Saugandhi – first, when she is sleeping in her bed with her shoulders "spread out like a kite's bow"; and second, when she feels like "floating high in the sky with the wind encompassing her" (46, 50). However, there are also images of birds that cannot fly – the caged parrot in her room and her armpit's skin looking like that of "a plucked hen" – denoting her inability to speak in the phallogocentric structure of language (46).

The incident that insults and transforms Saugandhi from a non-speaking being to a speaking one happens the night a customer rejects her with disgust right after looking at her. Saugandhi, rising from her sleep with a bad headache, puts on her flowery sari and goes outside with Ram Lal near the car where the customer is waiting. Pointing a sharp flashlight at her, the customer takes one look at her face and utters the word "Yuhkk!" ("The Insult" 57). Before Saugandhi realizes what is happening, the car drives off. Leslie A. Flemming identifies Manto's best stories to have "the sharp focus on the single illuminating experience" of the protagonists (95). Here, the sharp flashlight on Saugandhi's face followed by the rejection with "Yuhkk!" serves that purpose. The "Yuhkk!" shakes her up from her apparently content life and brings her to the crossroads of retrospection where she questions herself endlessly: "What had just happened? … So that 'yuhkk' meant he didn't like me?" ("The Insult" 57). Saugandhi, though being spoken to in the phallogocentric language in the story so far, finds herself at a loss to determine the meaning of "yuhkk"—Dislike? Disgust? Disapproval? Rejection? Or something else? With such confusion, she has an emotional breakdown in the street in the middle of the night where all that she keeps on hearing is "yuhkk" and the expression starts "messing with her heart" (58). Being insulted thus, she wants her internal pain to "engulf her body" so that it becomes impossible for her to think (58). Saugandhi, whose name means fragrance, feels that the "yuhkk" identifies her with something filthy, rejects her as someone worth liking, reduces her from a woman to an object, and puts question marks on the photographs of the four men in her room. She earnestly wishes to redo the scene so that she can take revenge on that man and his "yuhkk." Priyamvada Gopal explains this realization of Saugandhi as a beginning "to comprehend the distinction between objecthood and subjectivity" (99). This statement is established more in the narrative thus: "She felt as though someone was pressing his thumb against her ribs, as you press your thumb into a sheep or goat to see if there is any meat beneath the hair" ("The Insult" 62). The money she earns in this profession "melting right into her blood" makes the very mettle of her existence and has already introduced her as someone who is into her profession (46). When she feels like screaming to that customer, "Here, take it for free—take it. But not even your father could buy what I've inside me!" (62), it becomes clear that this rejection has not only insulted her as a prostitute but also as someone with an inner value for herself.

What Saugandhi has inside her comes out in the episode of her laughter becoming her language. When Saugandhi manages to come back home, she finds Madho waiting for her. Madho tells her, "Today you took what I said to heart—a walk in the morning is very good for your health!" ("The Insult" 63). Right after the episode of rejection, this welcome sounds ironically phallogocentric at this point of the story with all its didactic approach. Smelling liquor on her, he thinks this to be the right moment to extort some

money from her to escape the police report filed against him. The amount of the money, which he says he needs to bribe the sub-inspector with, increases from twenty to fifty and finally to a hundred as he goes on talking about it. What Madho has not realized is that this night Saugandhi has woken up from her sleep and has decided to respond. Cixous' idea of laughter as discussed in the paper earlier is reflected here. With the "Yuhkk" in mind, Saugandhi has decided that the rejection by a man will not be able to make her reach the point of self-rejection. She gets up from the bed, approaches the photographs on the wall, and, to Madho's surprise, bursts into laughter. One by one she rips them all off the wall and throws them outside the window in a fit of rage accompanied by laughter. Manto writes, "Saugandhi started cackling, a sharp laugh that pricked Madho like needles. … Saugandhi erupted in bitter laughter. It rained from her lips like embers flying from a grindstone. … Saugandhi laughed loudly and then shouted, 'Yuhkk!'" (65-66). The "rusty needles" in her room become active like her in Manto's depiction of Saugandhi's laughter (47). Also, the "embers flying from a grindstone" associate her image with the raging image of the avenging Medusa turning men into stones. In reference to the myth of Medusa, Gillian M. E. Alban says that she "creates, through her reflected gaze, a symbiosis between viewing subject and viewed object" (164). In this context, the symbiotic relationship between Saugandhi and Madho dislocates the latter's position as the subject as a result of which he can only force "himself to laugh" every time Saugandhi starts laughing ("The Insult" 65-66). As Veena Das points out, "it is the transactions between language and body, especially in the gendered division of labor, by which the antiphony of language and silence recreates the world in the face of tragic loss" (68). Both Saugandhi's physical and verbal rage here initiate an antiphony of her language (her laughter) and Madho's silence can recreate the entire world of her psyche from Cixous' perspective of poststructuralist feminism. Her laughter, together with the shattering sound of the glass frames of the photographs, marks the beginning of the breaking point of the phallogocentric structure of language in which Saugandhi has been confined with the signifiers that denote passivity, silence, and even the "Yuhkk!" Her ability to speak has been smothered by these meanings the way the gramophone, a machine that can produce sound if operated, in her room is covered with "a tattered black cloth" (47). She starts speaking in her laughter and speaking with her laughter; it is a new language which is free of the oppressing signifiers. On Madho's warning about this language that terrifies him, Saugandhi repeats the entire lecture given by Madho in their first meeting with all its do's and don'ts—only this time the speaker is Saugandhi herself. Madho has barely uttered her name and she begins,

> No—fuck off with your "Saugandhi this and Saugandhi that"! Does your mother live here that she's going to give you fifty rupees? Or are you some young, handsome stud I've fallen in love with? You son of a bitch! Are you trying to impress me? Am I at your beck and call? You fucking bum, who do you think you are? I'm asking you, "Who the hell are you?" (67)

These rhetorical questions are shot at Madho in the parentheses of Saugandhi's laughter. Madho's identity has been put into question and he, too, has been reduced to the point of

being nothing in Saugandhi's laughter-language which eventually decentralizes him from the stable position in the phallogocentric system.

Though the history of women's writing in the Indian subcontinent dates back to 600 BC in the earliest songs of the nuns written in Pali, it has been buried in the censorship of literary history as mentioned by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita in the preface to *Women Writing in India* (Volume I) (xviii). There can be found a thin line of the legacy of *écriture féminine* in other Indian languages but not any significant ones written in Urdu directly addressing female sexuality through prostitutes before the Progressive Writers' Association. So Manto's stories, like "The Insult" and others, contribute not only to developing that *écriture féminine* in the Urdu language but also to maintaining a legacy of such writing which finds an expression in a recent Bollywood movie, *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022), directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. There are other Bollywood movies with prostitutes as lead characters but this one portrays the real story of a prostitute named Gangubai, who worked in the Kamathipura red-light area in Manto's Bombay. Gangubai had risen in power in her time and advocated for prostitutes' rights to education and to the legitimization of their profession. In a scene in the movie, Gangubai (played by Alia Bhatt) introduces herself as a prostitute to a journalist, Amit Faizi (played by Jim Sarbh), saying, "Me prostitute, Gangubai" (*Gangubai Kathiawadi* 1:53:41-1:53:55). The demand of respect and legitimacy of her profession that Gangubai advocated in real life and in her portrayal in this movie echoes Saugandhi's self-esteem as a woman in her profession. This finds expression not only on screen but also on stage. In their discussion on Usha Ganguly's play, *Naamgottroheen—Manto'r Meyera*, an adaptation of Manto's stories about prostitutes ("Black Salwar," "The License," and "The Insult"), Nadia Rahman and Tahmina Zaman strike a similar chord as they state, "the scriptwriter wished to focus on the taboo profession (prostitution) as an everyday affair rather than a stigmatized one" (167). In Manto's observation, too, such a message is delivered as he considers prostitutes as "the products of the society," hence as "a legitimate part" of his culture ("Virtuous Women" 155). That boldness in Manto's approach makes his stories of prostitutes have a vital representation of female sexuality in the *écriture féminine* of the Urdu literary subculture. Despite such representation, women rising to power and speaking their own language are still criticized and frowned upon by men no matter which scenario they are in. One example of that would be the 2016 US presidential election campaign during which the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, had been compared to Medusa by conservative male writers and right-winged bloggers (Johnston). So, as far as the Medusa myth and Cixous are concerned, these ideas of women speaking their own language to deconstruct the phallogocentric system are not old yet as long as in such a system, women, be she a prostitute or a US presidential candidate, are held back in passivity and silence.

Thus, Manto's approach is not merely to write about women but rather to write for women. Through Saugandhi in "The Insult," he puts the spotlight on such an area in his city that both makes and fakes the reality of women in the profession of prostitution. In the phallogocentric structure of the language of the story, Saugandhi is held back to the traditional passive and silent position of women though she is a working woman, earning

her own money with her own labor. However, when she feels insulted to the core of her heart, she turns back and makes her ground clear: she is quite capable of speaking her mind rather than just being silent. Her hysteric laughter becomes her language and decentralizes Madho from his position of action and speech. She laughs and she speaks for herself, and that laughter reverberates through the readers of Manto's *écriture féminine* across time.

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Re-reading J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands:* Dialectics between Knowledge and Power Relations

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Abstract

J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* overtly offers more of a novelistic discourse than a political pontification. It presents two narratives – one about Eugene Dawn, working for the US government agency in Vietnam in the twentieth centruy and the other moves around Jacobus Coetzee in the eighteenth century, representing a threat to the cultural integrity and undermining true African culture and traditionalism. In the postcolonial and postmodernist contexts, crony capitalism and neocolonial incursions move in the framework set by the power-structure, mostly controlled by the corporate economy. War, not only military but also psychological, even in the postcolonial situations, turns into a power game for the capitalist countries by exercising imperialist hegemony over the economically backward Third World countries while simultaneously maximizing their monetary interest. This potential disposition of the imperial enterprise questions the versions of historical truth, arbitrarily used for silencing and Othering. In *Dusklands*, Coetzee presents a critical assessment of historical truth inherent in power relations. In varied degrees, war affects both the target victims and the ethically lived soldiers who are forcibly appointed to cause physical and mental damage. Through the portrayal of America's war in Vietnam in the first segment of *Dusklands* and Afrikaner's colonial incursions in South Africa in the second segment of the same text, Coetzee questions the versions of historical truth. This paper examines how J.M. Coetzee exhibits the dialectical process of the construction of knowledge which works as a counter discourse to the power relations controlled by the capitalist forces assuming the role of the imperialist hegemony and, under the subterfuge of globalization and modernity, turning Africa into an endless source of raw materials for the manufacturing factories of the First World countries.

Keywords: trauma, capitalism, neocolonialism, hegemony, apparatus

Power is often actualized by fictionalizing people. It is hard to see the full manifestation of power. Like an iceberg, only a fragment of it is visible from outside. In a world dominated by artificial intelligence, human beings have turned into a vulnerable entity that can be hacked in many ways by the software of power. It has the capacity to "maintain the stereotype and hide from us the true stature of man" (Gikandi 166). Power constructs subjectivity and credibly shapes knowledge and causes the displacement of the subject. Subject, according to Michel Foucault, is always a target and vehicle of power. Foucault further argues that power does not work directly and immediately. But in whatever form it works, ultimate objective of power is to achieve allegiance and submission. Its dispersal nature forms a network of relations encompassing all the constituents of the society. Even in

postcolonial situations, power dynamics involve the process of annihilation, displacement, and Othering of the individuals through subtle methods, such as convincing, negotiating, and intersecting. War is an exterior manifestation of a fragment of power. But the intangible aspects of a nation that include mythography, narratives, discourses, ways of thinking, aesthetics, and epistemology may be the target of the power dynamics. Exercise of power is no longer one way as it encounters resistance from the agents upon which it is imposed with a view to transforming it into a submissive one. Furthermore, according to Foucault, power relations are compelled to adopt changes in response to the resistance which often takes the form of knowledge as power itself constructs and controls knowledge. He thinks:

> power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (465)

The location of power and knowledge is being concurrently challenged by displacement, hybridity, and ambivalence resulting from the crosscurrents of culture, migration, intertextuality of diverse epistemological elements, multiculturalism, and globalism.

Now, having explained the theoretical framework of this paper, we may focus on *Dusklands*. It comprises two novellas, namely *The Vietnam Project* and *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*. The first one is dedicated to the narrative offered by Eugene Dawn, an agent of the imperial hegemony and, accordingly, he serves as a recruit of a US government agency and is involved in psychological warfare in the Vietnam War, virtually a project of transforming the natives into an Other. Ultimately he collapses in his endeavor of mythographic and psychological operations. At the height of his psychopathy, he attempts to commit infanticide. Again, in *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*, readers are provided with an insight into the historical realities of a hunting expedition in an unexplored region of 18th century South Africa. It also incarnates Jacobus' punitive expedition against the local Namaqua tribe. Jacobus's expedition metaphorically interprets the colonial enterprises of exploitation and annihilation of the cultural and linguistic wealth of the indigenous people, specifically the Hottentots.

In the first part of the novel Eugene Dawn, the protagonist, is depicted with inherent goodness which makes him hate bloodshed. But to become a part of the power structure, he is not disobedient to his superiors. He is also "under the thumb of a manager" (Coetzee 1). He would have evaded embarking on the Vietnam Project but it is because of his obedience to his superiors that he goes to Vietnam with a project of psychological warfare and thus leads himself into a corrosive mental conflict that ultimately brings about his psychological disorder. Eugene personally does not like conflict because, in his opinion, "conflict brings unhappiness, unhappiness poisons existence" (1). But he experiences a displacement or decentering of his own desire on the face of his involvement in the power structure. Power structure is a network constituted by micro as well as macro ingredients of the society. According to Foucault:

> [constituents] are attributed to "appropriation", but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, constantly in tension, in actively rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. (465)

Such displacement or decentering usually causes trauma that contributes to stress, anxiety, and depression, and the intensification of all these conditions brings about a fatal collapse of human sanity that Eugene Dawn goes through.

Again, Coetzee's *Dusklands* examines the ways power operates: "discursively, textually, politically, and personally" (Kossew 169). Coetzee believes that "everything is capable of being questioned" and nothing can be taken for granted (Kossew 168). As a result, it is difficult for the readers to conclude that Coetzee has left a conspicuous message in any of his novels. *Dusklands* is no exception. A close look at the text shows that the theoretical and referential framework that Coetzee has employed complicates his search for the causes of human insanity. For example, Eugene belongs to the side that is capable of being a superpower in the world regarding its ability in possessing firearms, air force, and even thriving economy. Epistemology is also used in this party's hand as an apparatus that can be operated to cause mental displacement of the target victims of the Vietnam War. The power that binds Eugene Dawn to play the role of its apparatus generates knowledge which involves itself in a conflict with power. Falling into the juncture, Eugene loses his mental sanity. His gradual transformation is delineated by his wife Marilyn and Eugene aptly assesses her views about him in the following words:

> My human sympathies have been coarsened, she thinks, and I have become addicted to violent and perverse fantasies. So much have I learned on those sentimental nights when she weeps on my shoulder and bares her heart. I kiss her brow and croon comfort. I urge her to cheer up. I am my old self, I tell her, my same old loving self, she must only trust me. (14)

Falling into the juncture of power and human sympathies which aptly constitute a counter discourse, Eugene loses his own self, that is, he turns into an entity devoid of "conscious" or "individual cogito" (Hawthorn 346). In fact, the conception of self is a construction attributed to a "process of autobiographical reasoning, or how people reflect on and make sense of their posts" (Syed 7). In this connection, it may be said that the autobiographical process of reasoning contradicts the categorization of an individual or a community as Bangladeshi or Indian or Nepalese or so and so, because the present world experiences the ever-expanding connectivity network which stretches out the chance of hybridity and the fluidity of identity. Borders are now melting down due to continuous and ever-increasing migration and consequential hybridization. Due to continuous communications, negotiations, and translations, there emerges a new space that belongs to neither the host country nor the homeland. This new space challenges the concepts of cosmopolitanism and universalism. In such a crucial situation, identity turns into a paradox which cannot be satisfactorily defined. In this connection, Phillip L. Hammack is relevant when he asserts:

> We inhabit a world of meaning in which people are in constant states of identification, or naming and categorizing, what or who one is and to which larger categories he or she may belong, categories like gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual identity, occupation, and the like. (11)

Living in such a diverse world, it is hard to develop an integrated self as it is usually being constructed through psychological process aided by the micro ingredients of power relations and it is very often compared to the identity which is mostly related to the outer world and linguistic categorization. External agents impact and reshape identity as well as the self of an individual. Hence, culture, which is generally considered a software, "gets hybridized and the absoluteness of the self turns into a matter of utopia, realistically not possible" (Smith 10). It is true in the case of Eugene Dawn too. His wife Marilyn keeps faith in her friends who tell her that his "psychic brutalization" will end with the end of the Vietnam War. It will also humanize Eugene. Thus, the binary opposition of humanization is dehumanization and this binary tends to be settled with a deliberate intention of making the conflicting location chronic by a war. The dehumanization process also challenges the philosophic definition of self of Rene Descartes who claims that he believes only himself and then nobody else. Descartes' dictum, "I think, therefore I am," means he believes in his own self only. But with respect to the present realities, Descartes' maxim encounters a lot of challenges. The nightmarish situations caused by the Vietnam War act as a block to Eugene's development of his own self. He loses balance in the face of diverse issues emerging from the situations related to the Vietnam War. While constructing his own identity he borrows materials from the local myths, history, culture, and social phenomena. Due to the diverse materials in varying degrees, identity turns into an arbitrary paradox as its ingredients assume varied dispositions in different locations. Social and political status with national potential similarly determines a person's colonial temperament towards the natives. Eugene believes if the colonial forces intend to exercise hegemony upon the natives, then they must eradicate their culture and impose new frameworks of thought process upon them. This imposition can be done both by weapons and negotiation ranging from psychological realities to social microcosms, engaged in a war.

Further, Coetzee's attitude towards war appears to be particularly critical. War brings about destruction not only to the somatic entity but also the psychic condition. Eugene, who is appointed an agent in the US army to create confusion among the Vietnamese soldiers, refers to psychological warfare as a project "to destroy the morale of the enemy" (30). It is a colonial policy to demoralize the natives and create a void into which the colonizers penetrate their own culture and thought-system. Recreating myths and constructing a new version of history with a view to "ascending meta-historical consciousness" and shopping their own myths the colonizers used to make the natives kneel before their "Wand" (42). In this way, reconstruction of the identity of the colonized or the natives is accomplished in parallel with that of myths and narrative. In the novel, the narrator Eugene possesses a conviction that the problem is not the reconstruction of Vietnam. Rather, as an agent of the imperialist hegemony, he wants to fortify his hold upon the Vietnamese and thus it will open up all means of exploitation. Eugene also claims that victory depends on having

sufficient force or coercion. However, coercion, in the form of military enterprises, does not always guarantee victory. It requires deliberate penetration of the imported myths and narratives that will psychologically weaken the natives and fortifies the strength of the colonizers or the invaders. This is done deliberately by the colonial power and as Wole Soyinka assumes, it is done "to actualize power and fictionalize people" (52).

The Vietnam War is an important historical phenomenon that Coetzee uses as an open ended metaphor which interprets even the modern globalized world dominated by the imperialistic countries in the name of globalization and multiculturalism. Coetzee's handling of the historical subject matter is not confined to a particular place or time. A critical analysis of the time and contexts surrounding the publication of *Dusklands* shows how the narrative of this text is influenced by Coetzee's trans-Atlantic travels. He conceived of the first part of this novel in South Africa. Then, the second part was conceived in New York and ultimately the whole book was completed back in South Africa. Thus the trans-national genesis of the *Dusklands* and its spatiality interpret Coetzee's "reluctance to be included in a narrow, nationally defined category of South African writing or a geographically constrained provincialism" (Wittenberg 75). Coetzee's deep connection to South Africa fuels his curiosity about the colonial subject matter. Actually, "Eugene Dawn's narrative in *Dusklands* (1974) has its backdrop that attempted American colonization of Vietnam; Jacobus Coetzee, in some respects, a forerunner is both a product of colonialism and, like Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, one of its most avid, twisted servants," he does not work; he is rather made to work as an apparatus of colonial hegemony (Watson 370).

After the Second World War, when colonialism officially and conspicuously ended, it resorted to corporate economy and started functioning in the form of imperialism, an inevitable outcome of a nexus between capitalism and political idealism. Then it economically started exploiting people and stereotyping them. Consequently, the victims of it suffer from existential crisis and its impact can bring about psychological breakdown. Eugene Dawn serves as a detached self, segregated from the world around him. Actually, his mission of alienating the natives by making them confused with manipulation of myths metaphorically interprets how war in the modern period mostly controlled by the capitalism compartmentalizes a society and challenges its solidarity and friendship. Eugene's mental breakdown metaphorically offers an anatomy of colonialism which is a projection of mental aberration "located exclusively in the divided consciousness that is a special feature of Western humanity" (Watson 375). In this connection, Descartes' interpretation of humans contributes to the interpretation of colonialism. According to him, ego poses as the subject and the nature is the object. Ego possesses "will to power" which voraciously desires to conquer nature or object. In the colonial situation the colonizers look upon themselves as subject and the natives assume the status of "other" or "aliens" and work as object. This object also confronts the subject. To resist this object, the subject usually adopts various strategies one of which is psychological war in which Eugene Dawn is engaged and used as pawns by the power dynamics. But Eugene's activities turn him into an alienated self, incapable of developing a dialectic relationship with the diachronic and synchronic journey

of the time. It makes him an entity characterized by divided consciousness and leads him to a juncture where he fails to connect himself even with his wife and child, and his own self. He turns into a segregated self, failing to negotiate with the surrounding environment.

Similarly, in the second part, Jacobus also desires to be alone. He enunciates:

> I love you, too, God. I love everything. I love the stones and sand and the bushes and the sky and Klawer and those others and every worm, every fly in the world. But God, don't let them love me. I don't like accomplices, God, I want to be alone. (148)

This segregation emanates out of the consciousness of white supremacy that instigates Jacobus to brand the Hottentots as savage, devoid of culture and civilization. Branding is done by the colonizers deliberately to create a congenial environment of exploitation without any resistance. Imperialism is just like a snake which was not killed, but scotched. Hence, it is still a threat for liberation and, according to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "If economic and political liberation are essential for our liberation, equally the liberation of our cultures, our values, outlook are a necessary measure of the true extent of the economic and political liberation" (75). For establishing supremacy the imperial forces create binaries and establish the master/servant discourse.

Further, divided consciousness tells upon a man's capability to exercise empathy, and it is found in the character of Eugene. In course of his enterprises in Vietnam as a soldier dedicated to creating chaos and confusion among the people and making them psychologically vulnerable, Eugene gradually turns into a psycho, devoid of human sensibility. Three photos delineated in detail by Eugene interpret how he is losing his sanity by degrees. The title of the first photo, "Father makes merry with children," exposes how horribly Eugene loses the sanity of his mind, the photo showing an American soldier called Chifford Loman raping a Vietnamese woman (20). The woman is tiny, "possibly even a child" (20). Two American soldiers are standing with severed human heads in the second photo. It seems they are celebrating their victory over the Vietnamese and the severed heads are to them trophies. A soldier is seen in the cage of a tiger in the third photo. This photo is derived from a film. It is noticeable that the photos that Eugene presents are a manifestation of his mental disorder. They also interpret how he has lost his human feelings, such as love and compassion for fellow human beings.

In this connection, *Dusklands* focuses on a paradigm shift from sanity to insanity caused by power dynamics, an outcome of colonial hegemony and it offers "a critique of Western civilization" (Castillo 1118). Eugene Dawn, in the first book, and Jacobus Coetzee, in the second book, serve as agents of the Western imperial hegemony respectively. Eugene is a mythographer whose responsibility is to make the Vietnamese psychologically disordered and lead them to the political and economic impasse from where they will not be able to come back to the state of stability, liberty, and democracy. Imperialism, thus, carries on the legacy of colonialism and enslaves the people of especially the Third World countries like Vietnam politically, culturally, and economically. Eugene uses his pen which can be

interpreted as a metaphor of a gun, a colonial hardware. The photographs that he refers to may be taken up as an interpretation of the stillness and stagnancy of life. Usually, as soon as a scene is captured by a camera the people in it are caught up in the canvas and confined to the stillness. The flash of light coming out of the glint of the eyes of the prisoner in the cage does not find any way out. The Vietnamese woman raped by Loman represents the archetypal horror associated with imperial hegemony. In the second book Jacobus Coetzee, the hunter, who explores the unexplored interior of South Africa with a view to making money through trafficking the tusks of elephants and hides of other animals, behaves as a corporate capitalist whose concentration lies in the motto of maximizing profit. He is also trapped inside the biases of the white supremacy. The people of the Namaqua community who nurse him back to health from his illness are astonished to see his brutality towards the local children. In addition, he goes on with a corrosive fight against this community and kills his slaves with a view to gaining financial profit, derailing humility and gratitude. With all these brutal practices, Jacobus Coetzee serves thoroughly as a representative of the typical colonizers whose intractable objective is to benefit themselves, explore power, exercise hegemony, and uphold the self as superior over the natives who are, in their eyes, sub-human beings. In this connection, it is relevant to mention Albert Memmi who thinks that it is a typical disposition of the colonizers to whom the colony is nothing but a profit generating field. He defines colony as:

> a place where one earns more and spends less. You can go to a colony because jobs are guaranteed, wages high, careers more rapid and business more profitable. The young graduate is offered a position, the public servant a higher rank the businessman substantially lower taxes, the industrialist raw materials and labour at attractive prices. (Memmi 4)

Whatever place Jacobus Coetzee visits is to him a marketplace. Hence, even the natives of the place which he visits are to him only a factory of labor. The Hottentots are to him savages, devoid of civilization. According to him, only the gun as the controlling apparatus can be used against them. The gun represents the hardware of colonial hegemony. Among the Namaqua tribe, even if contained by his physical limitations and trouble, Jacobus is confident about his dominance over the natives because he has a gun with him and he glorifies in its strength and control over the local people. It is so powerful that it can even set a demarcation between the self and the other. He asserts:

> The gun stands for the hope that there exists that which is other than oneself. The gun is our last defense against isolation within the travelling sphere. The gun is our mediator with the world and therefore our saviour. The tidings of the gun: such-and-such is outside, have no fear. The gun saves us from the fear that all life is within us. (Coetzee 122)

Coetzee also affirms, "The instrument of survival in the wild is the gun, but the need for it is metaphysical rather than physical" (124). The gun is the symbol of not only power but also pelf. Jacobus shoots elephants, hippopotami, and rhinoceros to make a mountain of all these killed animals for trafficking and it will bring him wealth and distinguish him from

the natives regarding his social and economic status decided by his pecuniary condition. But the irony is that the local Hottentots whom he calls savage do not need to use guns. They are the construction of the colonizers' narratives which define the natives 'as enslavement to space' (124). This space exists between two opposing perspectives. It never wants to bring these two together and defines the colonizers as self and the natives as Others. Hence, colonial discourse dehumanizes the natives with all crudeness and limitations of nature. It emerges out of the power dynamics existing in the negotiation between the colonizers and the natives. The actions of the natives towards the colonizers are driven by compulsion, rather than genuine humanity, as the colonizers do not view natives as human beings.

J.M. Coetzee's portrayal of colonialism in dialectical relationship between history and myth suggests that he seeks to establish a connection between Europe and Africa, but not through the old colonial relationship of dominance and subjugation. In this connection, Watson asserts:

> [Coetzee] wants to join Europe to Africa but not in the old colonial relationship of dominance and subjugation. He wants to preserve the contemplative, myth-making, sacralizing impulse at the heart of modernism and nevertheless respond to an actual historical moment in which such an impulse could not seem more of an irrelevancy. (388)

In the first segment of this novel, Coetzee critiques the American policy of global defense of democracy through the use of parody. Eugene Dawn, working with Mythography, is preparing "a report on propaganda methods, whose ultimate readership is the department of Defense" (Attwell 8). In the second segment, Jacobus Coetzee, an elephant hunter and adventurer, acts as a representative of postmodern imperialism, a legacy of European colonialism. Both the parts criticize the so-called American self-confidence in maintaining global democracy which is nothing but a neo-colonizing process of sustaining dominance and hegemony upon the third world countries. The novel depicts that resistance does not essentially and normatively emanate from human consciousness; it is rather a construction of the power-relations. The disconnection between ideological facade and reality, characterized by hypocrisy and falsification of history and myth, creates a traumatic experience for the individuals who see through this facade. The fortification of hegemony and dominance of the power relations (especially its center, not periphery) is articulated through myth instead of history. Thus, the amalgamation of these two produces a version of history that works as a weapon to control the subjects and challenge positivism and humanism, two illustrious terms of Western propaganda. In the name of liberalism, the corporate economy of the first world countries is creating an unequal ground of economic interaction between the First World countries and the Third World countries. In this interaction the liberal aesthetics, positivism and humanism are acting as an oppressive force upon the Third World countries as it is working as an annihilating phenomenon, not as an accommodative force. Intersection of cultural and political realities inherent in these binaries often inhibits the spirit of self-expression among the natives of Third World countries, such as South Africa. Under the pressure of this confluence, the natives

are losing their own narratives. When they realize that their self is being shaped by the previous colonizing forces, they tend to respond with a counter discourse that manifests as resistance, unrest, and suspicion.

J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* does not directly specify any political orientation, but presents a mythopoesis of power relations that construct the discourses of multidimensional identity of both the forces – imperialist hegemony and the resistance of the natives. The Vietnamese and the Namaquas are the constructions of the hegemonic power relations that tend to transform the natives into a discursive and "stereotypical construction of 'alterity' ('OTHERNESS')" (Thiem 55). Coetzee also exhibits how hegemonic power relations inevitably generate counter discourse that challenges the autonomy of the oppressive discourses. In the same vein, *Dusklands* offers a heterogeneous narrative remarkable for the intertextuality of social, cultural, economic, and psychological realities.

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"The Last Tram Has Gone": The Sense of Belongingness and Transcendental Homelessness in the Literary Works of Jibanananda Das

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Abstract

Jibanananda Das remains one of the major post-Tagore literary personas whose works are still open to interpretation. Torn between nurturing literary aestheticism and the responsibility to be a bread-earner, the complex dichotomy of Das' life has shaped his writings significantly. The fictional writings also guide towards the complex labyrinth Das himself is. Like a mysterious kaleidoscope, he reflects light in the unexplored regions, and his writings bear the paradox a modern man faces when he is homeless. Likewise, according to György Lukács, the philosophical term "transcendental homelessness" expresses the yearning for a soulful and emotional home that is no longer available in this world. Nonetheless, Das' oeuvre carries a fervent longing to be at home everywhere, and the yearning to find roots in a time of restlessness has left a permanent mark on his personal life as well. The identity crisis and alienation from society have forced him to continuously search for belongingness in a world full of fragmentation. Das' alienation and innate desire to belong somewhere in Bengal portray the finest example of transcendental homelessness, which is evident in his collection of poems and stories. This research aims to study the inherent urge of Das to be at home everywhere and the sense of belongingness illustrated in his poems and stories.

Keywords: Bengali literature, isolation, migration, home, rootlessness

> Home.
> A word that, in English or Danish, is spoken with a final clamping down of the lips, like windows shutting, as if what was contained was nothing but space. (Khair 195)

Jibanananda Das (1899-1954), who is considered as an avant-garde by his contemporaries, has been appropriately called "the lonely poet of the loneliest of poets" (qtd. in Al-Mahmud). Das has effectively illustrated the beauty of Bengal and various other themes through unconventional uses of imageries, motifs, symbols, and punctuation marks in the light of geographical, environmental, and mythological zones in his writings. He transcends time and culture altogether by expressing the longing to belong and be at home wherever he resides, from both conscious and unconscious senses, which is inseparable from his writings. The urge to belong wherever he goes but the failure to achieve this are consequently reflected in his writings through the use of nostalgia, alienation, and transcendental homelessness. This research paper will study this inherent sense of transcendental homelessness and

belongingness in the literary works of Jibanananda Das. Before characterizing Das's sense of belongings, however, it is important to offer a theoretical frame of home and homelessness.

Home represents the place a person lives in – the place in which he/she is most at ease. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud states that the house can be compared with the "genitals of the dreamer's mother" (435) as a dream symbol, and Oliver Marc further stresses the idea of the mother's womb as the foundational point of the house (Talu 129). Thus, it can be assumed that each person nourishes an inborn sense of home in childhood, which blossoms into a yearning for shelter in adulthood.

In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin classify linguistic "homelessness" as "the defining feature of the fiction of the margins, the colonial and postcolonial peripheries, the fiction of the outsider and the exile" (qtd. in Moir 7). In the same line, György Lukács, in *The Theory of the Novel*, proposes the idea of transcendental homelessness, which articulates the craving for the transcendental home that is no longer accessible in the modern fragmented world.

According to Etoroma, home is "a physical or nonphysical place or situation with which one identifies and where one is and feels *unconditionally accepted*" (qtd. in Simonis 16; emphasis added). Since the innate sense of home comes with motherhood, the home is "Heimlich" or familiar in our sense when it is related to nature and harmony. On the other hand, an urban home can be defined as "unheimlich" or otherworldly, as this kind of home is detached from the symbolic nature of the mother's womb. As a result, the contemporary human being longs to return to "the home" even if he is at home, which is displeasing. Nilüfer Talu argues that this in-betweenness produces a "paradoxical homelessness," which is transcendental in both the metaphorical and philosophical sense (7). Nostalgia, belongingness, homesickness, homelessness, memory – several terms flood uninterruptedly with the idea of home, overlapping but quite related to each other. Homesickness is more about location or space, where nostalgia is more about time, especially a moment in the past that is viewed as perfect and ideal. Homesickness is defined as "the conscious or subconscious longing for the home" (Ismail 88), and it "captures the hauntedness of space in a dislocated self" (Ismail 87).

The notion of homesickness is connected to the concept of transcendental homelessness. The main distinction between the two is that the latter transcends the former. György Lukács stresses the urgency of the soul as "blind impetuousness" (*The Theory of the Novel* 87) to be at home everywhere. Hence, transcendental homelessness enunciates the true longing for the Edenic moment after exile, banishment, or migration. According to Kun, this homelessness constructs an "artificial whole" (79) to cope with this fragmented world, but the desired organic totality cannot be achieved in this illusory sense of wholeness.

Das' home can be located across the political divide. Das was born in 1899 in Barishal (which later became part of East Pakistan and then Bangladesh) and died in 1954 in Kolkata, India. Barishal is embraced by the Bay of Bengal, various rivers and canals, and the great Sundarban forest, which make it a nourished land of natural resources. As a

student of English Literature, he was aware of the style of world literature and applied new form and essence in his writings which have been ridiculed and taunted massively by the contemporary writers and poets. Das' early published poetry portray his unconditional love for the undivided Bengal, which he adores as a lover his beloved, and his later poems assemble the fragmented and broken states of divided Bengal. However, Das' unpublished stories and novels, which bear an autobiographical touch, are little known. All the writings of Das carry the inner nostalgia and loneliness of their creator, which he had not been able to escape in his lifetime. He expressed his desperation and yearning to find his true home to have a perpetual presence amidst the nature of Bengal through the poem "Go Wherever You Please": "Go wherever you please – I'll stay on in Bengal" (J. Das, *The Beauteous Bengal*, trans. Majumder 18). Lukacs claims that all and sundry have an innate sense of belonging somewhere that is lost, and the ultimate resolution of human life lies in the fact of finding this place all over again (Young 4). The Freudian idea of the mother's womb being the innate home for everyone can be signified in this sense.

Besides, in the poem named "Beautiful Bengal," Das expresses explicitly the desire to find his roots again at the banks of the Dhanshiri river through these lines,

> Perhaps not as a human – maybe as a white-breasted
> *Shankachil* or a yellow-beaked *shalik*. (trans. Alam 51)

Das, throughout his life, kept searching for the place where he belongs, and his literary works represent his search. The innate sense of belongingness continuously pulls Das towards the nature of Bengal, which is why Das wants to return, even if as a reincarnated soul in various regional and natural figures.

At his childhood home, Das has been accepted and loved unconditionally, and he has endured from a sense of transcendental homelessness even when he has been at home in Bengal which he illustrates in his "A Day Eight Years Ago" poem. In this poem, despite having his wife and children beside him, the protagonist longs for death and commits suicide. In an unpublished poem, Das articulates his fascination with Buddha and his home-leaving,

> As if new Buddha is being born anywhere
> – having this thought in mind, I am walking (qtd. in Zaman 134; trans. mine).

Here, the desire to leave his home yet his constant yearning for affection create disharmony in his life. The contradiction between modern man's crisis about the desire to return home and the feeling of dissatisfaction at home has haunted Das till his last breath. The scattered use of punctuation marks, dash after dash, perhaps indicates Das' perpetual journey. Salman Rushdie pinpoints the people as Das as "semi-detached" (Rushdie, *The Ground* 72) who have no strong feelings for family and consider home from a "scattered, damaged" viewpoint (Rushdie, *East West* 93). In this regard, Sumita Chakrabarti reasons that, with the "silence-camel" imagery, Das presents the protagonist's sense of homelessness, which is peeking through the windows of the home (trans. in Dangar 19). He has remained semi-detached, yet he desires dearly to be united with nature which can only quench his thirst

for belongingness. Home is the Foucauldian heterotopia for Das, where he once belonged, but it turned into an "unreal real" place for him. Nature has replaced the place of his family and, accordingly, turned it into his true home, which will embrace him lovingly with all of his scars and distresses. Nature, thus, turns into the artificial whole, which consoles him in his broken state, but ultimately Das cannot reach the totality he has aimed for. Belonging neither here nor there, he roams like a modern man in a fragmented world, wishing frantically for homeliness. His desperation for homeliness is articulated in the much-loved and -discussed poem "Banalata Sen," about a mysterious woman figure whose eyes are compared with a bird's nest. Here, the nest is the literal translation of what Das originally meant by transcendental homeliness. This suggestive metaphor emphasizes his ecofeminist sense where nature and woman, idiosyncratically, harbor the shelter for a homeless person. The eyes of Banalata are the mid-point where reality and unreality, possibility and impossibility, the sense of home and unhome, belongingness and estrangement blend. But it is a matter of great irony that he has failed to receive the shelter of a bird's nest in his marital life. Just as "all birds come home" (Seely 130), Das has returned to Banalata, the imaginary soothing persona, to get the comfort of home. As home misses its inhabitants, Banalata has longed for Das and enigmatically asks, "Where have you been so long?" (Seely 130). From ancient Asoka to current Natore, his journey can be compared with the journey of Buddha who has been looking for "a moment's peace" (Seely 130) and the urge to embrace peacefulness has made him tiresome. The damaged concept of home has prevented him from terminating his journey, yet he cannot shake off the desire for a home where he belongs and pens, "There remain only darkness and, sitting face to face with me, Banalata Sen" (Seely 130). The sense of home and belongingness are also portrayed in the "If I were" poem, where the poet craves to reside inside "a solitary nest" (Alam 69), by forming the figure of a wild gander, with a wild goose. The repeated mention of the word "nest" in several poems suggests Das' perpetual longing for home, where he belongs.

On the other hand, Fakrul Alam notes that by the time Das published his *The Darkness of Seven Stars* (1948), the Second World War, Partition, the Great Depression, violence, riots, and catastrophic events had taken place and his poems also transform into different layers. A sub-continent that was falling apart has been illustrated in the different poems of Das with a bitter tone. In the poem named "1946-47," he writes about the chaos, riots, and diaspora after the Partition of Bengal. Alam further notes that Das himself has been forced to migrate from Barishal to Kolkata, which halts his physical attachment to his childhood home (115). Das expresses his viewpoint:

> They still blend with darkness,
> Hoping to savor sunlight again. (Alam 115)

The sufferings due to the diaspora and the devastating aftermath become alive in Das' writing as he is a victim also. The rootlessness, diaspora, poverty, and the ongoing communal riots in Kolkata are enough to make a person feel homeless, and Das has been greatly affected due to his obsession with nature. He laments for the home to which he once belonged but cannot touch in the present time. As a result, "a thirdspace, and a third

phase, a dimension" is formed where Das fights, struggles, and fumbles only to create a "hyphenated" self (Ahmed 107). He portrays his numbness in his "path to endless pain", where there is "nothing to look forward to" (Alam 105).

Unlike Das' poems, his fictional works mainly tell the story of his personal life in disguise. Even from the recollection of various editors of Das' manuscript, Labonno Das, Jibanananda Das' wife, flatly refused to publish his first novel *Malyoban* after his death (L. Das 11). Their marital life was a failure and it is one of the main reasons for Das' anguished experiences at home. In his poems, he repeatedly articulates his desire to be united with nature and his fictional works carry the hidden answer of his obsession with a non-physical entity as a defense mechanism.

In an article named "My Mother," Das articulates the pleasant childhood memories associated with homeliness and nostalgia. The sense of home and motherhood are blended in his mind as his mother renders security and shelter like home. As the mother was the initial home for Das, his comfort zone also circles around the mother-figure and nature. His mother used to work till midnight and Das conveys his sleepy excitement on his mother's return thus: "When my mother comes, I will sleep" (Das, *Samagra* 399; trans. mine). The dreamy and surreal moment of Das' drowsy state is mingled with the lullaby of birds, his mother's taking care of him, and asking about his well-being in the dim light of the lantern. Home, therefore, turns into the emblem of "peacefulness" in that hazy light and many years later, an adult Das wonders "if any peace conference can bring back the magnificent gatherings" (Das, *Samagra* 399; trans. mine), which his mother and other women have in need. Das recalls the memories of those comfortable days in the "Oghraner Sheeth" story, "Mother calls to the kitchen after returning home. Warm rice awaits at that time" (Das, *Collection of Fifty Short Stories* 469; trans. mine). He fantasizes about his ideal home which will be adorned with "wildwood, different kinds of *jhumko lota*, *kunja lota* and *aparajita*" (qtd. in Zaman 229; trans. mine) in his novel *Karubashana*. Another story "Kobita aar Kobita, Tarporo Kobita" articulates the dream of possessing a warm home, "a one-storey house in the remote area of Kolkata, reading space, some wooden chairs and table, carpet and numerous books – will write, read and smoke a cigar …" (qtd. in Zaman 102, trans. mine). Similarly, the stories "Paliye Jete" and "Jamrultola" also express the dream of a happy sleepy evening at home. Das longs for the simplistic rural life where his wife will adore and love her husband unconditionally and the home will be decorated with "playfulness, amusement, sleep, elegiac dedication, woeful tears, and satisfaction" (Das, *Fifty Short Stories* 549, trans. mine). But it is a matter of great regret that Das only gets woeful tears and sadness from his apparent home, without any feeling of satisfaction. He had been searching for the life of an artist in every sphere where he could nourish his aesthetic soul by writing and reading. But poverty and dissatisfied marital experiences snatched away his lifelong dream of leading a content domestic life. Thus, the physical sense of home has been replaced by the non-physical entity, "nature," by Das. The protagonist of *Karubashana* has grieved about this nourishment of the aesthetic soul: "always the eagerness to create art … is an inherent sin" (qtd. in Zaman 103, trans. mine). Das has labeled the artist as abnormal and illegal in this novel, who neither savors nor can

run the domestic life, indicating his discontentment with life. Despite being an educated being, he suffers greatly from an identity crisis greatly because of poverty and misery. In the same way, the protagonist of another novel, *Pretinir Rupkotha*, laments that he should have been at least an electric mechanic but passed his MA in English Literature instead and "has lost the homely life by doing these" (qtd. in Zaman 104, trans. mine).

In the short story "Kinnorloke," neither Das nor his alter ego, the protagonist Subodh, achieve domestic affection. Das has expressed his desire through Subodh to live a lovable life as "the life of a cricket near the breast of a she-cricket!" (Bandyopadhyay 29). The feelings of "unhomeliness" have gradually pushed Das from his home towards nature, but it does not erase the desperation to be at home everywhere. Das has searched for his home till his last breath, for which he has wanted to be reincarnated even after death, taking the forms of a glow-worm, an orange, a white hawk, a *shalik* bird, a crow, a white heron, a young girl's pet duck, and many other regional and natural figures in his writings. According to Hinduism, one person can emerge as reincarnated souls in various forms after death, which Das has illustrated in his various writings. He accepted reincarnation as a way to return to the banks of Bengal, as only this replaced notion of home can attain "moksha" or the ultimate bliss. Though moksha liberates one soul from the cycle of rebirth and death, the true happiness of Das lies in his joining with the natural world, even as a reincarnated soul. This desperation indicates the sense of belongingness of Das to his home, which is the natural world of Bengal. In the "Oshwather Daale" story, the protagonist fantasizes himself again as an unmarried person who lives by himself in a book-adorned secluded room but again misses the affection by imagining two owls as a couple. Das' married life had continuously hurt him, made him hate his home life, but the bitter marital years could not erase the longing for "the great, holy simplicity" of life, in Lukács' words (Lukács, *Soul and Form* 74). Poverty, unemployment, and a loveless life gradually squished all the essence of Das' artistic soul. The passing days of hunger at boarding have become alive through Das' pen as he ate distasteful and cheap food day after day. He collected those miserable moments in his diary, "Literary Notes": "Heat, little sleep at noon … can't spend more than 3 pice" (qtd. in Zaman 69). These depressed days have been outlined in the novel *Biva* where the protagonist fantasizes being a swallow to eat the cake and cookie from the neighbor's home. Gradually, Das reaches the absolute point of life at the time of his death while searching for soothing homely circumstances and failing to achieve them.

In the story named "Mangsher Klanti," the husband creates a new washroom for his displeased wife, who looks at the house, disgusted, and says, "Look at the style and appearance of the home! Thatched roof, ghastly walls, without the strength of cement" (Das, *Fifty Short Stories* 38; trans. mine). All of Das' novels and short stories carry the personal trace of the author, which may be labeled as "diversified autobiography" (Mitra 70) where he repeatedly and deliberately arranges his plots in the same edifice. The protagonists are usually male and are trapped in unhappy marriages indicating, the life of Das, and the wives are usually full of cynicism and bitterness. The wife laments to her husband in "Paliye Jete" that they do not have a gramophone, wooden table, chairs, or other luxurious items in their home while the husband silently agrees to this accusation. In addition, through

his protagonist, Das claims his passing domestic life as "cremation" (qtd. in Mitra 37) in *Malyoban*. Life has long been dead to him; the sense of a soothing, homely life has been replaced by the spiraling tongue of resentment and pessimism.

Likewise, Das keeps searching for the blurred sense of home from Barishal to Kolkata, that he articulates in his novel *Jolpaihati*. The protagonist, Nishit Babu, has no idea that he is now in India, not Pakistan, after the division of Bengal. The feelings of migration which Das felt has been expressed through his characters.

Das' protagonist questions hauntingly, "What is there for me in the home?" (qtd. in Salekeen 200, trans. mine). Yet the desire to belong in the shelter of nature remains eternally in Das. The transcendental homelessness and the constant craving for belongingness create at the end an enormous void in Das from which he cannot escape. The overwhelming effort to form the fragmented simplicity into wholeness ultimately carries the signature tone of Das' magical yet enigmatic writing.

As Gomez-Peña reasons, "Home is both 'here' and 'there' or somewhere in between. Sometimes it is nowhere" (qtd. in Simonis 15). There is an enormous gap between the imaginary and real existence of Das' home. His imaginary home, nature with its soothing shelter, always remains "somewhere" in his mind, although the supposedly real home evaporates from his mind gradually. The duality in his desire to belong to the natural world of his beloved Bengal and the inability to be happy in the alleged home forced Das to suffer from alienation, rootlessness, and identity crisis. His diversified autobiographical writings are the testament of his perpetual melancholy for being in a marginalized position where he finds himself in the state of "not-belonging" anywhere. Just like attaining "Nirvana," according to Buddhism, will eradicate earthly sufferings, it seems that Das will also receive the highest state of enlightenment by coming back all over again to the shores of Bengal. The spiritual home where his soul belongs eternally dwells in the greenery of nature, and Das nourishes "the wish to sit calmly somewhere" (qtd. in Salekeen 139; trans. mine) and remains as the modern transcendental homeless person who belongs truly to nature.

"Terrible suffocating prison" (Mitra 184) is how Jibanananda Das has perceived his homely life in his diary. The struggle for identity, disorientation, and rootlessness in a time of fragmentation tires Das so much that his death remains itself an enigmatic event. Whether it is self-destruction or an accident, the mystery is not resolved even after many years. As Clinton B. Seely observes, Das wants to come back again and again "in person and poetry" (J. Das, *The Scent of Sunlight* xii) in Bengal, where the bottle green hues and the darkness of nature and the singing of birds construct the ambience of the land into something beautiful and enigmatic. As Das states, "I move towards *a twilight world* – in my head" (Alam 29; emphasis added). This twilight world is nothing but his desired home where he will not be a stranger anymore. The sense of not belonging haunts him until his last breath. "The last tram has gone" (Alam 132) and Jibanananda Das has left his readers to reach his final destination where his heart resides peacefully. The desire to be at home everywhere he goes haunts him significantly and that is where his inspiration came from. "The overwhelming sensation" (Alam 29) to belong with loved ones, which

he cannot evade, and the frustration to achieve it – this dualism ultimately makes Das a modern transcendental homeless person. Looking for his roots in a broken world, Das truly belongs to nature, the birds, and the flowers of Bengal in the long run. For him, home means a soothing, solitary rural room full of numerous books where the singing of birds would always accompany him. At the end of the day, Das yearns to be united again and again with nature, even embracing it as his own home, as the world cannot offer him anything more beautiful and soothing other than the face of Bengal.

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Sovereign Exceptions and Sexual Autonomy in Heinrich von Kleist's *Betrothal in San Domingo*

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Abstract

This article investigates how the concept of a state of exception and its dialectic relationship with the norm are negotiated in the German author Heinrich von Kleist's *Betrothal in San Domingo* (1811), the story of two doomed lovers – a Swiss visitor named Gustav and a "mestiza" woman named Toni – set against the backdrop of the Haitian revolution. Drawing primarily upon Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben's political thoughts as well as Alexander Weheliye's critique of Agamben which, the former claims, has little "to say about racism, colonialism, and the world beyond fortress Europe" (64), I argue that the novella critically engages with the concept of exception and calls attention to its limitations but simultaneously offers an alternative conception to what political action may look like during a moment of intense conflict. The novella scrutinizes bio(necro)political theory's placement of death at the center of our political thought, emphasizing instead the inadequacy of the universalization of the concept of "life," particularly outside its Eurowestern perimeters. Through Weheliye, my analysis further suggests that *Betrothal in San Domingo* establishes Toni as an active, sovereign subject who, through actions of friendship and love, poses a significant challenge to the systems of exception and its underlying violent potentialities.

Keywords: State of exception, sovereignty, race, gender, subjectivity

In his *Political Theology*, Carl Schmitt contends, "The exception is more interesting than the regular case. The latter proves nothing, the exception proves everything" (35). For Giorgio Agamben, states of exception – such as concentration camps during World War II – lie at the heart of the functioning of modern states. In *State of Exception*, Agamben writes about human life, in particular, the Western concept of human life and its essence as well as limits. The exception for him is marked primarily by the temporary collapse or suspension of rule of law which creates the conditions of possibility for establishing the site of exception, and secondarily by the sovereign leader's suspension of rule of law (11). This article examines how Schmitt and Agamben's concepts of exception and its becoming the norm are presented and negotiated in Heinrich von Kleist's *Betrothal in San Domingo* (1811), a novella of love, racial conflict, and passion set against the backdrop of a successful slave rebellion in San Domingo. The novella critically engages with the concept of a state of exception and calls attention to its fundamental limitations, especially the question of what right does the individual, racialized subject have over oneself during a state of exception. *Betrothal* also suggests a reconceptualization of racialized and gendered political

action based on human solidarity, and thereby critiques Agamben's disengagement with either subject. In fact, the novella conforms to Weheliye's critique of biopolitics where Nazi racism is both considered the apex of racializing assemblages and does not take into account the "historical relationality and conceptional contiguity between Nazi racism and other forms of biopolitics … like colonialism, indigenous genocide, racialized indentured servitude, and racial slavery" (59).

In my analysis, based on both Achille Mbembe and Weheliye's revision, I will focus on the limitations of the Agambenian framework of states of exception, especially in the plantation and after the reversal of its prior political order. My contention is that Kleist presents quieter, subdued moments marked by a recognition of shared humanity that weaken the fixity of that rigid political code of a state of exception. The article argues that Kleist's treatment of such moments reveals the limitations of Agamben's usage of the concept and further proves that the thinker's conceptualization of the state of exception is not an adequate framework to understand enslavement or even its immediate aftermath. In addition, I will establish that the gendered female subject under conditions of extreme precarity can still exercise certain autonomy and thereby, raise complex questions about race, kinship, and loyalty. Finally, I discuss how, despite the Kleistean reaffirmation of binaries – friend/enemy, master/slave, white/nonwhite – which is established through the reversal of the exception, the temporal nature of the exception *continues* in the novella in smaller yet profoundly significant ways.

Love, Racial Passing, and the Friend/Enemy Distinction

Betrothal in San Domingo begins with the farcically named revolutionary figure Congo Hoango, an "old negro, a terrifying man" who burns his master's plantation to the ground, murders everyone in the household, and dedicates himself to the capture and murder of every white person he can lay his hands on (324). The novella is set in the years between 1803-1804 when General Dessalines, the leader of the Haitian Revolution, had ordered the massacre of French settlers on the island. Hoango's white master, M. Guillaume de Villeneuve, gave him a pension, leisure, and a "legacy in his will" but Kleist observes how "all these proofs of M. Villeneuve's gratitude did not save him from the fury of this fearsome man" (324). His partner in crime is his mulatto common-law wife Babekan, Toni's mother. A fifteen-year-old Toni is used as sexual bait in their mission, that is until Gustav von der Ried arrives. On the run and in search of provisions for this family, Gustav is portrayed as noble and kind, and quickly, Toni and he fall in love. To protect her beloved from her mother's plan to murder him, Toni pretends to betray him. Believing her to be a traitor, Gustav shoots her before she can explain her deception and consequently, a distraught Gustav kills himself. The novella ends with the Swiss soldier's family's safe return to Europe where they construct a monument in the lovers' memory.

In terms of both form and content, the intimate, private betrothal between the Swiss soldier fighting for the French army and the white-passing seductress Toni performs as a site of respite from the violence of the real politic of slave rebellion, racism, and imperialism in San Domingo. The exceptional, ambiguous intensity of the moment where colonial, racial,

and nationalist lines blur, albeit temporarily, makes room for a momentary blossoming of interracial love. In his essay on race and the difference it makes, Ray Fleming points out how "love, infatuation or passion can triumph over racial or cultural solidarity" in Kleist's *Betrothal in San Domingo* (310). And yet, the quasi-idyllic first night is later contrasted ferociously in the novella with a spectacular reversal of trust and love between enemies turned lovers, indicating a reconstitution of the social order the relationship previously attempted to undo. This aggressive reaffirmation of the social order which comes right on the heels of its momentary collapse is significant for it conveys an expression of and fundamental critique of the political order. A similar suspension of an idyllic union between another set of doomed lovers is visible in Kleist's "The Chilean Earthquake" (1807). That temporary respite too is similarly disrupted by a very public reversal of the new order through the reassertion of the older social and theological order.

Imagining the political order in San Domingo as a state of exception in a fashion proffered by Schmitt and Agamben faces some significant challenges in Kleist's work – particularly through the way which is the reversal of the original political order is staged by a slave rebellion. The rebellion replaces the white masters as ultimate sovereigns and consequently, the racialized others turn on their former masters in an act of vengeance, completely reversing the status quo and bringing to life the white fear of a black insurgency.[1] More so, the formerly enslaved become the arbiters of the laws of exception. Both outcomes are absent in the accounts of Schmitt and Agamben as the theorists never consider the plantation as a state of exception and consider the camp as the primary and paradigmatic moment of exception that defines the domain of the political itself. Yet, there are significant ways in which Schmitt's original idea of the state of exception and Agamben's later expansion of the concept to theorize Nazism and the concentration camps in Europe *do* apply to the aftermath of a slave rebellion in *Betrothal*. As a political event, the aftermath bears the hallmarks of many of the core norms of the exception – sheer lawlessness, sovereign's own incapacity to rule, questions about the domain of sovereignty itself, indiscriminate killings, lootings, and sexual violence, and a complete collapse of the social and domestic order of the state.

The novella thus is not only critical of conceptions of exception, it also proposes an alternative form of political action that is based on racialized and gendered acts of individuals – exemplified by the character Toni. In the two decades since Michel Foucault's original lectures on biopolitics, a lot has been said about Foucault's failure to appropriately engage with the race question in his theory of biopower and sovereignty. Importantly, theorists of necropolitical interventions – chief among them Achille Mbembe who defines necropower as the "subjugation of life to the power of death – reverse the original Foucauldian dictum of biopower as "making live and letting die" (Mbembe 91; Foucault *SMD*, 241) For Foucault, the mobilization of sovereign power with the aim to build social

1 In the comparable context of the American Civil War, Agamben offers that the "place—both logical and pragmatic—of a theory of the state of exception in the American constitution is in the dialectic between the powers of the president and those of Congress" (*SE*, 19). Agamben further offers that President Lincoln's emancipation proclamation was proffered "on his authority alone" and that at this point "the president of the United States was the holder of the sovereign decision on the state of exception" (21).

defense (exemplified by Nazism in his work) is a form of racism.[2] Yet, in his reading of the shift from sovereign power to biopower, he overlooks two conceptual conflicts with regard to race: the role colonialism plays in the production of Western modernity and the fundamental role played by the black "other" in the Western ontology of man. In other words, Foucauldian racism is racism without colonialism and blackness. Consequently, the fields of black feminist studies, black studies, and decolonial thoughts have widely challenged Foucault's "primitive" take on racism and colonialism (Weheliye 59). Sylvia Wynter argues that what Foucault identifies as the "invention of Man" led to "the 'rise of Europe' and its construction of the 'world civilization' on one hand, and, on the other, African enslavement, Latin American Conquest, and Asian subjugation" (263). Affirming Wynter, Denise S. Da Silva contends that "Wynter recuperates what remains illegible in Foucault's critique of Man: 'the idea of race'" (91). While analyzing "Foucault's description of the classical order and the discourse on race, despite the brief reference to 'European colonialism'," he locates "a double dismissal of the colonial context" (97). Ann Stoler similarly argues against Foucault by tracing the making of the "imperial body politic to the making of sexualized and racialized selves" (832). In other words, a race-centric understanding of political order and individual sovereign political action commensurate with Weheliye, Wynter, and Mbembe's understandings of the subject is absent in Foucault and Agamben's work.

Crucially, race remains at the core of *Betrothal* and Kleist's novella abounds with references to the reversal of conventional race-centric codes. There are several, interlocking struggles at stake at the intimate space of the betrothal in *Betrothal in San Domingo*. On its face, the relations of power between the white, imperialist Gustav and the teenaged, mestiza Toni is uneven, with Gustav's uncomplicated racial and imperial superiority eclipsing Toni's racial and gendered inferiority. That the encounter between the lovers is taking place in San Domingo in the immediate aftermath of the slave insurrection leads further instability to the dynamic the two lovers share. Nevertheless, Gustav's arrival is part of a process set in motion by slave leader Congo Hoango, not a departure from the norm as the light-skinned Toni has lured men like him before. In other words, Gustav is not the exceptional protagonist, the special white suitor/savior; rather he is a rude, unwanted "stranger" who is merely a participant in Hoango and Babekan's systematic revolt against whites (325). Nonetheless, unlike other instances where the trio – Hoango, Babekan, and Toni – have entrapped white men, this one unfolds differently. Toni and Gustav have several remarkably unusual interactions, chief among which is Gustav's initial shock of discovering her race and being drawn to her regardless. After she welcomes him into the home and he "recovers from the shock he had outside," he, with his arms around her waist, admits to how "willingly, even were everything else about [Toni] black, [he] would have drunk from a poisoned chalice with [her]" (330). Sander Gilman argues that Gustav has several misperceptions about race relations and blackness and that, for him, "blackness was

2 Racism is "bound up with the workings of a State that is obliged to use race, the elimination of races and the purification of the race, to exercise its sovereign power. The juxtaposition of—or the way biopower functions through—the old sovereign power of life and death implies the workings, the introduction and activation, of racism. And it is, I think here that we find the actual roots of racism" (*SMD*, 258).

the source of fear and terror, while whiteness, light, served as the sign of succor" (671). By and large, the novella confirms Gilman's binarized take on Gustav's perspective on race and the exceptions Gustav makes in the broad generalizations are minimal at best. As an "uneasiness settled like a vulture on his heart and he wished himself back, hungry and thirsty as he had come, among *his people* in the forest," Gustav certainly picks a side (333; emphasis mine). It can be argued that he is sympathetic towards the motive behind the slave revolt but is critical of its indiscriminatory nature towards all whites, as he feels not all of them deserve the ire of the rebels. He here confirms the "bad apple thesis" which is often used to justify systemic violence such as enslavement and colonialism (Heath, 5). Gustav offers that the "madness of liberation which has seized all the plantations drove the blacks and the creoles to break the chains by which they were oppressed and to be revenged upon the whites for many wrongs done them by a few reprehensible members of that race" (331). Gustav demonstrates the fascinatingly ambivalent ways in which racial conflict shows up in Kleist's work. The white fear of a black insurrection, the murderous rage of the enslaved, the hybrid ambiguity of "passing," racial trauma as well as racial desire are all vividly discernible in his work.

Despite its critique of conventional race-centric codes, Kleist's work is curiously disinterested in the complex narrative of the Haitian revolution, the successful revolution by the enslaved against their white French colonial masters in Saint-Domingue, now the sovereign nation of Haiti. The ideological effects of the revolution were far reaching – from Napoleon's dashed dream of a French empire to the Louisiana Purchase, the Haitian Revolution marks a turning point in the history of New World Slavery. Yet, Kleist sets the novella in the private domain and leaves the public commentary on the significance of the revolution to a minimum. Part of that reluctance may stem from the implausibility of the revolution itself in the Western ontological order. So committed the ontology was to the dehumanized, nonhuman status of their black other, that the resistance itself is unthinkable within that framework. Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that "The Haitian Revolution did challenge the ontological and political assumptions of the most radical writers of the Enlightenment. *The events that shook up Saint Domingue from 1791 to 1804 constituted a sequence for which not even the extreme political left in France or in England had a conceptual frame of reference.* They were 'unthinkable' facts in the framework of Western thought" (82; emphasis original). Thus, the slave revolt is incomprehensible to Gustav for comprehension requires him to think of his nonwhite other as fully human. More so, he comprehends slave violence against their former masters and white violence against black enslaved in comparable terms. When he indignantly narrates the act of one black girl who actively contaminates an entire white population with yellow fever, the Swiss soldier's sympathy lies with the white abuser of the woman as he feels there could be "no justification, however tyrannous the whites have been, for an act of such base and abominable deceit" (332). Gustav's sympathy for the "unfortunate man" who was the center of this sexual revenge plan by a formerly enslaved he had attempted to sexually manipulate evidences his failure to comprehend (332). Gustav not only fails to see how the enslaved had been victimized by her master, but is also unable to understand the scope of power a libidinal economic system sustains that structure the

relations between white man and enslaved woman. Further, he draws a parallel between this event and Toni's original plan to manipulate him (like she had done others) for sex and cannot conceive of the predicaments that led to the women making such choices. That violent threats, ownership, control of female bodies and a perverse paternalistic claim of submission and surrender is on par with the gendered and racial relations between white masters and enslaved women is incomprehensible to Gustav. Though Gustav, these scenes thus consolidate violent dehumanization with blackness, reifying the animalization and bestialization of black people commonly associated with the logic of enslavement.[3]

Toni, in comparison, cuts a more ambivalent figure in terms of her approach to race in the novella. Toni passes for white, a crucial narrative element that cannot be overemphasized in our attempt to understand the Kleistean project of critiquing the social and political order. Todd Kontje argues that "the same racial mix that allows Toni to pass for almost white prevents her from becoming 'really' white. She is biologically condemned to theatricality" (72). The theater Kontje refers to is the performance of race, and Toni's particular performance of it throughout the novella is a porous, fluid one. In fact, Kleist uses Toni's ambivalent racial status to destabilize Gustav's steadier understanding of the classificatory categorization of racial belonging. As Gilman offers, both Babekan and Toni are "neither white nor black, falling into a category not encompassed by Gustav's historically determined dichotomy in which white=good and black=evil" (669). In many ways, Toni's racialized body "appears as the … dominating factor that regulates [her] flow of life (Tabassum 109). Yet, the dichotomous reading of race in the novella faces certain opposition during the night of the betrothal, filled with small moments that compel a rethinking of such an order. Although Gustav is the one who "seized her" and "drew her down on to his lap," making him the one who crosses that physical boundary, Toni complies with his machinations (333). As both share tales of their former lovers, with "downcast eyes," Toni speaks of another man whose hand she refused "without moving from his [Gustav's] lap" (333). When he teases her and asks, "whether perhaps only a white man would ever win her favour," she "press[es] herself against him," allowing Gustav to shed his inhibitions, go against his instinct, and even draw a parallel between her and his former betrothed, Mariane (333). Significantly, his former betrothed is another female figure who had sacrificed herself to save Gustav, an exact narrative trope Toni will eventually mimic, setting them both up as characters who are loyal and selfless whereas Gustav thinks of his self-interest first and the women's wellbeing later.

The night of the betrothal is a truly exceptional moment both in the literal and the Agambenian sense. In *State of Exception* Agamben argues that "the ancient dwelling of law is fragile" and is always struggling to maintain its own order (22). The state of exception is "the device that must ultimately articulate and hold together the two aspects of the juridico-political machine by instituting a threshold of undecidability between … life and law" but when "the state of exception … becomes the rule, then the juridico-political system transforms into a killing machine" (86). As the Hoango-led resistance movement completely suspends the old order of white supremacy and black subordination, the site of

3 For more, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) and David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage* (2006).

this ultimately tragic betrothal can be marked as a tightly controlled moment of exception where individual actions are not dictated by rule of law or the regular order of things. The resistance movement brewing outside of the bedroom imitates Agamben's theorization of the sanctioned and naturalized disregard of the limits of the state's juridical and political power through times of state crisis. While a state of exception is used to justify the extreme measures of the state, as Schmitt argues, the exceptional moment has an "especially decisive meaning which exposes the core of the matter" (35). In this case the core is, of course, the binaries that bind us and the ways in which human emotions like love and loyalty can either destabilize or reinforce that which separates us from one another. Schmitt further argues that the "phenomenon of the political can be understood only in the context of the ever present possibility of the friend-and-enemy groupings, regardless of the aspects which this possibility implies for morality, aesthetics, and economics" (35). Thus, in that moment when Gustav allows Toni to ascend to his system of aesthetics by allowing her to become the image of his dead, white beloved, Toni "abandons her own system of aesthetics for Gustav's" and subjugates herself "to yet another rigid and therefore, potentially destructive way of viewing the world" (Gilman 671). In that moment, Toni shifts from the enemy camp to the friend through a resemblance to an old lover of Gustav's, or to put it differently, by becoming white in his eyes. The fusing together of the sexual and racial therefore, further muddies the conceptual binaries in the text.

Earlier in the novella, while talking about the rebellion, Babekan speaks of the "shadow of kinship visible" in their faces, echoing the Conradean fear of kinship among barbaric black and enlightened white (328). With clarity and precision, Babekan alludes to the naturally antagonistic, precariously balanced nature of the relationship between masters and slaves, whites and blacks, oppressor and oppressed. In contrast, when Toni discovers the whole truth of Mariane's sacrifice and observes Gustav's agony: "when she saw him deeply moved bowing his face into a handkerchief a *human* feeling, various in its origin, took hold of her," reversing the structure of imbalance laid out by Babekan (335; emphasis mine). Gustav too, sees her weeping after they consummate their union and gives her the little golden cross, a present from "faithful Mariane" and "hung it for a betrothal gift," the bond of their affection transcending the tyranny of enmity that shackled their races (335). For Schmitt,

> the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy. Insofar as it is not derived from other criteria, the antithesis of friend and enemy corresponds to the relatively independent criteria of other antitheses: good and evil in moral sphere, beautiful and ugly in aesthetic sphere, and so on. (26)

This Schmittian argument is made unambiguous in the moment of the betrothal where the stranger and the seductress dissociate themselves from those very distinctions. In theory, the distinction is still visible but, in practice, when Toni reaches for Gustav and Gustav promises her a future with him, the aesthetic tension of race and the moral quandary of a forbidden life falls away, making way for an extreme, unique condition where the

participants do away with the lines between good and evil. The enmity subsequently, is reproduced later only in public and not in private, offering up the potential that such reversal of racial and political codes is indeed possible.

Sexual Autonomy and Female Subjectivity

Eventually in the novella when Toni realizes danger is at the door and binds Gustav to protect him, she rightly predicts that his trust in her will be at stake and that mistrust will have everything to do with her race. Despite her own claim that she is now white, Toni herself does not believe her ascension to whiteness is permanent because of the ways in which perceptions of loyalty inform perceptions of racial belonging, especially in that heightened moment in history. While passing for white gives her access to whiteness as property, by betraying her black family and embracing the white lover who ultimately betrays her for her blackness, Toni remains suspended in the middle, in a vestibular zone of indistinction where she is neither white nor black. The inclusive-exclusive status of Toni's racial (non)belonging is crucial for it destabilizes the easy binary between black and white. While Toni never quite manages to entirely bridge the gap between the warring racial groups, she is the only raced subject who carries forward the ethos of their exceptional night of betrothal. On one hand, that Toni believes Gustav to be her betrothed demonstrates her faith in the exceptional act of the betrothal; Toni is the sovereign subject who attempts to allow the exception of the betrothal to become permanent. Toni believes that "through her sexual union with Gustav she has become his wife before God, she literally offers her life to save his" (Wittkowski 192). On the other, only under a state of exception such as the aftermath of a rebellion can such a union even be possible. That she attempts to uphold the reunion outside the cocooned intimacy of the bedroom marks her as an agentic, sovereign subject who attempts to transcend the rigidly constructed boundaries of racial codes in San Domingo. While Kontje argues that though "passing for white begins as a strategy of power for Toni in the struggle against white slave holders and French imperialists; it ends with her suspended between the black family she rejects and the white lover who rejects her," I argue that she demonstrates an active, sovereign ability to disrupt that very logic of racial divide (72). Toni's ambivalent racial status, thus, is a site that pushes against racial hierarchy as evidenced by her love and loyalty and her desire to die for Gustav in order to save him. More so, the twin deaths of Toni and Mariane further complicate Gustav's perception of Toni as he views only "one side of her self, her blackness" and "as a traitor whom he has to kill" (Fleming 324). Gustav's saviors—both women, one white and one black—exhibit the ways in which "life" is stratified into inconstant metrics of humanness, where the racialized and/or gendered bodies have historically been subjected to death with impunity.

A second, supplementary way to interpret the moment of the betrothal as an exception, and Toni's role as a figure of subversion is made possible through a reading of Toni's body and its use in the mission to destroy the whites. If Toni's body is part of Hoango's sovereignty, if her body is the site where Hoango's sovereignty exercises itself, then her first autonomous act is accepting Gustav as her betrothed and husband. The patriarchal family, the model of social order headed by Hoango depends upon duty and submission, not equality or

freedom from its members. The leaders of the movement weaponize Toni's body and her sexuality, a weaponization she consents to at first, a practice she participates in as willful agent. Much like the way in which the general population surrenders to sovereign authority for inclusion into the national or political community, Toni submits to the narrative of revolution and allows her body to be a part of its manipulatory process. Yet after the night of the betrothal, Toni withdraws her consent from the regulated weaponization of her body and delegitimizes Babekan's demand to further use her body. When her mother reminds her that other men have suffered perilous fates thanks to her sexual manipulation, Toni argues how unfavorably she views such "bestial" deeds and how "outraged" she is to have been forced to take part in such "inhuman" acts (337). Initially, she was encouraged to "allow their visitors every intimacy, except the last, which was forbidden her on pain of death" (325). Indeed, Toni gives Gustav permission for that final intimacy. Toni thus makes a series of sovereign decisions: subverting the sexual role assigned to her by authority figures at the night of betrothal, departing from the patriarchal home to protect a sexual partner she desires, and verbalizing her discontentment with the previous weaponization of her body. The precise point where Toni's autonomous decision-making process first begins to assert itself is the moment of the betrothal, thus permitting us to read the moment as unambiguously exceptional. In that moment of exception, Toni usurps the previous sovereign power of the state, Hoango, and orchestrates a subtle collapse of the structure of the political process. Neither Hoango nor Babekan is prepared for the aftermath; they are unable to handle her claim to her sexual and political agency. When Toni delegitimizes the role of seductress assigned to her and uses her cunning and devotion to reverse the domain of Hoango's rebel mission, she destabilizes the sovereign power of the exception, all made possible because of the feeling, intimacy, and reciprocity shared between her and Gustav. Despite Gustav's eventual failure to uphold the ethics of the betrothal, Toni not only transcends the limits of enmity during the scene of betrothal but is committed to carrying that collapse of the former order forward.

As several critics have pointed out, Gustav and Toni's response to their eventual changed circumstances further explores the fraught binaries between race and enmity. As the exceptional idyll of the night of the betrothal comes of its end, Gustav swears "that the love he felt for her would never go from his heart and that only in a delirious strange confusion of his senses, by the mixture of desire and fear she aroused in him, had he been led to do such a thing" (335). Kleist's use of "desire and fear" marks Toni as the ultimate racial 'other' and Gustav the European 'self' and lets the narrative oscillate between twin moments of acceptance and rejection, making explicit the temporary nature of the exception. In other words, despite the love, despite the shared humanity, despite the transcendence of racial hatred and loyalty, those precious moments of unreal, exceptional love is constantly undercut by reality. Kontje argues that "Gustav's instinct of self-preservation takes precedence over any concern for Toni's well-being. It is only between these moments of crisis that Gustav indulges in the sentimental fantasy of bringing Toni to an idyllic home in Switzerland" (71). The first time he is fearful of life, he expresses suspicion of her intentions and the second time, he fatally shoots her before asking the weighty, pointless, "why". In contrast,

Toni's defense of him to her mother – "Does not rather everything indicate that he is the best and noblest of men and surely not a party to whatever wrongs the blacks may accuse his race of – indicate not just individual passion but selflessness and devotion (Kleist 340). In other words, Toni views this man "as her betrothed and as her husband" unquestioningly (340). In the original German, Toni makes "three futile attempts at explaining her actions to Gustav, one marked by a single dash, two of them by double dashes – familiar semantic means in Kleist's narrative technique to signify inner processes that cannot be rationalized" (Burwick 319). Burwick claims, "the black heroine is more humane, and therefore superior in character and virtue to male white protagonist" (321). It is Toni who takes steps to save him and hopes to be his loyal wife in Europe compared to Gustav's promises that were unkept, marking her again as subject with autonomy.

Lastly, the mestiza woman's love for the white man could potentially stand for an attempt to legitimize colonial rule and it can be argued that Gustav's seduction and subsequent murder of Toni is an attempt to reiterate the colonizer/native binary where the dualism of possession and misappropriation of the native woman's body is legitimized thanks to Eurocentric ideologies of racial supremacy. However, the implicit critique and "condemnation of European racism and imperialism" by Kleist cannot be entirely overlooked, especially if we consider how Toni is not the only woman whose death binds Gustav (Kontje 71). Through Toni, Kleist demonstrates exactly that – a critique of the existing social order even as Gustav fails on that score. Thus, when with his "mouth twisting with rage," Gustav kills Toni, the narrative moment does not come as a surprise (348). Neither does Babekan's unflinching support of the cause and her sense of betrayal by Toni's autonomous decision to save and protect Gustav. "She assured the negro [Hoango] that the girl was a traitor and that the whole attempt to capture him was in danger of failing," writes Kleist (342). In the final moment of his life, even as his family tries to explain to him that she was their rescuer, in his arrogance Gustav still demands an explanation for being bound – the ultimate betrayal in his book. As the dying Toni struggles to answer and as the truth exposes itself, Toni utters her dying words "you should not have mistrusted me" to which Gustav echoes "I should not have mistrusted you" (349). Gustav's suicide, Winkowski suggests, indicates what "all the Whites in Haiti might do as well, or so Kleist seems to imply" (193). Ultimately thus, while Toni's union with Gustav and her subsequent acts of treachery and cunning is deliberate and calculated, Gustav's entitlement is irrevocable and indeed irredeemable. In other words, through the lovers' polarized actions, Kleist's critique of the imperial, racial, and social order is explicit – Gustav's actions are condemned while Toni's offer the potentiality to brave the existing system.

In the end, while it may be tempting to suggest that love and friendship fail to transcend the complexity of the public tension in the story, in my view, Kleist's treatment of the exceptional idyll of the betrothal as well as Toni's exercise of her autonomy through disregarding the control and regulation of her sexuality make plain Kleist's critique of imperialist, racial, and sexuality politics of its time. Even as much of the spectacularized violence in the story takes form at the expense of violence against Toni's body, after the complete reversal of the racial and sexual reconciliation, Kleist still ends the novella with a memorial of their love

erected in a Swiss garden, signifying a utopian appeal for reconciliation. That ending stands as a critique of those racial values, values that needed thorough rejection and rethinking. Despite the fact that she succumbs to the devastation of racial enmity, that her loyalty was unwavering till the end and Gustav's was not, prove that Kleist prioritizes the exceptionally liberatory potential of the betrothal and her willful agency to dictate her sexuality and emotions among all else, allowing it to stand as a critique of the existing order.

Ultimately, my analysis of the novella shows that Kleist explores terror and violence under the rubric of stately, social, and gendered order in an attempt to counterbalance dominant ideas of racial hierarchy, patriarchy, and imperialist ideologies. The exploration of those invocations of shock and terror is juxtaposed against Kleist's recognition of human emotions, through notions of love, loyalty, and friendship. Eventually, *Betrothal* opens up the possibility of a new social order, one where previous ideology, orthodox and distorted as they are, do not matter. In line with Weheliye and Mbembe's claims, there exists enormous emancipatory potential in thinking through the representation of states of exceptions beyond fortress Europe as signified by the social, racial, and gendered relations in the story.

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Transgression of Race, Gender, and Class: Reading Mary Ann Shadd's *A Plea for Emigration*

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore Mary Ann Shadd's transgression of race, gender, and class boundaries by employing a close reading of the text, *A Plea for Emigration*. I will explore the triangular relationship between race, class, and gender seen in the text from intersectional feminist perspectives. My contention is that, through her activism by pen, especially in *A Plea for Emigration*, Shadd exposes the feminist voice that enables her to protest against racism, slavery, gender stratification, and marginalization based on class hierarchy. In other words, I claim that Shadd's transgression of the borders of race, gender, and class lies in her activism and ideology as a woman, black, and marginalized. This paper will, therefore, show that Mary Ann Shadd strongly transgresses the borders of race, gender, and class as the first black woman who owned and edited a newspaper, inspired American blacks towards freedom, confronted her contemporary male leaders, exposed the female gaze during a period of history when the male gaze was predominant and authoritative, became a public speaker making the world listen to her while working with the so-called socially aesthetic people despite being a "negro".

Keywords: transgression, race, gender, class, Mary Ann Shadd, *A Plea for Emigration*

Mary Ann Shadd (1823 -1893) transgresses the boundaries of race, gender, and class through her activism and thus emerges as a feminist who speaks not only against discrimination based on gender, but also takes action against racial and class-based oppression; so, her feminist voice, as exposed in *A Plea for Emigration,* can be identified as an intersectional one. The available literature on Shadd shows that she was an activist all through her life and did not limit her activism to just as a black woman or as a marginalized class. On the contrary, she paid attention to each identity individually. We can explore and analyze her works and performances, which she undertook and accomplished, to evaluate her activism. So it is not irrelevant to introduce Shadd concerning the scholarship that this paper intends to explore. Who is Shadd, then? She is a woman, a Black woman who was born in 1823 in Wilmington, Delaware and "grew up in a family of free blacks in the slave state of Delaware" though freedom was a relative term [in her birthplace] even for the free blacks because they were subject to "widespread persecution during this era" (Shadd 7). She was the first black woman who founded and edited the *Provincial Freeman* advocating for the freedom and emancipation of black people in Canada. At sixteen, she established a school for black children in Wilmington. Also, she founded an integrated school in

Canada financed by her family first and then by the American Missionary Association (AMA), an abolitionist-leaning white organization.

Shadd was a cautious and concerned voice on the question of slavery and racial discrimination. Being concerned about the rights of black people, particularly about the free black people who were under the threat of enslavement due to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, she advocated for anti-slavery by persuading both the slaves and the free black people to escape and to emigrate to Canada, a potential place of accomplishing freedom both racially and financially. In 1849, she attempted her first venture into publishing by writing a twelve-page pamphlet titled *Hints to the Colored People of the North* to disseminate her political ideologies. However, her success as a writer and an abolitionist became widespread after the publication of *A Plea for Emigration* in 1852. Mary Ann Shadd was also a schoolteacher, a public lecturer, an educator, a lawyer, and a reformer; all these identities allowed her to work on the abolishment of slavery, elevate the status of women, and emancipate black people from poverty and marginalization. She also worked as a recruiting officer in Washington where she recruited black people as soldiers for the Civil War. This activity exposes her agency both as a black person and as a woman because, by doing so, she ultimately helped her community to become emancipated financially and hold authority. We see that there are diversities in her works, though *A Plea for Emigration* is often called a microcosm in which there is a glimpse of all her performances. Hence, this paper seeks to explore Shadd's transgression of race, gender, and class boundaries by employing a close reading of the text, *A Plea for Emigration*. I will explore the triangular relationship among race, class, and gender from intersectional feminist perspectives. My contention is that, through her writerly activism, especially in *A Plea*, Mary Ann Shadd exposes her intersectional feminist voice. She advocates for the emigration of black people from the United States to Canada through her intersectional feminism which is considered to be "the flip side of white feminism" and thus challenges the dominant discourse of essentialist feminism (Nash 13). In other words, her notion of racism is inter-woven into sexism. We cannot think of the former without thinking of the latter or vice versa, at least in the context of black people and, more specifically, black women.

Before moving to the main discussion of the paper, I find it significant to address the term 'intersectionality' at this juncture. The term intersectionality refers to an interaction of "multiple, converging, … [and] interwoven systems" (Carastathis 304). In other words, it is an interlocking system of oppression. In feminist theory, intersectionality denotes "the relation between systems of oppression which construct our multiple identities and our social locations in hierarchies of power and privilege" (304). Kimberle Crenshaw uses the term as a metaphor. To her, "intersectionality is best able to challenge all forms of discrimination" because "intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (Crenshaw 139, 140). Intersectional feminism considers "intersectionality as a synonym for oppression, without specifying what, in particular, is intersecting, or how" (Carastathis 305). For Chandra Talpade Mohanty, intersectionality is a network that incorporates "gender, race, class, and sexual paradigms" (1). She believes that the position of women is interlinked to the "relations of ruling which posits multiple intersections

of structures of power and emphasizes the process or form of ruling" (56). For her, it specifies "the relations between the organization and experience of sexual politics and the concrete historical and political forms of colonialism, imperialism, racism, and capitalism" (Mohanty 56). Anna Carastathis says that "intersectionality can act as a corrective against white solipsism, heteronormativity, elitism, and ableism of dominant power and hegemonic feminist theory by making social locations and experiences visible that are occluded in essentialist and exclusionary constructions of the category women" (309). Hence, taking intersectional feminism as the theoretical framework, my paper focuses on the inter-relations of the oppression between race, gender, and class. The interrelation is significant for the marginalized, erased, excluded, and neglected groups who can get a voice through it. White feminism, which is "mostly unidimensional in that its ideology focuses solely on the equality of the sexes" neglects the discrimination and oppression of women of color by essentializing the sufferings and experiences of all women (Marcus 1). Essentialist white feminism considers the experience of white women as the experience of all other women, and that what is appropriate for white women will be appropriate for black women. Due to the distinct cultural and social experiences of black and white women, their means of emancipation will also be different, but white feminism does not acknowledge this. Hence, intersectional feminism which seeks the interwoven relations between race, class, and gender "has resulted in more critical attention being paid to white feminism" (Evans and Bussey-Chamberlain 361).

In *A Plea for Emigration*, Mary Ann Shadd advocates for her abolitionist activism by persuading not only the free black people to emigrate to Canada, but also the enslaved to escape slavery and to move to a place where they can find their freedom and rights. The main reason for writing this pamphlet is that the Fugitive Slave Law made the life of American black people dangerous. She thought Canada as an ideal place to start a new life because not only has it such "climate, soil, timber, clearing lands, grains, potatoes, fruits, vines, berries, domestic animals and game, lands, labors, trades, churches, schools, settlements, political roots, and election laws," but it also has a "just society in which a black person could expect to be treated equally" (Calloway-Thomas 1; Smith 6). This advocacy is her exposure to racial consciousness and her agency as a woman. It is because, during her time, a black woman was considered the "weaker sex" and expected to "establish high morals and virtue through domestic activities … like childbearing" but Shadd did not conform to the expected gender norms (Rhodes 348). On the contrary, it might have been her mission to transgress gender normativism by employing several strategies which helped her defy her male counterparts. Shirley J. Yee aptly comments on Shadd when she writes:

> Shadd's appearance … reflects the strength of her presence among a predominantly male leadership. She challenged nineteenth-century gender conventions by openly debating with black male leaders about how best to build community and alleviate poverty among Canadian blacks. Through her constant attempts to insert herself into the male world of political leadership, which either did not recognize or rejected the idea of sexual equality, she identified "integration" as a gendered and racialized notion. (2)

By integration, Shadd focuses on the necessity of including the racially and sexually marginalized groups who are kept outside the mainstream American society. In this context, both the people of color and the doubly marginalized women of color have been referred to, for the term women used by white feminists does not cover all women. Shadd persuades African Americans to emigrate to Canada because she feels that the total freedom of these people is not possible in the United States due to the deeply entrenched racism and discrimination.

Shadd's contrastive outlook with her male counterparts shows her unique standpoint on the question of abolitionism and the emigration of free American black people. As an abolitionist, Shadd had to work with other people, both black and white, whose mission was also to abolish slavery in the US. However, Shadd often found that their outlook and approach towards the anti-slavery movement were different from hers, so she had a confrontation with many of them including Henry Bibb and Frederick Douglass, who were in favor of segregation, whereas Shad wanted integration. Rodger Streitmatter comments about the conflicting relationship between Shadd and Bibb. He says: "her nemesis became Henry Bibb, a fugitive from slavery who published the newspaper *Voice of the Fugitive"* (Streitmatter 27-28*)*. Bibb favored segregated schools; Shadd insisted that schools be integrated. Bibb considered Canada a temporary haven: Shadd a permanent home. Bibb supervised the Refugee Home Society; Shadd criticized the society for buying property and then reselling it to black people at a higher price. These differences escalated into a bitter feud between Bibb and Shadd. In 1852, for example, the *Voice of the Fugitive* stated: "Miss Shadd has said and written many things which we think will add nothing to her credit as a lady" (Streitmatter 28). In this context, the word "lady" deserves our attention. It denotes a particular social status or class associated with certain expectations of behavior and decorum including modesty, obedience, and refinement. Hence, when Shadd is not accepted as a "lady," it refers to her ideas and actions being inappropriate or unacceptable according to societal norms. She speaks against the categorizers, thus challenging the issues faced by women of color. She wants to navigate gender and racial expectations and limitations.

Shadd's authentic outlook towards abolitionism and the prospect of free black people distinguishes her from her male counterparts. Though they were powerful and authoritative, she never conformed to them. On the contrary, she uplifted her individualism by exposing her unique ideology contrastive with that of the male world. In the mid-nineteenth century, when women, especially black women, had very little scope to speak publicly, Shadd became an outrageous voice by going against all her critics. Nothing could stop her despite several metaphorical attacks on her. For example, her criticism of the Refugee Home Society and American Missionary Association (AMA) stopped them from funding her school to be established in Canada West. Shadd used to maintain her livelihood with her little salary from the school; so, the AMA's refusal to fund her school was a show of their alliance with the powerful men rather than a powerless woman (at least in the eyes of society). However, she did not retreat from her path; rather she became a travelling teacher, which helped her to spread her views to a wider audience. Thus, she shows the world how to fight back and exercise rights, even though she was marginalized in many ways.

In *A Plea for Emigration*, Shadd addresses Bibb and his associates as the "very ignorant people, who think differently …, are in favor of the distinctive churches and schools," and as "the demagogues … to make the way of missionary a path of thorns" (9, 51). Even though both Shadd and Frederick Douglass were against "exclusivity," she opposed his view concerning the passenger traffic on the underground railroad (Shadd 12). Whereas Shadd urged black Americans to escape and get back their freedom by emigrating to Canada via the Underground Railroad, Douglass wanted them to stay in America and fight against slavery and for their equal rights. Shadd found that American societies are deeply ingrained in racism, gender violence, and discrimination, so it was almost impossible for people of color to have complete freedom. Again, black people were being murdered brutally by white supremacist slaveowners, so remaining within the country was a life threat that Douglass did not want to acknowledge. This is why Shadd contradicted him though both were abolitionists. Shadd did not keep any stone unturned to let her voice be heard by the patriarchal male world and dominant white supremacists. Thus, she emerges as a reactionary and revolutionary voice. Jason H. Silverman says that by opposing the advocators of segregation and by "[v]iewing all segregated institutions with nothing less than contempt, Shadd openly condemned those blacks who willingly subjected themselves to that kind of second-class citizenship" (105). For Shadd, people of color cannot even reach equality by segregating themselves from the white, let alone equity, because this separation identifies them as special. Shadd did not want to see the black community that has different rights and responsibilities from the white. On the contrary, she wanted to see a community, a society in which both black and white, rich and poor, and men and women live in harmony and peace without harming each other.

Shadd believed in the equality of gender, and the way she protests gender stratification represents her transgression of gender roles appropriated by society. Her mission of saving black people, especially black women instigated her to put the foundation of a newspaper named the *Provincial Freeman*, a voice against dominant political parties and religious leaders, which allowed her to disguise her identity as a female author, and to embark on the law as her career. The mentioned works represent her as a social non-conformist and a voice of anti-establishment. It is her mission of representing the voice of the voiceless, the black people and more specifically the black women who are marginalized by both patriarchy and essentialist white feminism. Referring to Barbara Smith and Adrienne Rich, Leema Sen Gupta's comments in response to black women's erasure in the white supremacist literature and the patriarchal literature is significant. In her essay "Intersectionality in Adrienne Rich's *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* and Barbara Smith's *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism*," Gupta says:

> Black women writers … are almost completely ignored in the world of literature and … Black women writers face two overlapping oppressions which necessarily intersect one another. Black woman writers are oppressed, in the first place, for being women in a wholly male-dominated (both white and black) society, and secondly, for being black under the structure of white supremacy. All segments of the literary world – whether establishment, progressive, Black … [or] female – do

> not know, or at least act as if they do not know that Black women writers … exist. (60)

As a black woman writer and activist, Shadd was also a victim of the same kind of discrimination both as black and as a woman. Her *Provincial Freeman* was in trouble due to the people's resistance to the female editorship; so she listed Samuel Ringgold Ward and Reverent Alexander MacArthur as the editors of the paper. This indicates her noble mission which is to devote the newspaper "to the elevation of the colored people" (Streitmatter 29). She wanted the *Provincial* to be published, and thus she wanted her voice to be heard by other people, especially by free American black people. Thus, through her complicated strategies, she "used 'the Provincial Freeman' to present herself and her ideas" to the world (Steadman 119). Rinaldo Walcott says that for a "Black woman [*sic*] the restriction is in many ways more severe … and yet Shadd Cary was able to continue to act within the contexts of white, masculinist restrictions" (142). Thus, her continuation of the act is a challenge to the male world as well as the transgression of gender normativism. At the eleventh Colored National Conference in Philadelphia, Shadd was pushed to another challenge by the male world. Her male counterparts claimed that she had to win a debate with the male convention leaders if she wanted to be allowed to speak publicly. She won the competition and became a public speaker, and thus got the opportunity to share "the speaker's platform with such noted orators as Lucretia Mott, Robert Purvis, and Frances Ellen Watkins" (Streitmatter 29). She travelled from place to place and state to state to take part in public speaking and spread her message to the people. This path was quite weary, for she had to overcome all the obstacles as a black woman in the white supremacist patriarchal world. This is how she "defies prohibition against women's public participation … [and exposes her gender] transgressive behavior" (Steadman 119). What we see is even though Shadd does not talk much about the rights, freedom, and equality of black women in her *A Plea for Emigration*, her genderless activism expresses her very gender identity which intersects with her racial identity and her marginalized self. Hence, her gender transgression and her gendered voice are within the very notion of gender neutrality.

Shadd's *A Plea for Emigration* can be called a pristine document of her quest for black liberty. Throughout the text, she emphasizes the emancipation of black people. Her text can also be called a constitution that guides the colored people on how to get rid of their enslavement and accomplish freedom – racially, socially, and economically. For Robert Nowatzki, "Shadd was one of the first 'race women' who fought for the rights of the African Americans and worked hard to set an example to whites and blacks of what an African American could accomplish" (222). Though there are many writers who advocate for emigration, A *Plea by Shadd* is different from most other works addressed to potential emigrants. What we see is "whereas most such works were addressed to potential white emigrants to North America from Britain or continental Europe, … Shadd's work is explicitly intended for the information of colored immigrants" (Shadd 10). Her voice against the Fugitive Slave Act in *A Plea* manifests how much she wants to save her fellow community from the shackles of not only slavery but also class-based and gender-based oppression.

The particular reason Shadd motivated people of color to emigrate to Canada West stemmed from her desire for people of color to live in a place where they would not face discrimination based on their complexion. She acknowledged that inequality based on birth and social position is a common phenomenon in every country of the world. Though she did not say whether racial discrimination is the worst one or not, she wanted her people not to be treated unequally based on their color. She says in *A Plea* that in Canada West, "[b]uilders, and other tradesmen, of different complexions, work together on the same building and in the same shop, with perfect harmony, and often the proprietor of an establishment is colored, and the majority or all of the men employed are white" (Shadd 32). She again puts her views saying "prejudice of color has no existence" in Canada, rather "new fields of enterprise will be opened to them, and consequently new motive to honorable effort" because colored men can do any business in this country if their qualifications fit them (Shadd 33). Hence, she wants to destroy racial discrimination through her advocacy of emigrants of color. Though she often confronts the boundaries of race and gender, the desired end is mostly racial elevation.

In *A Plea for Emigration*, Mary Ann Shadd argues for non-segregated education and non-segregated churches, and she also wants to put an end to white charity because, to her, it is disgraceful in a sense that the free black people who receive the white charity are just like "public beggars" (50). Her focus is on the churches in which "all classes and complexions worship, and no 'negro pew' or other seat for colored persons especially" (Shadd 34). For her, all the blacks "are members and visitors, and as such have their pews according to their inclination, near the door, or remote, or central, as best suits them" (Shadd 34). Her emphasis on integration represents her sense of equality. She believed in freedom for black people and freedom for all. Her voice regarding racial freedom is very straightforward. She might want to see a society in which all people irrespective of race, class, caste, and gender live in harmony without discrimination. She says:

> We are free men, say they who advocate independent effort, we, as other subjects, are amenable to British laws; we wish to observe and appropriate to ourselves, whatever of good there is in the society around us, and by our individual efforts, to attain to a respectable position, as do the many foreigners who land on the Canda shores, as poor in purse as we were, and we do not want agents to beg for us. (42)

Here, the word "agents" may be understood as "brokers," "middlemen," "intermediaries," "contact men," and so on. On every occasion, we need to realize that this is a derogatory term by which the author hints at somebody who is working for the betterment of the powerful, dominant class and thus they push the powerless, the black people, especially in this context, towards misery and vulnerability. Therefore, the author wants these people not to make American black people dependent on the white people's charity. This is how Shadd's "quest for black liberation – freedom from slavery and its debilitating legacy – dominated the very fabric of her political and personal being." (Rhodes 346)

Although Shadd's consciousness as a woman, black, and a middle-class social being are intersecting with each other, and her aspiration for economic emancipation of the

underprivileged class of society is evident in her performance as a writer-activist. The minute details regarding the facilities that an emigrant can enjoy in Canada West represent her deeper inclination for the economic emancipation of her people. She focuses on creating a safe home for black people, but her sense of safety is interwoven with her sense of class and gender. In *A Plea for Emigration*, she prioritizes Canada as a potential emigrant country rather than South America, Mexico, West Indies, and Africa because the government of Canada does not approve of any law advocating discrimination based on race, class, and gender. In addition, geopolitical aspects cannot be ignored. For her, it is Canada that can make a balance of power by providing each class of people with freedom of thought and action. There are several occasions when the writer puts her emphasis on the economic emancipation of Canadian black people as financial security or solvency is one of the rudimentary aspects of a life with status in society. Shadd firmly believed that a "man who is willing to work need not suffer, and unless a man supports himself [*sic*] he will neither be independent nor respectable in any country" (Shadd 50). In fact, she suggests that financial freedom and/or class mobility is a prerequisite for the now marginalized people to uphold their social position, express their views, and thus gain ownership in society.

To recapitulate, Shadd's transgression of the borders of race, gender, and class lies in her activism and ideology as a woman, a black, and as a middle-class social being. Being the first black woman to own and edit a newspaper, to drive the American black people towards freedom, to confront her contemporary male leaders, to expose the female gaze during a period of history when the male gaze was predominant and authoritative, to be a public speaker as well as to make the world listen to her and to work with the so-called socially aesthetic people while grappling with her intersecting identities strongly imprint the transgression of race, sex, and class of "this neglected foremother" (Steadman 119). In my opinion, writing and publishing such a groundbreaking text like *A Plea for Emigration* is itself a kind of transgression of the time and space set for a black woman during the nineteenth century. Hence, Shadd incorporated multiple identities like race, gender, and class and her quest for each and all together, and her voice against each and all kinds of oppression made her feminist voice an intersectional one even though she was not beyond limitations as an intersectional voice. One of the limitations is her sole focus on black people and black women. Even when she was talking about women's rights, she primarily focused on the rights of black women without equally considering the crisis of other women. Again, her approach to emigration to Canada for freedom and emancipation was controversial as many black people including Frederick Douglass did not support her means of accomplishing freedom. However, a voice like Shadd's must be celebrated in the context of the intersectional feminist voice because she is a pioneering woman to fight against all forms of oppression and injustice done to black people. W.E.B. Dubois' evaluation of Shadd and her activism in relation to her race, gender, and class is worth citing here:

> She [Shadd] threw herself single-handed into the great Canadian pilgrimage. … She became teacher, editor, and lecturer; tramping afoot through winter snows,

> pushing without blot or blemish through crowd and turmoil. (qtd. in Streitmatter 36)

Streitmatter also quotes Frederick Douglass' praise of Shadd: "She displayed industry, financial capacity, and literary ability of a high order. … She is a pioneer among colored women, and every colored lady in the country has a right to feel proud of her." (36)

The quoted extracts show how Shadd devoted her whole life to speaking for the women of color and their social, economic, cultural, and political emancipation. Shadd shows the women of color how to fight for their rights, so the black literary renaissance was paved the way for the contribution of the black women writers and activists like Shadd. Agreeing with Streitmatter, we can, therefore, conclude that Shadd challenged all intersectional barriers of her time and paved the way for future generations of black women to follow in her footsteps.

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Women and Madness in *Game of Thrones:* A Feminist Critique

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Abstract

Historically, women do not appear to be escaping the determination to be insane either by adopting prescribed patterns of femininity or by opposing the attributions. No matter how strong or weak a woman is, in the end, there is always a possibility of the loss of the self that turns them into *mad women*. This paper examines why and how several female protagonists in *Game of Thrones* are depicted as insane and hysterical as over time their characters grow stronger. The analogous arrangement of madness and femininity blocks their access to the position of normality in this fictional world. Moreover, female abnormality is a clear form of female normality since, weak or strong, women like Daenerys, Sansa, Arya, or Cersei end up being labeled as insane or hysterical by the patriarchal normativity. In the fictional world of Westeros, madness and gender performative discourses form the framework of behavioral traits that lead its female protagonists towards madness. This paper will use gender theories and Butler's performative acts to explain the attitudes of the writer as well as the creators of *Game of Thrones* towards female insanity and the reasons behind the depiction.

Keywords: madness, hysteria, feminist criticism, performative acts, *Game of Thrones*

Introduction

The world of *Game of Thrones* is a hard, unyielding place. There is no room for weakness. Anyone who hesitates is sorted out and quickly eradicated. One would think that women have a difficult position in the universe of George R. R. Martin, but the female protagonists outshine all the male protagonists. Be it the ascent of Daenerys Targaryen, from docile little sister to the tough, all-conquering ruler who commands whole armies or the intriguing Cersei Lannister who quietly pulls the strings in the background of her family and strikes her control deep into the royal house; the audience clearly witnesses that the female protagonists are the driving forces in this universe. Moreover, the world of Westeros in *Game of Thrones* is based on the European Middle Ages and has similar patriarchal social structures. However, the protagonists break the prevailing conventions and develop ways to gain and consolidate power and political influence. In this context, the female characters can be described as empowered female figures in a world dominated by male characters.

In a world where the disastrous relationship between man and woman is discussed at length, *Game of Thrones* is an example of how one can create interesting characters for both sides that constantly and decisively influence the development and progress of history as well as depict the reality of empowered women who emerge victorious but are demeaned and forced down with the label of madness. George R. R. Martin deliberately places his

faith in a divergent image of women in his world and the creators of the TV series depict the madness within the strong female characters who otherwise deny all the normative and hegemonic gender roles. Here, the confrontation with the marginal existence of women and the feminine discourse of insanity makes a complex and detailed critique of the normativity of society and patriarchal dominance possible. The female protagonists thus appear on the one hand as rulers and heroines, but also have to struggle with oppression by social norms on the other and thus, are depicted as "the mad queen," "the mad mother," "the crazy assassin," or "the hysteric damsel in distress."

Madness: "A Daughter's Malady"

Whether we understand gender in the structure of a social relationship or how we analyze and deal with historical and current conflicts between men and women depends on how gender is thought of, talked about, and negotiated. This is not the same in all parts of the world and has not been the case during various historical epochs. As an object of social observation and everyday disputes, understanding of gender guides our perception and experience which is simultaneously produced in processes of cultural social construction (Donaldson 112).

Phyllis Chesler in her 1972 study, *Women and Madness,* describes female madness as the effect of patriarchal conditions, as an expression of the "intense experience of the biological, sexual and cultural castration" of women and the "striving for potency" condemned to failure (31). Moreover, much psychiatric theory regarding women's mental condition is revealed as more ideological than scientific, according to Busfield (99). Moreover, Adrienne Rich identifies that with the help of the stories of suffering, Chesler addresses the suffering of women in madness to design a critical perspective on patriarchal structures (Chesler, cited in Rich 1). Besides, women are deemed as "normal or neurotic according to a male ethic of mental health based on the invisible and sometimes explicit assumptions of patriarchal society" (Chesler, cited in Rich 1). The patriarchy in our society, in this context, can be seen through the characters in the TV show *Game of Thrones.* When looking at the women of *Game of Thrones* in interaction with the male characters, it becomes clear that their positions of power are not completely independent of those of the men in their surroundings. Overall, the kingdom of Westeros is dominated by men and masculinity serves as a symbol of power and success which later unfolds as the cause behind some of the main female characters' harrowing actions in the fiction.

According to Joan Busfield, insanity as a differentiating moment only emerges as an aspect of enslavement and the resistance of women (99-100). It can be seen when Martin divides the women portrayed in the books into groups of victims or presumed victims of sexual violence during childhood or even while being an adult. Like Martin, in the context of the "victim discourse," madness has only an illustrative function for Chesler as well as for Showalter and Ussher as it serves as particularly urgent evidence of the general oppression of women. Here in the fictional world of Westeros, hysteria is the answer to the unlived lives of all women and that is why it is dismissed by specialists, as suggested by Jane M. Ussher as a "malady of representation," a simulated or at least auto suggested disease attributed

only to the strong women (10). The same inner conflicts as well as societal oppression have been seen happening with the female protagonists of *Game of Thrones*. Thus, insanity as the forbidden, contradictory, and feminine concept is also seen in the world of Westeros.

Feminized insanity produces forms of representation of pathologized femininity by fixing certain images of women which decisively co-constitute women's self-perceptions and possibilities of representation. Thus, at the end of the 19th century, medical discourse produced a clear analogy between insanity and contemporary idealism of femininity in the theories of "women's diseases," namely hysteria and anorexia nervosa (Showalter 2). Furthermore, any fictional world mirrors and projects the surrounding and the environment the creator of the world lives in; therefore, it is important to investigate how and why the ideas of gender dominate the denotation and the connotation of hysteria and insanity in the fictional world of *Game of Thrones*. In this world, the strong female figures portray different aspects of female suffering in society having one thing in common: the "Female Malady" (Kromm 507). Therefore, while the fictitious world shows patriarchal structures, at the same time it exhibits a broad, convincing spectrum of female characters within the paradigm of the "Female Malady."

In *Game of Thrones*, the strong female figures are mainly explored through the lens of hysteria, and only one male character is characterized as mad, namely the Mad King, and that too is not exactly shown but narrated. Since women have been considered irrational in Western thinking organized through binary oppositions, strong and empowered women were always marked as mad and insane (Showalter 8). In Westeros, several female characters were depicted as mad through the eight seasons, while the creators tried to give reasons behind their madness. Although there are given reasons behind the characters' actions, the patriarchal norms played a pivotal role in the female portrayal of these characters. While the male protagonists are mostly good and chivalrous, the female protagonists are mainly deemed to be either insane like Cersei or Daenerys, or so fragile that they lack self-will, like Sansa. Moreover, at the end of the TV series, while the empowered women are turned into madness incarnate, the weak and docile character Sansa is given some power while constraining her from the shackles of her brother's rule.

Cersei Lannister: The Mad Mother

First of all, the audience as well as the readers come across the strength of Cersei Lannister when she shows in the very first episode that she is not just a trophy wife and queen to the king but has the will to voice up ("Winter is Coming"). However, the patriarchal norms do not allow the creators to keep their female characters as strong and empowered as they probably would have if these protagonists were male. Since female characters like Cersei do not follow societal norms or oppose all the attributes of femininity that society imposes on them, they are simply labeled as insane and hysterical.

The most important scene for Cersei's character in the TV series might be in season 5 episode 1, "The Wars to Come," where the witch Maggy the Frog prophesied Cersei's destiny. The action of seeking a prophecy in the darkest corners of the forest by a young girl like Cersei indicates the "drive to self-knowledge" (Rich 18). In the medieval period, a

search for knowledge like this is more than "a search for identity" and in actuality is "the refusal of the destructiveness of the male-dominated society" (19) as Adrienne Rich asserts in "When We Dead Awaken." While this search for identity continues throughout Cersei's adult life as well, the naive girl later turns into a heartless woman by realizing her position in the male-dominated society. Cersei was given power in the TV show; however, it "still conveys how little power she has in this male-dominated world" (Jones 14). No matter how hard she fights she is not given the right to rule. She is either a queen to a king or a mother to a king.

Furthermore, according to Michel Foucault, the woman is only deemed as a woman completely permeated by her sexuality (149-151); whereas, "women's normative reactions to life events [are] associated with marriage, motherhood, menstruation, or menopause" (Ussher 89). Yet the mother as the positive figure represents the same characteristics as the negative image of the "hysterical" woman. In this context, women in their motherly image are seen to be the paragon of womanhood, whereas the same attributes of mothers are thought to be their weaknesses (Chesler 31). Moreover, sometimes motherhood is even deemed to be one of the main reasons behind a woman's hysteric behavioral traits. Whenever a mother speaks her mind she is labeled as mad anyway, since "the contrast between the reality of the demands of the mothering role, and idealized cultural constructions of motherhood" has drained all their energy (Ussher 168).

In the book *A Game of Thrones*, Martin also describes the same notion when Jaime Lannister, Cersei's brother, says that motherhood alters a woman's mind where all the mothers turn mad and in that instant, he calls Cersei mad and irrational because of her motherhood where previously she had been ruthless and more intelligent than any other woman (61-62). Moreover, if a mother is strong-willed and has the tendency to question the societal norms they are instantly put down with the weapon of labeling them as insane or demeaning their actions by calling them off. Hence, Cersei is hysterical and abnormal since she wants to break the patriarchal norm by becoming more powerful than a man; however, paradoxically, possesses motherly love and at the same time the same amount of hatred towards the world that took her children away from her.

However, the most important turn in Cersei's character is shown when she is stripped of her clothes and is forced to walk naked through the entire city in the name of the "walk of atonement" (Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* 732-740). Mortified and humiliated, Cersei walked through the streets of King's Landing only to become more vicious and abominable. "The Walk of Atonement" therefore was the last blow to transform Cersei Lannister into a despot ruler who only cares for her power and thrives on revenge. Here, the patriarchal normativity once again projects an incomparable female villain, namely The Queen Regent Cersei Lannister. After the death of her children, she is beside herself and plans every step to eliminate her enemies. However, when examined closely, it is clear that Cersei is only a pawn whose actions are merely a projection of the depravity that she faced throughout her life. Thus, the creators of *Game of Thrones* project Cersei Lannister as the paragon of insanity through her actions but forget, only in support of patriarchy, to showcase the conflicts that a woman has inside herself for being deprived of her desire and free will.

Daenerys Targaryen: The Mad Queen

From the beginning of *Game of Thrones*, the later Dragon Queen, Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen has been suppressed by her older brother Viserys, who considers himself the rightful heir and prospective king of Westeros. In the beginning, Daenerys has no power over her own life. It is clearly shown when her objections to the imminent marriage are verbally countered by Viserys. The forced marriage shows that Daenerys has no controlling power over her own life. Rather, she has to subordinate herself to his patriarchal perspective of the world. Consequently, the relationship between the Targaryen siblings reflects the traditional understanding of patriarchal norms in Westeros, where the men and at the same time the eldest son has the right of inheritance.

Women who loathe being women and spend all their time convincing others that they are just as good as (or better than) men often assume the role of men and are strong (Felman 8). Daenerys, in her book encounters, is uncertain, conflicted, and occasionally panicked. However, her inner turmoil from the book's point of view faded in the visual depiction. In the series, she is the one who changes societal norms as a woman by leading a huge army of Dothraki as well as the Unsullied to abandon slavery. This makes her one of the most influential characters within this fictional realm with the great power of three mighty Dragons at her command. "Confidence, ferocity, aggressiveness and a capacity and willingness to use force are key masculinized traits employed by Daenerys as she develops as a leader" and her evolution "as a ruler and leader both depend" on her incorporation and demonstration of "masculinized traits" (Clapton and Shepherd 13).

Overall, the kingdom of Westeros is dominated by men where masculinity serves as a symbol of power and success. Moreover, Daenerys does not question this hierarchy until she renounces her brother and watches undeterred when her husband murders him in the episode titled "A Golden Crown." This moment is liberating for Daenerys as she finally gets rid of her crazy brother. But at the same time, it certainly has left another crack in Daenerys' psyche to watch her supposedly last relative die in front of her eyes in this cruel way. In this episode, the young subordinated girl becomes a woman and realizes that she has her voice and free will. Here, Daenerys "breaks the wheel" by breaking the shackles of male dominance over her. Although this moment is considered as the key moment of Daenerys' empowerment, it is also when the audience is introduced to her hysterical heredity. Besides, in the TV series, she always affirmed that she was going to "break the wheel" which can be seen as a symbol of breaking societal norms. Daenerys, being empowered by knowledge and her own experience, wanted to begin a new era devoid of slavery and discrimination. She even wanted to obliterate the hierarchy within the system. However, her promise to break the norms was shown to be the reason behind her own demise.

When everything seemed to be smooth and good for Daenerys, she was hit by the fall of her child Dragon Viserion ("Beyond the Wall"). Although, with this depiction, it seemed like she could overcome this loss with the loving shelter of Jon Snow, the creators show that a woman can never be self-dependent. No matter how strong and powerful they might be, they always need a male shadow above them be it as a loyal follower like Jorah Mormont,

or advisers like Ser Barristan Selmy and Tyrion Lannister, or a lover like Jon Snow. This is when patriarchy triumphs once again and demeans the spirit of an empowered woman as if the transcendence is only meant for men and a woman's transcendence is towards men (Beauvoir 17).

Moreover, in "Translating Medea's Infanticide: A Critical Analysis of Euripides' Medea," Sohana Manzoor alludes to the potential for upheaval and social transformation that a resolute figure such as Medea could instigate. This perspective serves to enrich the understanding of Daenerys' character within the context of the fictional realm depicted in *Game of Thrones*. This is the "womanhood in a woman" that drags them down instead of letting them have their transcendence and causes conflict within their psyche. Both Elaine Showalter and Jane M. Ussher explain in their books that the abandonment of identity is denounced as suffering under society, thus taking on the role of "madness" within the boundaries of societal norms (Showalter 68 and Ussher 11). A destroyed individual and not an empowered being is shown to us here with the mental breakdown of Daenerys which actually was inevitable since she was suffering from identity-lessness for a long time.

Therefore, the actual blow comes in the episode titled "The Last of the Starks" when, already succumbed to the patriarchal norms, Daenerys loses her most loyal follower and ally. Finally, when her best friend is killed brutally in front of her, she loses it all. Moreover, her lover becomes distant because of their family relations and she loses two of her beloved children (Dragons) for the crown. According to Rich, "Women must protect a mate or child at any cost for the sake of self-preservation that goes beyond the essence of the feminine within them" which turns them to be mad ("Women and Madness"). Here, Daenerys' attempt to save her child Dragon pushed her one step closer to her hereditary malady of being mad. All of these had the culminating effect on the most influential and empowered female figure in Westeros. Daenerys, therefore, could not stand the view of her childhood home, "The Red Keep" in King's Landing, and the "Bells" do not help either as it was the rage within her that was giving the cue of the outburst ("The Bells"). This is when the audience encounters an inner turmoil unfolding. This is Daenerys surrendering under patriarchal subjugation and the audience repeatedly encounters the win of patriarchy in the society.

The Hegemonic Gender Norms Behind Female Madness in *Game of Thrones*

The question of the ontological as well as ethnological status of gender difference has been a dominating factor in the search for women's identity. The pressure of nature, be it natural femininity, natural masculinity, or natural heterosexuality, is thus produced by artificial means, where nature seems to be a theatre in whirl density. Meanings are subject to infinite processes of cultural change and displacement, which have had and will have different connotations depending on the historical context. The meaning of gender is constituted within language. Butler calls this the performativity of gender ("Performative Acts" 520). Her thesis assumes that discursive processes produce and materialize gender in the first place; here, materialization in Butler's case means the historically specific appearance of gender ("Performative Acts" 521). Butler says that identity categories such as "the woman"

are not neutral descriptions or even fit under natural categories ("Performative Acts" 522). They are to be understood as normative social settings since they describe what they produce at the same time. In a certain way, here, Butler only radicalizes something that can already be read in Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 293).

Thus, in and through madness and gender performative discourses persons become visible and recognizable in the dynamics of subjectification. Moreover, this subjectification happens through the perpetual, never-ending, performative practice of the somatic and linguistic repetition of the society for the female protagonists like Arya, Sansa, or Daenerys to act as they are supposed to and not as they want to. In the process, "the practice of performative acts" is veiled by the staging of a supposedly preceding substance and repetition that leads itself "towards its productive effect" (Butler "Performative Acts" 274). The continuous repetition is inevitably always also a variation, a shift towards an uncontrollable realization. Here, it means that the practices of the performative realization of gender difference are in themselves precarious, unclear, not definable, and therefore not conclusive or determinable. Therefore, the hegemonic patriarchal order of certain performative acts that are denied by the strong female protagonist leads them to become 'hysteric' and mad where in the end the patriarchal society always emerges triumphant.

The question of the ontological status of gender difference dominates in Judith Butler's theory of performative acts. According to Butler, the performativity of gender is understood as an "ongoing process of repetition" ("Performative Acts" 520). Moreover, Butler asserts that the binary structure of gender difference and its heteronormative structure form the normativity of modern gender ontology that are both ostensibly natural and extra-social facts ("Performative Acts" 521). Moreover, the problematization of female insanity can provide a wide range of instruments for an analysis of the functional mechanisms of power discourses and marginalization (Clapton and Shepherd 10). Therefore, the performativity of gender identity comes almost naturally to the female protagonists of *Game of Thrones* who are living in a strict medieval patriarchal society.

Nevertheless, in the world of *Game of Thrones,* George R.R. Martin has shown the performative acts of women with the depiction of his female protagonist with profound eloquence. In Westeros, gender relations lead the female protagonists to subversion when they are within their feminine order. However, this subversion forces them towards performative subversion where they assume the masculine traits to illustrate their power within the normativity framework. To understand the change of gender roles in Daenerys Targaryen, Cersei Lannister, Sansa or Arya Stark's character one has to turn to Judith Butler's performativity theory as, to attain their goals, these characters had to turn themselves into despot rulers, a cruel regent or a faceless "nobody."

Arya Stark: The Faceless Wo(man)

Arya Stark, the intellectual, strong-willed girl from the north, is one of the main characters of the fantasy epic *Game of Thrones* since the beginning of the book as well as the TV series. Arya Stark, the youngest daughter of Lord Eddard Stark and Catelyn Tully undergoes

one of the most impressive character metamorphoses in the series. From a little girl who wanted to be a knight, Arya turned into one of the most cold-blooded psychotic killers in the world of *The Song of Ice and Fire*.

Arya Stark is the modern feminist in the world of *Game of Thrones.* From the beginning of the book series as well as in the visual depiction, Arya has been protesting to have equal rights as the boys such as, when she answers her father that she does not want to be a lady (*A Game of Thrones* 149). She is seen to be more potent with masculine traits rather than perfect feminine traits that are expected of her. According to Judith Butler, a constantly repeated invocation as a girl or a woman then constantly consolidates gender identity anew ("Performative Acts" 521). Here, in the case of Arya, her governess Septa Mordane constantly tries to perfect her as a girl who is destined to assume the role of a lady in the future. Nevertheless, the persistent mention of gender identity and roles reinforces Arya's determination to reject conventional gender expectations while she strives to embrace freedom and resist the confines of traditional femininity, as she "associates traditional girlhood with weakness and inferiority" (Tan 488). This is why she says twice in the series that she is "no lady" ("Lord Snow"). In her case, Arya tries to find her "self" in the "other" only because the "other" was the more privileged one in society.

After her father's unlawful execution, Arya has to assume a boy's identity and that is when her rejection of the gender roles actually starts. However, from the beginning of the story, the readers as well as the audience have witnessed that Arya was performing under a skin that she was not comfortable with. She was never comfortable in dresses and was always repelled by the societal norms and conduct that were strictly followed by women. Transvestism for Arya, here, is "the opportunity to escape the strictures of female roles" (Hunt 11). As a strong-willed independent person who is taught to stand on her own feet, Arya rejects traditional gender roles, gender identities, and all social norms (Tan 489). Strong female characters like Arya have no gender at all and the problem here is the rejection of femininity (Frankel 42). The "selfless" women characters thus become conflicted and the outcome of this conflict results in madness or hysteria.

According to Butler, the construction and production of gender behavior have been acquired by socially controlled activities at the level of perception, interaction, and everyday politics, which provide certain actions with the meaning of being female or male (*Gender Trouble* 373). Although Arya has to learn womanly traits like embroidering, she always wants to join her brothers in lessons of fighting. She is more at ease with a sword than with a needle. That is why she names her sword "Needle" and explains to her brother Jon Snow that Sansa has her own needle and this is her needle ("Winter is Coming"). However, the everyday activity that is expected of Arya is rejected by her almost instantaneously since she does not approve of the "societal hegemonic order" as she wants to be "constituted by discourse yet not be determined by it" (Benhabib 378). Therefore, when Arya is finished with the training of becoming "a faceless man" in the House of Black and White by Jaqen H'ghar, she excels in archery and can wield any weapon she wants to. However, this gender transformation by Arya is a rejection of her "selfhood" which isolates her from the rest (Tan

488). She does not belong to either gender group and is a "No Body" which is the reason behind her transformation from a little tomboy to a "faceless" assassin.

However, no matter how hard she tries, Arya has been unable to renounce her female identity. Whenever she is called a boy, she corrects them that she is a girl in reality. This dilemma within Arya's psyche must have later formed the twisted mind inside her head since "performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishment both obvious and indirect" (Butler "Performative Acts" 279). Therefore, clearly the reason behind Arya becoming a vicious and cold-blooded assassin is her rejection of the societal gender norms and the essence of gender identity constructed by the societal hegemonic order.

Sansa: The Naive "Little Bird"

From the beginning of the story of *A Song of Ice and Fire* as well as its visual representation *of Game of Thrones,* unlike her sister Arya, Sansa Stark has been the quintessential courtly, polite, and fragile princess who is the embodiment of societal submissiveness of women. Besides her being hopelessly romantic, Sansa is naive and believes that the world is full of goodness and everything is going to turn out well for her since she follows everything and does what is expected of her. While masculine characters like Arya are all about overt strength, outspoken and bold, and fighting the system directly, feminine characters like Sansa are softer. They fight using smiles, kind words, and manipulations. They are often concerned with marriage and motherhood and tend to keep their true opinions to themselves. Sansa Stark has been a perfect example of these feminine features from the beginning of the story until she was tortured and humiliated by the person she was infatuated with and later was even raped by the person she was married off to.

Sansa was dehumanized the day she was raped by her husband on the wedding night. Here, her later found strength could only be explained by her experience of violence, similar to Daenerys. This creates the impression that female figures can only develop strength and self-confidence in fiction if they experience sexual violence beforehand (Frankel 14), a superficially "reinforcing" view, which, however, draws a very dangerous picture of female empowerment. Sansa explicitly takes this view herself: "Without Littlefinger and Ramsay and the rest I would have stayed the little bird all my life," she says to the Hound, who used to mock her in King's Landing as a naive "little bird" ("The Last of the Starks"). In other words, everything Sansa now has in status and self-confidence, she owes alone to her tormentors. This statement indicates the hegemonic male subjectivity while women cannot build such a subject for themselves. And thus, the abandonment of identity that has always been repeatedly forced upon the girls like Sansa in a patriarchal normativity, is denounced here as suffering under society and thereafter taking on the role of "madness." Sansa in her determination to become "the queen in the North" is inconsiderate towards Daenerys' psychological impact on the fact that she is in love with her nephew and exposes this well-kept secret to everyone via Very. This is when the hysteria within Sansa is revealed that helps to unfold the madness within a certain female Targaryen who was supposed to sit on the iron throne and rule over Westeros.

Moreover, according to Adrienne Rich, "women are products of culture and society" where

every single woman acts out the plot of societal norms that were determined for them ("When We Dead Awaken" 21). This statement is relatable with Sansa since from her childhood she has been the "daughter sunshine" who is the embodiment of societal norms. However, the turn on her identity that opposes the performative roles of society resulted in an empowered woman regardless of the sufferings she went through. Besides, Sansa, who had successfully renounced the manipulator, seems to fall back into old, naive behavioral patterns when she had to seek shelter under Littlefinger's umbrella. Confirming Butler's thesis that the body, the anatomical gender, is simply an effect of social hegemonic orders which is "a continual and incessant materialization of possibilities" ("Performative Acts" 521). However, in the end, Sansa has become a strong woman who can hold the scepter in her hand and will make a difference in the world of Westeros, though on her brother's side.

Although Sansa has ruled Winterfell since season 7 and is even crowned "Queen in the North" in the series finale, it is unforgettable that she only came into this position of power after Jon Snow had graciously resigned and let his sister rule. Here again, women are only allowed to have the power not because they are worthy of it but because masculinity in the normative structure only allows them to have it in the first place. Besides, Sansa only had the title of being the "Queen in the North" because she had to bow down to her younger brother Bran when he was crowned the king of Westeros. In Sansa's example, too, it is mainly men who create her, with violence and power not to mention the grotesque assumption that women can only become "strong" through experiences of violence. The scene in which Sansa arbitrarily decides that the North can become independent as the only kingdom in Westeros is a final attempt to give her some independence after all. However, this twist seems very intentional. Societal norms do not allow a woman to become more powerful than any man. Thus, the creators of *Game of Thrones* could not allow its female protagonist to become as powerful as a king. Once again, the result remains the same: patriarchy prevails.

Conclusion

Since the eighteenth century, women have been consistently positioned within Western thought as aligned with irrationality, establishing a binary framework that reinforces men as rational agents and women as irrational beings. This binary opposition can be delineated using the concepts of "self" and "the other." Consequently, this dualistic paradigm leads to the stigmatization of women, as femininity becomes synonymous with irrationality and mental instability. Here, insanity becomes an essence of the feminine (Showalter 21). Moreover, a feminist theory that wants to "free femininity and madness from their mutual definition" should not only "criticize the images that are qualified as patriarchal" (Kromm 508, 531). Additionally, it necessitates the avoidance of reintroducing the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion inherent in normalization discourse into discussions concerning femininity and mental health. Furthermore, it calls for a critical examination of one's engagement with the patriarchal norm and the subjugation of women.

The scrutiny of female insanity provides a valuable lens for dissecting power dynamics and marginalization. This approach offers a nuanced critique of societal normativity

and patriarchal dominance by exposing the marginalization of women and examining the discourse surrounding femininity and madness. In this context, understanding the "self" is essential for comprehending gender relations within societal structures. Gender roles, however, remain deeply ingrained and not solely cultural constructs. Strong women grapple with societal norms and expectations tied to their gender, aligning with feminist perspectives on traditional gender role constraints (Islam 84). This observation aligns with feminist perspectives on the constraints that women often face due to traditional gender roles.

Sometimes the feeling prevails that those female characters who gain power and influence in the course of the story of *Game of Thrones* have masculine attributes or orient themselves towards male role models. Moreover, the recognition of certain norms could lead to difficulties in coping with life, to decentration of identity which is the cause that leads women to an act of performance that puts a mask on them (Benhabib 375). Thus, it can be easily said, as Beauvoir has famously pointed out, that gender roles, in reality, are anything but cultural and social constructs that are not a quality that is innately inherited but produced as well as attributed by societal norms.

All in all, the female personas within the realm of Westeros exhibit profound complexity, encompassing diverse character traits while simultaneously commanding their narrative arcs. Nevertheless, certain formidable female characters in the television series *Game of Thrones* are perceived to manifest qualities typically associated with masculinity, thereby transcending conventional gender roles. This phenomenon is noteworthy in light of the understanding that discussions surrounding gender are not static; they are performative, representing actions that construct and emulate a specific societal framework, rather than mere static declarations or descriptions. In the case of Daenerys Targaryen, for example, to become powerful in the patriarchal society, she had to assume the character traits of men which later led her to unfold as a mad queen instead. From this, it can be concluded that George R. R. Martin as well as the series makers do not deviate in this aspect from the classical image of women in the societal hegemonic order. However, the representation of empowered women becoming mad and hysteric is alarming and provides a negative image of every empowered woman in society.

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Precarity in the Capitalocene: *Gun Island* and Climate Change

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Abstract

This paper, mapping the trajectory of migrant workers' lives in Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island*, locates precarity in the nexus of capitalism and climate change and identifies the latter as a new determinant of precarity. Heightened precariousness is generally perceived today as an effect of conflicts and wars. Contemporary South Asian novels mostly explore how caste, class, religion, gender, and sexuality condition the production of precariousness in today's world. My paper looks into the production of a precarious subject seldom represented in contemporary South Asian Literature: climate refugees. Drawing upon *Gun Island*, I argue that climate refugees inform us about the necessity to expand our understanding of vulnerability so we are able to factor in those whose lives have been upended by the effects of anthropogenic climate change along with the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism.

Keywords: Climate change, Anthropocene, precariousness/precarity, capitalism, world-ecology

Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island* casts light on a frontier of precarity that contemporary South Asian novels are apparently unobservant of. Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* portrays the precarious deadlock of generational subjugation under the caste-class dynamics of rural India. Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* depicts the precarious experience born of social and political conflicts, as collateral violence of national projects, of government's retaliations on the Maoist insurgency in Andhra and Chhattisgarh, and resistance in Kashmir. In the depiction of precarious life, Mohsin Hamid's magical realist intervention in *Exit West* shifts the lens to the refugee crisis that emerges from the wars in the Middle East. In these fine works, the generalized condition of vulnerability is represented through the relations of class, caste, religion, gender, and sexuality, intertwined in the social, political, and economic nexus that constitutes the contemporary world. Like *Exit West*, *Gun Island* foregrounds the refugee experience in a transnational setting to portray human vulnerability and the trajectory of precarious life. In fact, there are significant works, including Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* itself, that connect precariousness with the refugee crisis. What sets *Gun Island* apart is that it turns the lens to the planetary repercussions of anthropogenic climate change to identify precarity and represent the precarious subjects of climate refugees.

Precarity refers to both labor conditions and life experiences that mirror unstable, insecure, and uncertain circumstances. It is recognizable in "social risk and fragmented life situations" caused by contingent employment, wage squeezes, pernicious work risk, and uncertainty, reflecting a life condition without "security and predictability" (Schierup and Jørgensen 3).

The ontological condition of vulnerability engendered by precarity is often designated as precariousness. Judith Butler demarcates precariousness from precarity, suggesting that while the former refers to the biological and bodily vulnerability and injurability of life, the latter finds these states conditioned socially and politically (Butler 3). In short, precariousness is a generalized human condition whereas precarity is a structurally determined condition of life. This paper, departing from Butler's biopolitical premise, situates them in the circuit of the capitalist mode and relations of production. Contrary to the argument that precarity has arisen as a novel historical symptom characteristic of neoliberal capitalism, Marx's writings on the reserve army of labor who face the intensifying threat of being cast away into the surplus population "of the unemployed and underemployed" show that precarity has been a constant norm of capitalism (Kasmir 4-9; Jonna and Foster 4-5). The irregular migrant workers and refugees find themselves in the reserve army of the transnational labor market. Migrant workers, the "surplus population of globalization," are often regarded as "the quintessential incarnation of precarity" (Schierup and Jørgensen 4-5). A significant share of them is the "new migrant group," displaced by climate disasters, who are increasingly crossing the threshold of precarity and entering a life of intensifying insecurities (Standing 93). The climate crisis and the consequent global ecological rift have emerged as factors creating further interfaces of precarious labor conditions and ontological experiences of precariousness (Kasmir 3; Jonna and Foster 14). The repercussions of climate change are creating subjects who are weighed down by the precarious condition of marginality, uncertainty, and anxiety.

Drawing from *Gun Island*, I situate precarity in the nexus of capitalism and climate change and argue that climate change has emerged as a new determinant of precarity. Recognizing climate change-induced precarity as another interface of capitalist exploitation, I also examine how capitalism conditions both climate change and precarity. Critically examining the novel's subscription to the Anthropocene ethos, I propose to read the Anthropocene from the lens of capital and argue that the collective agency of humans that is characteristic of this perceived geological era became possible because of the global subsumption of labor processes and entire terrains of social relations by capital. In order to explore *Gun Island*'s depiction of climate change-induced precarity, I find it necessary to examine how the novel formalistically incorporates the question of climate change as its representation in narrative form faces significant challenges because of the incongruity between the degree of the spatial and temporal dimension of climate change and of the individual and collective human experience of this crisis. Pivoting on the novel's representation of an array of crises engendered by climate change, it is postulated that the fictional representation of climate crisis allows us to grasp the troubled relationship between ecology and capitalism, between precariousness and the circulation of bodies in space and time.

Gun Island and the Fictional Representation of Climate Change

Ghosh's earlier novels *The Hungry Tide* and the *Ibis* trilogy are imbued with ecological sensitivity but concern over climate change appears rather obliquely. But in *Gun Island*, climate change is recognized both as the subtext and the motive force that substantiates the content and conditions the narrative progression. In the novel, Deen, the narrator,

who lives in New York, comes to know about the legend of Gun Merchant while visiting Kolkata The legend is a derivative of Manasamangal Kāvya, an immensely popular poetry of medieval Bengal. Deen is asked to visit the shrine of this Merchant on an island in the Sundarbans since he has a PhD in Bengali folklore. On that trip, he meets Tipu and Rafi. A chain of uncanny events complicates his visit, making him depart for New York unnerved. The uncanny encounters become a regularity in Deen's life, following him to Los Angeles and Venice. In Venice, he bumps into Rafi who has migrated to Europe after losing his home in a storm. Deen later learns about Rafi's perilous journey and gets to know that Tipu is on a boat full of refugees – the Blue Boat – that is crossing the Mediterranean to make shore in Italy. Deen, with his historian friend Cinta and a group of activists, takes a ship to rescue that boat. The Italian Navy, joined by a flotilla of anti-immigrant nationalists, head in that direction too to push the boat back. After a series of coincidences and the intervention of forces of nature, the passengers are finally rescued. In the course of this plot, the novel explores the polyphonic reality rendered by climate change.

The parable of Gun Merchant and his journey serves as an allegorical subplot to which Deen's own journey of making sense of the altering reality around him runs parallel. Gun Merchant was a wealthy and successful merchant who refused to worship the goddess of serpents – Manasa Devi. As a result, he is hunted across mysterious lands by the infuriated goddess. The parable can be read as an allegorizing attempt to symbolically represent the dialectical interactions between nature and human agency. Gun Merchant's adventures and exploits symbolize the capitalist enterprise of profiteering by appropriating and exploiting the natural environment. Manasa Devi's rage that hunts and haunts Merchant can be read as the aftereffects of the human exploitation of nature evident in the form of climate change that is now hunting humanity. The evocation of this allegory and a series of uncanny happenings in representing climate change in this novel make it imperative to examine how apropos of the existing paradigm of fiction *Gun Island* does it.

Ghosh himself notices a "peculiar form of resistance" faced by fiction while addressing climate change and posits that forms and conventions of contemporary fiction are inadequate to represent it (*Derangement* 09-11). It is argued that the climate crisis renders narrative problems and the problem of imagination to the effect that the articulation of climate change is inhibited by the dominant cultural narratives (Wenzel 1; Trexler 24). This particular difficulty of representation takes place because of the discrepancy between the enormity of the "spatial and temporal scale" of climate change and that of the "individual human experience" (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 10). In short, the canon of fiction and criticism appears underequipped to represent the complexity of this planetary phenomenon. Ghosh finds that the conventional mode of fiction writing complies with the logic of bourgeois rationality where the narrative follows a continuum of probability eliminating the "improbable" (25). Literary imagination here goes through a process of rationalization, making the representation of climate conditioned by capitalism's logic of organizing nature and its ideological reproduction in everyday life. The planetary implications of climate change seem too improbable to make sense in the domain of urban-bourgeois life which makes the fictional representation of contemporary climatic reality exiguous.

Gun Island attempts to transcend the formalistic limitations of modern fiction to animate the tensions of anthropogenic climate change and its predicaments by addressing a planetary totality – the apparent and the underlying reality, consisting of both human agents and nonhuman forces – and its cognitive representation in the narrative. It breaks away from the existing narrative logic that resists the formalistic incorporation of climate change by deploying the uncanny. As the narrative progresses, an array of uncanny events take place like Deen's multiple encounters with snakes, Tipu's visions and predictions, an anonymous email predicting the mass-beaching of dolphins, and the resolution of the Blue Boat crisis where the creatures of the sky and sea kindle a preternatural moment. In the novel, the "reclamation of the uncanny" is observed as an attempt to dissolve the "distinction between imagination and reality" (Armitstead). This approach to conditioning the narrative progression by coincidences and uncanny happenings can be seen as an act of subversion where the above-mentioned regime of bourgeois rationality is destabilized. Capitalism's ideological conditioning has led to the crisis of representation where the new global and fundamental realities remain inaccessible and unrepresentable and fail to emerge into "the presence of perception" because of the growing contradiction between the lived experience and the structural coordinates that condition such experiences (349-50). This contradiction is reflected in the precarious living experiences against the reality engendered by climate change and its ungraspable spatiotemporal scale. In the novel, the tensions concerning climate change – the rise of sea level, the destruction of micro and macro ecosystems, animal migration, unpredictable and inclement weather and their effects on human lives and affairs, the change in livelihood, forced migration, unsettling interactions with the changing reality and increasing experience of precariousness – are accompanied by improbable and uncanny happenings. This evocation of the uncanny tries to dissolve the incongruence between the living experience and the structural reality so that climate change and concomitant crises like precarity become perceptible and representable in the medium of fiction.

In representing climate change *Gun Island* sketches how this crisis creates new conditions and experiential frameworks of human vulnerability as well as intensifying the existing conditions. The novel not only depicts the increasing precariousness experienced by migrant workers and refugees but also explores climate change's intertwined relations with the equations of globalization. In devising world-imagining, a mode of imagination to facilitate narratives to locate "a world and one's place in it," Jennifer Wenzel insists on understanding the continuities and disjuncture between globalization on one hand and repercussions of neoliberal capitalism and imperialism's exploitation of nature on the other (1-2, 4). Here, it is implied that climate change and concomitant crises are transnational and global phenomena. Besides subscribing to this idea, *Gun Island* accommodates both the local and the global cultural frame to address climate change, as Ursula Heise emphatically makes the point (04-08). Its narrative trajectory traverses from the remote island of the Sundarbans to Europe, implying that climate disaster at the periphery causes reverberations at the very center which is recognizable in the global distribution of precariousness. This paper offers a reading of *Gun Island* to map the precarity in the nexus of the global dynamics of capital and the planetary impacts of climate change.

Gun Island and the Mapping of Climate Change-induced Precarity

The early part of *Gun Island* is set in the Sundarbans which depicts the disruption in the relation of negotiation and dependency that the people have formed with this mangrove forest spanning parts of India and Bangladesh. As most people inhabiting this muddy landscape of ebb and tide live by fishing, farming, and collecting honey and timber, the rise of the sea level and the invasion of salinity into freshwater have made both the land and water hostile to local livelihoods. The damaging effects on freshwater ecosystems and land fertility are echoed in Tipu's words to Deen, "the fish catch is down, the land's turning salty" (*Gun* 60). Moreover, increasing storms and cyclones are aggravating those difficulties as vast stretches of fertile lands and commercial fishing ponds get over-flooded by saltwater and become unusable for years. The peril is evident in Moyna's lament: "Both land and water were turning against those who lived in the Sundarbans" (48). The gradual change of the environment and the repeated assault of natural disasters are jeopardizing their usual course of life which is propelling them to leave their homes in search of new professions, migrating to new places (60-61). Deen reflects, "Communities have been destroyed and families dispersed" (49). Tipu and Rafi, both concerned about the growing insecurities of life there, embark on a journey to Europe. In *Gun Island*, precarity is recognizable in the matrix of relations represented in the emblematic journey of the migrant laborers to the metropolis and the life lived there. Tipu and Rafi travel to Europe through the land route used by the human trafficking network, illegally crossing multiple borders. While crossing the border to Turkey, Tipu gets shot by the border guards on his leg and falls behind. Rafi manages to get to Istanbul, and through Eastern Europe finally reaches Venice. Tipu, after recovering, goes to Egypt and gets on a boat to cross the Mediterranean to come to Italy.

Here, Rafi belongs to the category of illegal immigrants who live outside the assurances of certain rights that are availed of by "citizens" and survive with minimal legal protection. In return, they offer the metropolis the basic services it needs to sustain itself. Dipesh Chakrabarty calls them the "new subaltern classes" of today's global economy which includes migrant workers, minorities, "the stateless," asylum seekers, and refugees (229). They do the heavy construction work, cleanings, and sweepings and serve as street vendors, salesmen, and waiters. Doing multiple jobs and working extra hours do not guarantee them minimal comfort as Rafi and Bilal often bunk at night in abandoned buildings and warehouses. They get no protection from the state as being of rights but live in constant fear of deportation and incarceration. They represent the lives that are "reduced to a bare life stripped of every right" (Agamben 183). More aptly, they live "a complex and contradictory mode of being or surviving somewhere between legality and incivility" (Bhabha 39). Their life is a constant negation of civility and the legal question applies to them only when the legal measures are to be taken against them, not to endorse any protection for them. Chakrabarty describes their precarious situation as representing "emergent, undocumented lifeworlds that break through the formal language of 'protection' and 'status'" (229). They cannot ask for police help since they are "illegal," as happens with Rafi. Their survival takes place in a zone of "privation and disenfranchisement" (Chakrabarty 230). Their very state of being is sketched in Deen's reflection: "In their eyes, I could see an anxiety that bespoke an existence of extreme precariousness" (*Gun* 155).

The Blue Boat registers a climactic point of precarity. This episode of *Gun Island* is a representative phenomenon of the capitalist metropolis' contradictory attitude toward migrant workers. The metropolis cannot survive without the essential cheap labor provided by these "illegal" migrants, yet it deliberately leaves them in a constant state of precariousness. It assumes the most inhuman role when its naval forces try to push the arriving migrants back into the sea. The boats, unfit for long sea voyages, overcrowded, short on supplies, and always a strong wave away from drowning, are denied permission to make port and forced to drift on as the passengers count seconds in fear of drowning. The boats getting capsized and corpses hitting shore are common stories in news media. The contradiction is apparent in the rescue of the Blue Boat. Here, Tipu is rescued by the same state that threatens to drown him and deliberately leaves Rafi outside the frame of protection. Precarity appears here as a "politically induced condition of maximized precariousness" where the people who are subjected to state violence, have to seek protection from the same state (Butler 26). Precarity, here, implies the politically initiated conditions that deprive people of the economic and social nexus of support and expose them to violence, injury and death (Butler 25). A constant threat of violence, the very survival against that threat and the mode of being that led these migrant workers to that condition signify both their bodily precariousness and the politically conditioned precarity. In *Gun Island*, Rafi and Tipu incarnate climate change-induced precarity as they belong to a significant share of the migrant population who are being displaced by climate disruption and turning into climate refugees. For Chakrabarty, these refugees embody "the human condition negatively, as an image of privation" (231). Here, precarity – the socially and politically conditioned uncertainty and vulnerability that determines human life and existence – becomes a parameter of the human condition. For Arendt, humans as a species are conditioned beings, and whatever comes in contact with humans becomes transformed into their condition of existence (9). This claim can be stretched a little to say that whatever socio-political milieu or ontological situation influences and determines human life can be taken as the conditions of human existence – the human condition. Precarity appears as the point of reference to understand the human condition in the wake of climate change.

Precarity, the Anthropocene, and the Ecology of Capital

Contemplating the human condition apropos of climate change, Chakrabarty looks into the imagination of the two figures of the human: "the human-human and the nonhuman-human" and argues that the human needs to be understood in both of its modes of existence – ontological and non-ontological (237-41). The latter is understood in terms of the collective agency of humans which the Anthropocene ascribes to the whole of humanity. The Anthropocene posits that the human species has collectively become "a geological agent on the planet" to "act as a main determinant of the environment of the planet" (Chakrabarty 174-75). *Gun Island*'s subscription to this argument is imbued in the narrative as it formally and aesthetically embodies the tensions of the anthropogenic climate crisis. It addresses the dialectical negotiation between the human-made systems and the nonhuman entities that configure human experiences. Deen's "sense of being" endures phases of disorientation and reorientation as he encounters migrated animals, erratic weather, and uncanny coincidences

which signal a new domain of planetary reality forged by climate change. Adam Trexler mentions that the novels that capture the Anthropocene explore "how things like ocean currents, tigers, viruses, floods, vehicles, and capital relentlessly shape human experience" (26). *Gun Island* corresponds to this Anthropocene ethos that is evident in Deen's efforts to make sense of the changing reality. When talking about a particular consequence of climate change, Cinta tells Deen, "It is here because of *our* history; because of things human beings have done" (214). This "*our*," gesturing towards a non-ontological agency, does not differentiate humanity and attributes the agency of making history – the history of changing geological and climatic composition of the planet – to the entire species. The novel's subscription to the Anthropocene points towards sidestepping capitalism as the particular history of human endeavor that incited climate change. The Anthropocene may capture the geophysical change of this planet and its vicissitudes but while attributing the agency to the undifferentiated humanity, it evades the question of uneven relation of power and perpetual differentiation by inequality that differentiates this species. Endorsing this agency to humans irrespective of their class and power position overlooks the question of how "humans co-produce patterns and relations of power and production within nature" (Moore 25). The intra-species differentiation such as class inequality, and unequal racial and gendered relations produced by non-linear, unequal, and uneven relations of power and wealth – by capitalism. Before any collective agency is attributed to the entire species, the lens needs to be shifted to the history of capitalism as it re/produces unequal relations of power in the web of life.

The Anthropocene is further questioned for forwarding ahistorical and abstract humanity that obfuscates the history of exploitation and class struggle, and for offering apolitical and technocratic solutions (Hartley 155-57). Behind this obfuscation is its oversight in recognizing capitalism as a driving force of climatic change, as it also overlooks the question of labor from the perspective of capital (Banerjee 02). To overcome the apolitical thrust of the Anthropocene, Moore proposes the term "Capitalocene" to locate the origin of climate crisis in the operating logic of capitalism that determines the relations facilitating the unremitting accumulation of capital (6, 172-73). Of course, the Marxian intervention in capitalism's impact on nature began with Marx himself as he advanced the idea of social metabolism which is defined as the interactive process between humans and nature, mediated by labor itself (283). However, capital's appropriation of the labor process and unfettered accumulation through the exploitation of nature create a rift in this metabolic interaction (Foster 156-60). The rift marks the dissociation of human labor from natural conditions of production as the necessity of nature to capital appears not "in the form of an organic social and material unity between the producers and their natural conditions of existence" but as distinct material conditions so that the use-value of the labor power can be appropriated (Burkett 62). Moore, however, finds it more of a metabolic shift than a rift when this metabolism is seen through the double internality of the flow of capital and power in nature and the flow of nature in capital and power such that the Cartesian dualism of nature and society coalesces into a singular world-ecology, "a way of organizing nature" that conjoins "the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the co-production of

nature in dialectical unity" (2-3). Capitalism itself is an ecological system where nature and capital are in a contradictory unity of interpenetrating processes that are constantly being "produced and reproduced" (Harvey *Contradictions* 247-8). Capitalism's organization of nature, as a "world-ecology," converts the natural environment into Cheap Nature – an enormous repository of unpaid work/energy and the value-relations associated with it – by "the exploitation of labor-power and the appropriation of unpaid work" (Moore 81). This unrestrained accumulation, appropriation, and exploitation of nature have led to the planetary crisis of climate change.

So, when *Gun Island* points toward "*our* history," subscribing to the Anthropocene, it conceals the role of the capitalist class, the economic and political organization of capitalism, and its organization of nature that have engendered the climate crisis. The novel sheds light on the production of a particular kind of precariousness to which contemporary novels are not very attentive but it falls short of casting light on the original sin. In its thematic organization around climate change and precarity, as the novel addresses the history of profiteering and accumulation by exploiting nature, an implicit critique of human-made systems appears as a subtext here. This critique, however, pinpoints the collective actions of the species and capitalism appears here as a particular moment of the Anthropocene. In the novel, the parable of Gun Merchant allegorically represents the capitalist venture and its dialectical relationship with nature. Allegorizing a present crisis with a historical homology is not new for Ghosh as his *Ibis* trilogy has already been read as an allegorization of neoliberalism that exposes "the rhetoric of freedom and the invisible hand of the market" and extrapolates "how the commoditization of poppy leads towards … the destruction of life as well as the environment" (Zayed 129-32). In *Gun Island,* the homology is mythical with allusion to a historical past, making it an allegory within an allegory only to gesture towards the proposition that "allegory itself is allegorical" (Jameson 1). However, allegory here appears more as a one-to-one allegory than being an allegory proper that "becomes indistinguishable from the text and no longer visible to the naked eye" (Jameson 1-4). Even though the allegory is distinguishable as a parallel narrative, it aims to reveal a "structure of multiple meanings" (Jameson 9). It signals a relationship between the mythical then and the contemporary now to reveal the structural coordinates and the matrix of relations that inform the dialectical interpenetration of capital and nature. The seventeenth-century adventure of the Merchant for profit-making temporally coincides with the advent of capitalism and its disregard for the natural environment in the process of accumulation. Manasa Devi, the interlocutor between humans and nature, gets angry when she finds that Merchant did not want to worship her and the apparent balance that exists between human society and the natural world gets shifted. Manasa's curse and rage befall Merchant just like the repercussions of climate change are affecting human life now. The Merchant falling victim to the forces and creatures of nature corresponds to the aberrant weather and climatic phenomena of the seventeenth-century Little Ice Age. Climate change appears as the beast that has been unleashed by the exploitation of nature that is now hunting back humans. Merchant's exploits that are emblematic of the human ability to master nature end up offering an allegorical representation of the collective human agency that unfolds

in the logic of capitalism. However, as this allegory does not represent the labor process, the history of exploitation, and the hegemony of one particular class which are constitutive of capitalism, the symbolic representation of the capitalist venture ends up showing it as one particular facet of collective actions of the human species. Moreover, if Gun Merchant represents the collective agency of the species, then his sufferings must also point to the collective tribulation of the human species rendered by climate change. Chakrabarty speculates that there are no lifeboats to save "the rich and the privileged" beckoning the sufferings of the whole species in the aftermaths of climate change to which Merchant's allegorical sufferings correspond (189). However, the representation of the precarious experience in the novel shows that the tribulation afflicted by climate change has a class dimension. It hits them the hardest who are at the fringes of the capitalist class relation. Ultimately, in the novel's recognition of "our history" signifying the collective human agency of the Anthropocene and the depiction of the uneven distribution of precariousness along the line of class position, an unresolved tension hovers around. This tension actually harbors the contemporary debate over the species agency and the capitalist accumulation process – the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene – to locate the origin of climate change.

The collective agency that the Anthropocene ascribes to the species in fact has a capitalist mediation. Here, I propose that the Anthropocene can be better explained through the global subsumption of labor processes and social relations by capital. As a species, humans never comprise a single unit to consciously act upon this planet collectively. But how can a species divided geographically across nations, cultures, and unequal class relations, and incorporating irreconcilable differences have a collective agency as to bring a new geologic era if a single overarching logic does not connect them? This is where the globalizing logic of capital comes in. The human species can be attributed to a collective agency only when the entire terrain of social relations and the interpenetrating relations between human and natural processes (the labor processes) go through both formal and real subsumption by capital, on a global scale. With the shift from formal to real subsumption, the entire fabric of social relations has been subsumed by capital where a "properly capitalist" instead of indicating homogenization connotes a society formed of multiplicities and interactions of the differences (Hardt and Negri 441-2). The subsumption by capital indicates the species marked by differences and unevenness have coalesced under an overarching logic. If the whole species is to be imagined to have a collective agency then one must take into account how the entire human species and the matrix of relations connecting them have been subsumed by the global dynamics of capital. The collective agency of humans is then the agency of capital that brings the entire species and the matrix of relations connecting them under a single umbrella. Although the species is bound together by the dynamics of capital, the species as a whole does not possess a planet-altering agency since it is differentiated by unequal class relations, and not every individual has an equal impact on the planet's environment. It is rather the relation of power produced by the world-ecology of capital that determines the distribution of this agency across the species. The class that has control over the capitalist production process and a far greater carbon footprint for over-consumption surely contributes more to the planet's distress. The subjugated classes

in the capitalist system are part of this collective agency only in the sense that they have become the cogs in the capitalist machine – its production, circulation, consumption, and market networks. The Anthropocene, then, more aptly can be termed the Capitalocene. The temporal overlapping of the proposed Anthropocene and the advent of capitalism and its global operation of subsumption also signals this shift. Paul Crutzen identifies the latter part of the eighteenth century as the starting point of the Anthropocene which coincides with the beginning of industrial capitalism (Chakrabarty 175). However, the umbrella of capitalism as a single economy began subsuming the world in the sixteenth century (Wallerstein 59). Moore illustrates that capitalism's exploitation of nature for endless accumulation began in the fifteenth century (181-89). If a geologic era characteristic of anthropogenic climate change is to be envisioned then it should be thought of as the Capitalocene since it overcomes the theoretical oversight of the Anthropocene and addresses the labor process, the history of exploitation, and the hegemony of the capitalist class in the process of accumulation and the organization of nature, and also explicates precarious life conditions.

The production and distribution of climate change-induced precarity are mediated by the capitalist dynamics too. Capitalism's organization of nature stimulates the process of alienation that dissociates the labor process from natural conditions of production leading to the estrangement from nature itself. This estrangement is exacerbated when climate crises dislodge people of their livelihoods and dislocate them from their spatial relations with the natural environment. Rafi is a fisherman, but his profession is growing more insecure as the rivers are being depleted of fish. The spatial relation he has with the natural environment of the Sundarbans is disrupted by the direct impacts of climate change on its ecosystems. Here, disruption and reconfiguration of certain spatial relations through which social life is re/produced are resulting in human displacement in the Sundarbans which is still operating at the fringe of the capitalist machine but already subsumed by capitalist processes. The vicissitudes of this displacement transcend the borders of nation-states and add more pressure to the already existing global reserve army of labor, making the life of the marginal class more precarious. The uneven development of capitalism contributes to this predicament as it creates necessary conditions for the advanced economies to thrive by drawing capital and labor so that cheap labor from the underdeveloped ends rushes to the developed side (Harvey "Uneven" 150). The contradiction of uneven development conditions the refugee rush and makes them board the boats to cross the Mediterranean and pushes them to precarious living conditions. Understanding the precarious experience of climate refugees thus demands factoring in the global dynamics of capital.

These dynamics are patent in the transnational spaces that are formed by the overlapping of three phenomena – the mobility of labor, the transgression of borders, and the migration of people (Jay 4-5). In *Gun Island*, precarity is recognizable in transnational spaces as the novel factors in all these phenomena to explore the intertwined relations between climate change, precarious life experiences, and the equations of globalization. Globalization has accelerated the subsumption of non-capitalist forms of production within capitalist processes. Marx distinguishes between formal and real subsumption on the ground that the formal incorporates the existing pre-capitalist and non-capitalist labor processes to

produce absolute surplus value, but the real subsumption substitutes those labor processes with the capitalist mode of production to produce relative surplus value (1019-1025). Globalization triggered the transition from the formal to the real subsumption of labor in the past decades as modes of labor and social relations have been increasingly brought into the fold of capital (Munck 87). The global expansion of capital and the proliferation of accumulation enable the global movement of cheap labor by destabilizing national borders. These processes stockpile a global working class, not with a distinctive association to the relation of production but, "in the sense of an accelerated process of proletarianization" (Munck 87). Climate change expedites this shift from the formal to the real subsumption of labor as climate disasters are uprooting people to push them into cities and beyond national borders where their labor – fundamental to current forms of exploitation and value extraction – is subsumed by capital as they end up both in waged-labor systems and informal sectors. Rafi, Bilal and other climate refugees of *Gun Island* share a similar story. Displaced by climate phenomena, they move beyond borders and flock to the spaces created by the globalization processes where they are exploited by neoliberal labor conditions. These spaces appear as conjunctures where the implications of capitalism and climate change intersect. Be it the streets of Venice where migrant labor is exploited, or the waters of the Mediterranean where death awaits just a wave away, precariousness caused by neoliberal conditions and climate dislocation becomes conspicuous in these dispersed and fluid spaces. Rafi and other migrants are forced to live there in a contradictory state of being. The denial of legality exempts the states from any civic duty towards them which perfectly fits with their neoliberal scheme of austerity. And the fear of deportation and incarceration ensures that the workers provide cheap labor without resistance. In this context, precarity now corresponds to both labor conditions symptomatic of neoliberalism and ontological conditions of vulnerability and uncertainty – both mediated by the capitalist logic of accumulation and dispossession.

In addition, the ongoing era of neoliberalism has exacerbated both climate crisis and precarity. The accelerating destruction of tropical rainforests, exploitation of natural resources, and increasing emission of carbon over the last few decades coincides with privatization and profit-driven policies of neoliberalization, leading to further environmental degradation (Harvey *Neoliberalism* 172-5). Capital's reshaping and re-engineering of nature, relentless exploitation of resources, and unrestrained carbon emission resulting from accumulation processes have caused the climate crisis which has been greatly intensified in its neoliberal phase. Simultaneously, neoliberal economic policies have ensured that labor becomes cheaper, employment becomes unstable, and social protection is massively curtailed. All of these have inflicted the unprotected migrant workers and climate refugees with a constant feeling of insecurity and anxiety which have become the very condition of their existence. *Gun Island* captures this anxiety of existence exacerbated by neoliberalism which is incarnated in the climate refugees. These subjects of climate change-induced precarity are also subjects of neoliberalism who embody neoliberal class conditions and expose its exploitative domain. The novel's depiction of precariousness gestures to the class dimension of climate change to imply that both neoliberal capitalism and climate change hit hard the class that loiters at the margins of the capitalist machine. My reading of *Gun Island* substantiates that climate change has appeared as a novel determinant of

precarity. However, to comprehend its dynamics and implications, the lens needs to be shifted towards its capitalist mediation when capitalism is considered a world-ecology of organizing nature to the end of unrestrained accumulation and unchecked exploitation.

Conclusion

Gun Island departs from the conventional norm of locating human vulnerability in wars, social and political conflicts and economic nexus of dependability to look into how anthropogenic climate change makes life precarious. This paper, from the novel's representation of climate refugees, has argued and tried to establish that the planetary impacts of climate change and the global dynamics of capital coincide to create an additional interface of precarity. *Gun Island* projects precarity in the contour of the Anthropocene but this paper offers a critique of this premise and posits it in the frame of the Capitalocene through the operation of subsumption by capital. There is a Latin phrase in *Gun Island*, "*Unde origo inde salus* – 'From the origin salvation comes'." The underlying motive of this paper has been to address this origin. This research maintains that the current climate crisis is engendered and exacerbated by capitalism's way of organizing nature and the precarity induced by it is also structurally mediated by capitalism. Although climate change and the concomitant array of crises do not always overtly display a billiard-ball causal relationship to capitalism, they are indeed cognate of manifesting their bearings in different spheres of human life and planetary reality. Capitalism can indeed be located simultaneously as the origin and the underlying structure that has subsumed the processes that have led to this crisis. In order to address climate change and associated precarity along with the corresponding array of crises, it is requisite to address capitalism, its structural coordinates, and its matrix of relations.

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Partition's Shadow: Assam's Barak Valley and Siddhartha Deb's *The Point of Return* (2002)

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Abstract

Assam's Barak Valley is an example of how the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan left behind long-term conflicts and issues pertaining to identity, place, and belonging that have created turmoil in the geo-political space that we refer to as India's Northeast. The transformation of this space from a frontier during colonial times to a borderland in 1947 is not only significant for the genealogy and configuration of states within the region but also because this understanding subverts common assumptions about 1947, particularly on issues of communal polarizations, the formation of the border as well as the participation of non-political groups like the tribal populations who had very little stake in the playing out of the Radcliffe Line. Siddhartha Deb's 2002 novel *The Point of Return* looks at some of these questions of identity and belonging that so plague the region. The novel is an exploration of the life journeys of Dr. Dam and his son Babu and their relationship to the geographical locations they come to inhabit. The spatial and temporal realities that came into being in the Northeastern region is charted through this text in the postcolonial state making practices that produce irreversible patterns of social and political chaos. Issues of ethnicity, language, and belonging that are contentious questions in this region are represented in this narrative as the continued precarity of people who had come to live here. This essay presents an analysis of the novel through the optics of history and literature, using tools from the Phenomenological analysis of Time by Paul Ricouer, to investigate how the interface of events and memory transform and complicate our understandings of a contentious divided past.

Keywords: Partition of India, Barak Valley, migration, communal polarization, memory, belonging, identity

> Real life, life finally uncovered and clarified, the only life in consequence lived to the full, is literature.
>
> – Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*

Assam, and particularly the Barak Valley, can be examined as significant sites of how the 1947 Partition of India left behind long duration conflicts and unsolved issues pertaining to identity, place, and belonging that have created unceasing turmoil in the geo-political space that we refer to as India's Northeast. To comprehend the transformation of this space from a frontier during colonial times to being India's borderlands in 1947 is significant for the genealogy and configuration of the states within the region (Yumnam 157-8). This understanding also subverts common assumptions about 1947, particularly on issues

of communal polarizations, the formation of the border as well as the participation and resistance of groups like the tribal and plains populations to the vagaries of state formations. Many of these groups had initially very little at stake in the playing out of the Radcliffe Line but as the borders became heavily militarized and manned by the postcolonial state, protracted conflict zones emerged that were expressions of self-determination and forms of sub-nationalism of contending groups living in the region.

India's Northeast is a prime example of the fissures that existed in the nation-building project that emerged from the dominant nationalist discourses around 1947. The spatial and temporal realities that came into being in the Northeastern region remains largely uncharted although the postcolonial state making practices in the region have produced irreversible patterns of social and political ambiguities. After 1947, contentious issues of ethnicity, language, and belonging became paramount in the region and have remained so to this day. An exploration of these complex and current issues will therefore mean an understanding of local societies, their encounter with other communities and the various forms of politics and collectivities that have emerged in the region after the Partition. The formation of the northeastern borderlands in 1947 and the creation of East Pakistan resulted in a seemingly isolated landlocked Northeastern region that ended in a restructuring of territorial and political fault-lines. Unlike the communal conflagrations between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims elsewhere in Bengal or in Punjab, the Northeastern region has seen conflicts between Hindus and Hindus, Hindus against Christians and hill tribes against people residing in the plains or valleys. For example, Barak Valley has seen xenophobic violence from time to time, not only between the hill tribes and non-tribals (like elsewhere in the region as in Meghalaya, Mizoram, and, most recently, in Manipur) but also from Assamese speakers who have continued to see the region as inhabited by "outsiders." In Assam, post-Partition immigration had continued throughout the 1950s to the 1970s, and the binaries of "homecoming" or "infiltration" change from time to time for the Hindus or Muslims who had crossed the borders either before or after the formation of Bangladesh in 1971. Assam, the largest state in Northeast India, was particularly perceived as suffering from a "dual predicament" of a "perenially repositioned internal and external frontier of Indian democracy" (Sur 168). Border control measures like a physical fence and documentary evidences to ascertain citizenships were put in place and in between 1979 and 1985, the Assam Movement gathered momentum to address the contentious issue of "foreigners" in the state that was related to ownership of land and conflicts over linguistic identities. Here, border fences and walls "acquire a metaphorical charge and transform into a potent political register, even as it struggles to impose neat territorial divisions" (Sur 170).

Barak Valley is situated at the southern tip of Assam and is separate from the Brahmaputra Valley. The geographical spread of the Barak Valley covers three districts of Assam: Cachar, Hailakandi, and Karimganj, the Jatinga Valley of North Cachar, the Jiri Frontier Tract (Jiribam) of Manipur, Kailashnagar-Dharmanagar area of Tripura, and four districts of Bangladesh: Sadar Sylhet, Maulavibazar, Habiganj, and Sunamganj. The three districts of Assam and the four districts of Bangladesh have emerged out of the two districts of Cachar and Sylhet in the British times, together known as the Surma Valley division since

the districts became a part of Assam in 1874. During the Partition in 1947, a major part of the Sylhet district (leaving only Karimganj to India) was transferred to East Pakistan, so the Indian portion of the valley is called Barak Valley today. The valley is the northern section of the Meghna valley (comprising Dhaka, Mymensingh, and Comilla) so that in the absence of natural boundaries, the traditions and culture of East Bengal spread easily to the Sylhet-Cachar region in the ancient and medieval periods. In 1947, Sylhet was the only region in the Eastern sector to have undergone a Referendum on July 6 and 7, 1947 to decide its fate whether to join Pakistan or not. While Congress ministers like Basanta Kumar Das campaigned extensively to keep Sylhet with India, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, who played an important role in Muslim League politics in Assam, made sure that Sylhet went to East Pakistan. Ultimately, only Karimgunj remained in India while the rest of Sylhet merged with Pakistan. While Punjab and the rest of Bengal were divided on the basis of religion, the Sylhet referendum was a vote on two issues of realignment: India was partitioned on a communal basis and Assam on linguistic lines. The post-partition lived realities of people living in the Barak Valley therefore offer many insights on issues of linguistic and geographical identities, dispossession and migration.

After the division of the country, the Hindu middle class refugees in the Barak Valley were joined by other tribal exiles from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and from Mymensingh and Rangpur, who crossed into Assam for a variety of reasons. The migration patterns were varied and complex and ranged from communal persecution, economic reasons or even familial or marriage ties. The resultant tension between native population and the "intruders" often took the form of linguistic and economic opposition, sometimes between the same religious or ethnic groups. Apart from the agriculturists and artisans who came as refugees to the Barak valley, there were a large section of Sylheti middle-class economic migrants to the region. Their identity had been formed not as a result of rivalry against Muslims but in opposition to the Assamese Hindus who had resented their elite status and government jobs that many had enjoyed from British times. In the late nineteenth century, this rivalry began to assume serious proportions and the new Assamese middle class floated a number of organizations (for example the Asom Jatiya Mahasabha that had begun work in 1945-46), expressing alarm at the "Bengalisation" of Assamese society by the migrant Hindus and Muslims from Sylhet. The ideological ramifications of "infiltration" and the language question in the Barak and Brahmaputra valleys erupted in the "Bangal Kheda" movement where Bengali settlers were targeted and terrorized. The Assam Movement criticized an Indian law of 1950 (the Immigration Expulsion Act) that openly encouraged free entry into Assam of Hindus who were victims of communal disturbances in East Pakistan and turned Muslim peasants into "illegal Pakistanis" who were persecuted and deported. In contrast, the Hindu Bengali migrants were granted temporary lease of "abandoned" land that were in reality tracts where Muslim cultivators had been driven out (Sur 55). In Barak Valley, the Bengali settlers' consciousness about language and identity, largely different from Assamese society, took the shape of a defensive linguistic nationalism. On 24 October 1960, the Assam Legislature passed a bill stating that Assamese would henceforth be the only official state language. The bill was to politically deny the existence of a large minority,

the Bengali speaking Hindu settlers who had made the Cachar region their home after the Partition. The Bengali settlers, in turn, claimed that the Barak Valley in lower Assam had always been an important cultural center of the language from medieval times. Thus, when the 1960 Bill was passed restricting the use of their mother tongue, the Bengali population erupted in anger. On 19 May 1961, a procession of students and writers went on a peaceful march through Silchar town demanding recognition for Bangla as a medium of instruction in schools and colleges. The police fired on the unarmed demonstrators and eleven people died (Sengupta 193-4).

Siddhartha Deb's 2002 novel *The Point of Return* looks at some of these questions of identity and belonging in the life journeys of Dr. Dam and his son Babu and their relationship to the geographical locations they come to inhabit: Gauhati, Shillong, and Silchar. Dr. Dam's family had come to the Barak Valley after the Partition, walking across the natural frontiers to Silchar town where they had set up their modest home. The trajectory of that journey is repeated throughout Dr. Dam's other migrations, and in his son's movements from Shillong and Silchar to Kolkata and to Delhi. The traces of that original journey leave its marks, like nomads leave behind smudges of their fires, indelible in a certain way. "No one will tell you what you yourself do not seem to know at times, that your forefathers came from elsewhere. From where? It cannot be found on the map of India, which, with its confident peaks and curves and wholeness, eliminates any speculation that in this representation of the subcontinent there are places that do not belong, people who do not belong" (Deb, 210). The curve of movements and memories are interlinked, and a return is possible, even if fleetingly. However, every return is compromised with the detritus of living: the space left behind seems to be "unreal" – "Perhaps this is the true return, the completion of a cycle set in motion long ago, and if it seems lonely, maybe it is because migration is a reductive evolutionary principle where the sprawling oppressive family gives way to its streamlined nuclear descendant, to be replaced finally by the individual straining at the limits of memory" (Deb 221). The life stories of the two men are "travel stories," to use Michel de Certeau's words, that show us a bio-geo political life of the exile. By following the quotidian movement of the characters through spaces and places, by registering their disillusionment and trauma, the novel goes beyond the historical knowledge of data and figures to present us with an eloquent affective approach to what we may decipher of a migrant's life. The narrative's contrapuntal juxtaposition of "Time" alerts us to the ways in which this different knowledge can nudge us to move from particular historical events to literature's different epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical practices. In the novel, Time is both synchronic and diachronic where the semantics of action is transformed into a diachronic narrative through the use of decipherable symbolic descriptions of houses and buildings. In the chapter titled "Wedding Season: 1982," the Dam family house on Lane 13 is a site that "marked more clearly than any other event a boundary between what had gone before and what was to come." It was a story that could be told now, safely as "most of the characters are gone; some of them I have let go willingly, while the others I lost without wanting to" (Deb 98). The trope of exile creates within the narrative a synchronic time where past and the present intermingle and are constitutive of each other. Yet each

of the protagonist's journeys, across houses and terrains, becomes in essence a journey to reformulate the trajectories of history as felt and narrated through a diachronic concept of time. In Paul Ricoeur's idea that fiction fuses with history to go back to their common origin in the epic may be usefully explored in this novel that unearths a "sphere of the horrible," inserting the memory of suffering of an old man, victim of a history he does not fully understand and never complains about, into our scheme of things: "to follow the story is not so much to enclose its surprises or discoveries within our recognition of the meaning attached to the story … a new quality of time emerges from this understanding" (Ricouer 67). Deb's novel helps us to understand the hitherto unknowable, the horrible, the mundane dimensions of the migrant's life: "Silchar was a small Bengali island in the state of Assam, heavily settled by immigrants from the villages of East Bengal, who had brought with them a sense of identity that allowed for neither growth nor change. They were defined not by what they were – that was uncertain – but by what they were not" (Deb 107). When Dr. Dam is posted to Shillong, his life story is superimposed onto the history of the town and its growth from a colonial outpost to its postcolonial dereliction and lurking violence. Dr. Dam is a witness to the growth of the city just as he is also its victim: the rising xenophobic hatred indiscriminately targets Bengalis, Nepalis, and Biharis who have made Shillong their homes for years. From 1979 onwards as the spiraling violence goes out of control, the unspoken trauma of being a *dkhar* (the Khasi word for foreigner) confronts the Dam family. Unable to articulate his outrage and his powerlessness, and victim of a state sponsored corruption, Dr. Dam decides to go back to Silchar after his retirement. Dr. Dam's experiences of both liminal spaces and "homes" are not of an immigrant to another continent who "invariably create an interculture, or a liminal way of life" (Ahmed 1) but of an insider/outsider dichotomy within similar cultural and social spaces that underlie his experiences of belonging.

The novel consolidates the struggle of remembrance against forgetting, just as it exemplifies a man's struggle against tyranny and injustice. In this lonely struggle, a single line in a diary entry exemplifies the horror of a slogan that haunts Dr. Dam and Babu: "Go Back, Bangladeshis." Going back had never been simple. Shillong, a colonial project, was begun in the 1870s when Assam was carved out of the Bengal presidency. As Shillong grew, it drew Assamese, Nepali, Marwari, and Sylheti speaking Bengalis who came to live and work there. The early economic migrants were followed by thousands more like Dr. Dam and his family. The Assam agitation of the 1970s ignited a Khasi sub nationalism that began to actively target non-tribal population who were regarded as racially inferior. Through the various events and ruminations in the text, we come to comprehend how a divided self can only be understood in terms of its relationships with the land and with other lives: this strong sense of belonging binds them to time and place, to anchor their histories in a symbiotic relationship to the individual and the collective, even when that collective evokes fear. In a memorable section, the narrator describes an event in Police Bazar where the father and son, unknowing of a public curfew declared only a few hours before by the Khasi students' union "against foreigners," are assaulted. That event teaches the young boy to practice running: "The truth is that the running was not for my father but for myself,

and what I was reacting to was not so much the attack that had taken place but the violence that was yet to come" (Deb 231).

The novel tries to unravel the impossibly tangled legacy of 1947 that are mirrored perpetually in the other larger questions of belonging, livelihood, and identity that give rise to a spiralling series of assaults and attacks on those perceived to be "outsiders." Disjunction marks this narrative of intertwined lives of father and son, who look at memory in different ways and whose relationships to geography differ too. After changing homes many times, Dr. Dam decides to build a modest home next to his original family home where he had settled after 1947: "the house he would build in Silchar was a last-ditch attempt to find a resting place, to face the reality of retirement and not move from rented house to rented house on an ever-tightening spiral, so that he could ultimately set forth on his final journey from the same emotional space at which he had arrived fifty-six years earlier, the space some of us call home" (Deb 43). The attempts to find a place of sojourn is exactly matched by the son's movement away from the town where he grew up: "Each churning in the storehouse of memory that is me displaces something, changing the contours of my hometown, merging that place with people and incidents that came much, much later" (Deb 216). The question of who gets to stay and who does not is answered in an elliptical way through the life of Dr. Dam whose first job as a vet is to look after the state-owned elephants. In the words of his son: "That is the image of him I love the most, of a shy and earnest young man riding a bicycle along a jungle track … and as the jungle swallows him up completely he is happy, not because India or the government means anything to him. India is just a name, but this forest rising around him is a country without boundaries, whose borders cannot be mapped, where most the cartographers can do is mark, in bold letters, HERE THERE BE ELEPHANTS" (Deb 302).

The restive impossible homeland then offers another view of History that often defeats its very purpose of memorialization. "History, dragged so far from the metropolitan centers, from the rustic mainlands, will tell you nothing. In the Northeast, the way I remember it, history lies defeated, muttering solipsistically from desultory plaques put up to commemorate visiting politicians, the memorial stones fading against the brilliance of the colours in the streets. History is mired in one dirty green tank captured from the Pakistanis in the '71 war … pathetic in its smallness … its rusting gun aimed far away, beyond the hills, at some distant and ideal enemy settlements" (Deb 211). History writing from the margins and borders entail a different leap of faith, a different crisis of consciousness and a different set of narrative strategies. With its contrapuntal juxtapositions of places, times, and memories, Deb's novel achieves an altogether different affective wholeness to offer other sets of paradigms to history writing in the sub-continent. This chronicle then is both a memory text and a testimony of journeys: through the land and through the mind. In its narrative thrust, it refashions our understanding of places and times that are marked with unendurable violence yet filled with possibilities, if only we have the courage to face our and the nation's past.

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Language and Applied Linguistics

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Registers of the Street Hawkers in Dhaka

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Abstract

This study examines the distinctness of registers shared as a part of communication by the street hawkers in Dhaka. The reasons for studying these registers are to investigate their different jargons, why they use them while selling their products, and what they mean through them. It also explores the effectiveness of their registers in their communication. By adopting the qualitative method, the researchers have interviewed 40 street hawkers, recorded their conversations and some distinctive vocabularies for over a month, and found some striking meaningful registers they share in this profession. The results show that they use these specific registers before the customers to make communication comfortable and smooth. They also share these jargons to hide the real meaning from customers, to make fun of them, to discourage their fellow hawkers from promptly selling a product, to get rid of some particular customers, and sometimes even to cheat and provoke them. The findings of the study are discussed carefully to draw the attention of language users, planners, and policymakers. One of the important reasons for choosing the street hawkers was to concentrate on the professional language variation of an underprivileged community in Dhaka.

Keywords: register, sociolinguistics, jargon, street hawkers

Introduction

To live in a society, human beings must share ideas, collect information, communicate, and interact with others using a language for different personal and social purposes. However, the language they use for communication varies from individual to individual, country to country, community to community, and even profession to profession. This variation of

language always depends on the speaker. One speaker may use different types of language items, codes, and sets of vocabularies based on the context for a definite purpose. They also may not use these exact codes in another context. In sociolinguistics, the register refers to a set of vocabulary used by a particular social group.

According to Rahman and Mohiuddin (2014), "A set of vocabulary that is available in a particular profession is known as register" (p. 46). In the field of sociolinguistic study, the register is a crucial area that has received significant attention from linguists worldwide. Holmes (2001) held that registers are specific sets of vocabulary items associated with different occupational groups or the language of groups of people with common interests or jobs. Because of being applied in the job sectors, the register must have a significant meaning to the people of a community, society, or even in a country. However, Rahman and Mohiudddin (2014) stated that, regrettably, textbooks of sociolinguistics have tended to overlook the rich tradition of register studies.

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is a city where many people are found living temporarily for occupational purposes. All these people have their own dialect, and after living in Dhaka for a long time with people using different kinds of dialects, their own dialect gets mixed with others and forms a new type of language. They also use definite registers, jargons, or codes to communicate with others in the same profession. In Dhaka, more than 5 lakh street hawkers sell various types of products like dresses, shoes, bags, cosmetics, and fruits, and use different types of verbal repertoire amongst themselves while selling their products. Each hawker generally communicates with the other in their native language, Bangla. Still, in some situations, they use several codes carrying different meanings, which are only comprehensible to them but not to the customers. These hawkers are not very educated and come from lower economic conditions. Their living standards are not very high, and sometimes, if they cannot sell their products daily, they have to starve along with their family members. However, they have a strong unity among themselves and support each other in case of any problems outside their community. They maintain good communication amongst themselves using their registers in terms of selling any product to the customers, tricking them to make a good profit, and sometimes they mix these registers with their native language, Bangla, even though they do not have much formal education. Most of them think that the jargons they use are derived from Hindi and Urdu though it is challenging to find any Hindi or Urdu words in the registers they use. Some of the street hawkers are conscious of sharing their jargon with an outsider because they think that might lead to problems as they use those to tease and provoke some customers who are not willing to buy any product from them. The uniqueness of the registers of the street hawkers in Dhaka is that their professional language is different from others in terms of applying them in some particular situations. It is fascinating that a hawker selling a particular product shares different codes from those selling other products. Sometimes they share some similar registers as well.

Hawkers in common, for example, use 'Jot' to refer to the customer who would only bother them by asking for prices of different products but would not buy any. The jargons

they use are not derived from their native language or not even from English. They created completely different codes to communicate quickly and comfortably. The researchers became interested in investigating the occupational language of a marginal community because they realized that this type of working-class people in a busy city like Dhaka hardly get any attention in any sector of linguistic research, unlike some noble occupational groups like doctors, engineers, the army, and the police. Many other researchers have worked on the registers of various professional groups and explored plenty of significant results. Still, the indispensable professional group of street hawkers, who have created a potential language item for their smooth communication, is neglected as they do not have much economic solvency and proper educational background. Street hawkers in Dhaka share some different and meaningful jargons that are different from other occupational groups, and this should be discussed widely in sociolinguistics.

With this background, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

a) What are the striking features of Dhaka street hawkers' registers?

b) Why do they use these registers in their professional communication?

The results of the research are expected to enrich the study of the registers of underprivileged communities like street hawkers living miserably in developing countries across the world and also to place emphasis on an established language item created by a barely educated professional group.

Literature Review

Function of register

The functionalities of registers resemble the functionalities of an established language. Both have the functions of displaying the identity of the language users. According to Edward (2009), the importance of language as an identity marker at a group level is much more readily evident than accent, dialect, and language variations that reveal speakers' membership in particular speech communities, social classes, and ethnic and national groups. These kinds of variations are also a must when the groups are based on gender or age or extending the linguistic focus to include jargons, registers, and styles of occupation, club or gang membership, political affiliation, religious confession, and so on.

Regarding occupation, it can also show what the language user is doing. A transport worker's register might differ entirely from that of a doctor, for example. Apart from these, registers can differentiate a community or social group from one another. Registers can also help a language user apply a definite vocabulary set depending on the social situation. A single user can apply different registers in different situations. A register has to be purposive. There must be a purpose for using it. The purpose might be occupational or situational, or it can provide a specific meaning to another user without keeping others informed about the meaning.

Registering any language is one of the most exciting topics to be analyzed. A number of researchers have conducted studies on registers of various occupational groups. Hence, it needs to refer to some of them to make the current study more extensive.

Rahman and Mohiuddin (2014) mentioned that in sociolinguistics, a set of vocabulary that is available in a particular profession is known as register. The purpose of their study was to investigate the meaning of different jargon the transport workers use in Bangladesh and the reasons for choosing some particular words among them. It also scrutinized what the transport workers signify with the codes they use while communicating among themselves.

Holmes (2013) opined that the register is the language used in situations associated with such a group of people with common interests or jobs, and it refers to the use of a particular style of language by a specific group of people in conditions they are involved in. She also indicated that using a register depends on the context, and it is uttered by a particular occupational group in their activities. Therefore, the register is needed to be analyzed along with the situation or context. Holmes (2013) developed context or social factors that influence the application of registers. The social factors include participants, setting, topic, and function. The users of the language are called participants. Holmes (2013) divided the participants into addresser and addressee. The setting includes what time and where the conversation takes place. The topic is what is being talked about. It controls the idea of the conversation. Finally, the function describes the purpose of the conversations. It explains the function of the utterance, whether the utterance contains information or is used to show affection.

According to Wardaugh (2010), registers are the sets of language items associated with discrete occupational or social groups. Surgeons, airline pilots, bank managers, sales clerks, jazz fans, and pimps employ different registers. Jannah (2015), in her research on language registers on instant messages, aimed to analyze the form of registers and describe the use of instant messages in terms of the gender and age of the participants by using David Crystal's (1991) theory. The thesis uses a sociolinguistic approach and a descriptive qualitative method. She finds 24 forms of register on IM and the differences in the use of IM in terms of gender and age of participants, in which the female's language is politer than that of the young male. Ambarsari and Rusnaningtias (2016) explored the registers doctors use while they are in conversation with nurses in a hospital in Jawa Timur, Indonesia. They identify the features of the doctors' registers in association with their morphological features. The results reveal that the features of the registers or vocabulary they use in their professional communication are different from the vocabulary they use in other contexts. Regarding morphological features, they adopt clipping and abbreviation as the processes of word formation for developing their registers.

Haque and Mohiuddin's (2013) work found the causes, applications, and inspiration for using the high-frequency English lexical resources of the military registers in Bangladesh. They worked in a sensitive, prestigious, and nationally crucial occupational group with many activities at home and abroad. Ulfa (2010) tried to discover a register's features in English movie advertisements. This research aimed to characterize linguistic features, such as diction, variety of language, and figure of speech, and to describe how language variety and figure of speech characterize the register of English movie advertisements. Descriptive research and a purposive sampling technique were employed in the research. The data of

this research were the use of diction, the language variety, and the figures of speech in the register of written English movie advertisements by www.21cineplex.com, published in Jakarta Post from 2008 until April 2009. Ulfa (2010) found some special characteristics in the register based on the data analysis. Each characteristic of the language of movie advertisements covers a specific purpose and form.

Daristin (2015) identified the linguistic features of register in an auctioneer's talk, and she used some theories by Holmes, Radford, and Wells in her analysis. In that study, she found some features that marked the register of the auctioneers' talk. They were syntactic reduction, syntactic inversion, distinct vocabulary, and intonation patterns. Balzer-Siber (2015) examined the registers used by the announcers in television sports in broadcasting soccer in the United States. The study showed that the announcers use their own linguistic features to attract more viewers with an intention to promote production companies.

The similarity between all the papers reviewed above and this paper lies in the fact that they deal with sociolinguistic research, especially about registers. However, all those research works were primarily conducted with participants belonging to a higher class social group and are already included in many language-related discussions. Moreover, the registers they found mainly originated from English or the native language they use. The street hawkers' registers are unpredictable and not even derived from English or the native language, Bangla. The researchers have been interested in working with a marginal group's professional registers regarding their socio-educational and socio-economic conditions. This occupational group is the street hawkers in Dhaka who sell various necessary products to people and hardly get any attention from them in any sector. According to a report by *The Financial Express* (2022), around 300,000 street hawkers sell various commodities by hawking, and almost all have a low-income profile. They do not lead a polished life at all. Their educational background is not good, but they have formed an excellent social bonding. They express their identity by using a set of jargons while talking. Though they are native speakers of Bangla, they can use their jargons in a distinct form or by mixing them with Bangla. The researchers found that their professional jargons completely differ from the registers of other occupational groups. Doctors, engineers, and police use some professional language too. Still, most of them are taken from either Bangla or English, but the street hawkers have created a set of unique codes which are mostly not taken from English or Bangla or not a distorted form of them. Strangely, the registers created by the hawkers are not predictable for ordinary people to understand or have any clue about them.

Methodology

The researchers conducted this research in a natural setting by applying the qualitative research method. They used structured and semi-structured questions to collect data, interviewed the participants, and went through observation. All the data have been collected through direct observations and interviews. The data have also been collected from the situations when the hawkers were selling products to their customers in their working places and mostly when conversing with their fellow hawkers and assistants regarding selling their products. The researchers also made face-to-face verbal interactions with several hawkers selling different products and sought the information they need. At some places, three to

six inquisitive hawkers gathered and started to answer the researchers' questions, which also helped them to have a focused group discussion. Here, the researchers were able to investigate the similarities and dissimilarities of the jargons they share in their occupational sector. They also tried to compare and contrast the registers they provided based on their products. All interviews were conducted in Bangla and later translated and transcribed. The researchers used this method to describe the meaning of the registers the street hawkers in Dhaka apply in their profession, the reasons behind using them, and the effects they get from them.

Participants

To complete the research, the researchers interviewed 40 professional street hawkers. There were 15 hawkers selling shoes, 10 selling garment products, 5 selling fruits, 5 selling items like ribbons, bangles, and cosmetics, and the rest 5 selling kitchenware. Among the 40 hawkers, 30 were male and 10 were female. Interestingly, the researchers found that some female hawkers share standard registers when doing business. Most of them were 20 to 40 years old. All the hawkers did not have the chance to receive formal educational, and many of them could not get themselves admitted into any educational institutions. The comparatively young hawkers had some opportunity to study until class 5, but later, they could not continue due to the financial crisis of their families. Finally, the researchers interviewed 15 people working in different professions to investigate whether they could infer the semantic use of the registers used by the street hawkers.

Procedure for collecting data

Flick (2022) held that the observation and interview data are taken by identifying and selecting the individuals, getting permission, asking them, and gathering information. Ary et al. (2010) stated that data analysis is processing data which involves several stages: organizing, coding, interpreting, and representing. To collect data, the researchers selected Mirpur (1 to 10) and Gulistan, two essential and busy marketplaces. Firstly, being customers, the researchers observed various types of street hawkers selling different products on the street, like garment products, shoes, fruits, cosmetics, utensils, various electronic gadgets, books, etc., for almost one month and recorded the jargon they use while selling products to their customers. They generally use this set of code words with other hawkers selling the same products and with their assistants. Sometimes they create two or three interesting harmonic verses respecting the quality of their products and utter and recite them repeatedly in a very loud voice together with their fellow hawkers to get the customers' attention. The researchers wrote those jargons and verses on a piece of paper. They spent two weeks interviewing the target group and recording the interviews at Mirpur. Here, they managed to interview 3 groups for focus group discussion. It was very interesting that most of the group members came forward to make a group and give information on their own when they saw the researchers interviewing one of their fellow hawkers. Then the researchers went to Gulistan to collect data from the street hawkers selling different kinds of products. They found that most hawkers use similar jargons based on their products as the hawkers of Mirpur did. The researchers noted the jargons on a piece of paper.

Findings

This section describes the findings, discussions, and analysis of the study. The data have been analyzed based on interviews, observations, utterances, and structured and semi-structured questions. Through observation and analysis of the collected data, the researchers have tried to find answers to their research questions. They described the striking features of the street hawkers' registers in Dhaka city and why they use some particular set of jargons in their occupational communication. The researchers explained the meaning of the set vocabularies the street hawkers use and tried to understand the effectiveness of their registers in communication.

The street hawkers feel very proud of the jargon they acquired from their profession. These registers make their communication easy and comfortable in front of customers. Each hawker generally communicates with the other in their native language, Bangla. Still, in some situations, they use several codes carrying different meanings that are understood by them but not by the customers. All these hawkers are not very educated and come from lower economic conditions, such that their families may starve if they are unable to make sufficient sales.

Nevertheless, their bonds are strong, given the commonalities amongst them as explained earlier. They also use the registers to pretend to be a highly experienced business person for a particular product to do a profitable business with their wholesalers, to hide the real meaning from customers, to make fun of them, to disallow their assistants from selling a product, to get rid of some specific customers, to seek the attention of the customers, and sometimes even to cheat them.

Most of the street hawkers in Dhaka think that the jargons they use are derived from Hindi and Urdu though it is really difficult to find any Hindi or Urdu words in the registers they use. Some street hawkers are conscious of sharing their jargons with an outsider because they think that might bring problems as they use them to tease some customers unwilling to buy any product from them. The specialty of the registers of the street hawkers in Dhaka is that their professional language is different from others in terms of applying them in some particular situations. Interestingly, the hawker selling a product shares some different codes from those selling other products. Sometimes, they share some similar registers as well.

It is found from Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 that most of the registers are quite difficult and unpredictable for people in general. The researchers interviewed 15 general people from various professions except street hawking and found that most of the people failed to understand the registers used by the street hawkers.

The researchers found that the hawkers who sell shoes noticeably use a good set of jargons for their communication. They use it for easy communication. Sometimes they use them to hide information from the customer and even use them to make a good profit. For example, 2 pairs of the same-looking shoes might have different quality and buying prices. They can replace that pair of shoes with another pair of the same-looking shoes being

poorer in quality than the first pair by using their jargons with their assistant or the other fellow hawkers.

Table 1: Registers used by the street hawkers who sell shoes

What they use	What they want to mean
Chao Maal [চাও মাল]	The quality of the product is not good.
Chol Maal [ছোল মাল]	The quality of the product is bad.
Goni [গনি]	Shoes
Tike [টিকে]	Available
Usai [উসাই]	Not available
Chitta [চিট্টা]	White
Ratta [রাত্তা]	Red
Cchia [ছিয়া]	Black
Lori [লোরি]	Profit
Ratta [রাত্তা]	Something liquid
Cchudda [ছুড্ডা]	Old man
Cchuddi [ছুড্ডি]	Old woman
Tasha [টাশা]	Middle-aged male
Tashi [টাশি]	Middle-aged female
Chung Mara Nera [চাং মারা ন্যারা]	Get rid of the customer
Fugari [ফুগারি]	Cigarette

They also maintain many rare registers when they need to use any numerals. They use these registers to make their communication easier and time efficient, and to hide the real price of a product. The hawkers who sell shoes, cosmetics, and garment products, especially shoe sellers, mostly use these numeric registers for comfortable communication.

Table 2: Numeral registers of the street hawkers

What they use	What they mean	What they use	What they mean
Sung [সাং]	01	Tegla [তেগলা]	13
Sung Chitta [সাং চিট্টা]	02	Fugla [ফুগলা]	14
Ek Pai [এক পাই]	03	Budla [বুদলা]	15
Fook [ফুক]	04	Daagla [ড্যাগলা]	16
Bood [বুদ]	05	Paitla [পাইতলা]	17
Daag [ড্যাগ]	06	Mungla [মাংলা]	18
Pait [পাইত]	07	Koonla [কুনলা]	19
Tali [তালি]	08	Sudi [ছুদি]	20
Koon [কুন]	09	Lainga [লাইংগা]	100
Chola [ছলা]	10	Sung Lainga [সাং লাইংগা]	200
Egla [এগলা]	11	Ek Pai Lainga [এক পাই লাইংগা]	300
Jola [জলা]	12	Ek Pai Lainga [এক পাই লাইংগা]	300

The hawkers who sell fruits on the street use some registers regarding the size of their products.

Table 3: Registers used by the street hawkers who sell fruit

What they use	What they want to mean
Mati [মাতি]	Best Quality
Kaat [ক্যাট]	Small Size
Mazla [মাজলা]	Medium Size
Thika [ঠিকা]	The unsold remaining products
Kek Maal [কেক মাল]	Low-quality product

The researchers found that hawkers selling garment products and cosmetics use almost similar registers for their communication. They use them mostly when discussing the price of their products with other sellers. Hence, most often, their registers are about counting money.

Table 4: Registers used by the street hawkers who sell garment products and cosmetics

What they use	What they want to mean
Ek Chala [এক চালা]	10 Taka
Suti [ছুতি]	20 Taka
Ek poka [এক পোকা]	1000 taka
Lot Er MaaL [লট এর মাল]	Rejected products
Medical [মেডিকেল]	Products the customers want to change

The researchers also found some common jargons used among all the street hawkers who sell different products. All these jargons have similar meanings for their comfortable understanding.

Table 5: Some common registers used by most of the hawkers

What they use	What they want to mean
Jot Customer [জট কাস্টমার]	The customer who will not buy any product but bargain.
Maal Lara Koto [মাল লারা কত]	Asking about the buying price of a product
Usai [উছাই]	Telling a customer to leave
Lori sai [লরি উছাই]	Could not make any profit
Jot Maal [জট মাল]	Worst quality product

Discussion and Recommendations

Language has been there since the beginning of society, but it has continued its function by changing its shape and form in case of necessities and situations. Different communities and occupational groups create, adopt, and use language for internal communication. A professional group with the identity of street hawkers, living mostly on the roads and suffering daily to gain a solvent livelihood, have created a distinct set of registers purposively for their easy communication, which is mostly unpredictable for the general public. Truly speaking, we do not bother about their lifestyles, sorrows, and sufferings; we do not even care about the language they use as they live a lower-class lifestyle. Nevertheless, they have been practicing their registers smoothly for a very long time. As native speakers of Bangla, they are not deriving any words from it but creating their own jargons with a set of different vocabularies. Most of them do not realize that they have acquired these jargons from Bangla, but some of them believe that these registers are a mixed version of Urdu and Hindi. However, the researchers could not identify whether their registers originated from Hindi or Urdu as their registers do not sound like either of these languages.

Wardaugh (2010) stated that a "register is a set of language items associated with a discrete occupational and social group" (p. 48). Here all the registers of street hawkers are indecipherable to other professional groups, and they have been able to establish their registers as independent and exclusive as they can use them as native speakers of their specific language items.

Rahman and Mohiuddin (2014) stated, "Having a sound socio-educational and socio-cultural background, the Army personnel of Bangladesh create, generate and use registers and jargons, some of which are unknown and unpredictable to us" (p. 62). On the other hand, a community with no socio-educational and socio-cultural background is really advanced in maintaining particular and well-established language items for their needs. They are underprivileged in terms of education, social status, and culture and lag behind other professional groups, but they use their registers effectively to create smooth communication among them. Most of the time, they use the registers to attract customers, make a profit, express the quality of a product, fix the price, cheat, and tease customers, and sometimes pretend to be experienced business people to the retailers. The study's findings are discussed judiciously so that language users, planners, and policymakers can be aware of the language competence and repertoire of a marginal community. One of the important reasons for choosing the street hawkers was to signify the language variation of a lower class group who would get some attention in sociolinguistics research.

Table 6: Relationship among field, tenor, and mode

Registers	**Field**	**Tenor Speaker-Hearer**	**Mode**
Damer maal kome loy It means that the normal price of the product is high, but they are selling at a cheaper rate.	Uttered to draw the attention of the customers	Hawkers to the customers	Spoken registers are uttered to serve the purposes.
Vabi nile vai khushi It means that if the wife buys the product at a cheaper rate, the husband will be happy.	Uttered to gain the attention of the female customers	Hawkers to the customers	
Jot niye kot khaiyen na It means that customers should not buy any bad products from other hawkers.	Uttered to make the customers aware of the bad quality of other hawkers' products	Hawkers to the customers	

Chung mara nera It means that the salesperson/shopkeeper should not pay attention to a customer.	Uttered to make their partners or assistants drive away the customers	Hawkers to the fellow hawkers	Spoken registers are uttered to serve the purpose.
Taguri takte jabo It means that someone wants to take leave for some time.	Uttered to inform their partner about his leaving and having a meal	Hawkers to the fellow hawker	
Lori Usai It means that the salesperson/shopkeeper should sell a product without any profit.	Uttered to inform another hawker about not making a profit	Hawkers to the fellow hawkers	

Conclusion

The method of coining registers and the recurrence of using them by the street hawkers have become a fundamental and natural part of their verbal repertoire. The street hawkers have a poor socio-educational, socio-economic, and socio-cultural perspective, but they have created a strong bond and set of language items according to their needs and demands. Societal needs and demands of a community affect and dominate the language of that particular community. The use of language and every element of language bear an identity for every social and occupational group. The street hawkers in Dhaka have to lead terrible lives. They must work hard to earn their livelihood. They do not have good living facilities and must work in rough and tough conditions on the street. But their major attraction is their registers. With their registers, they maintain a good sociolinguistic feature that nobody has revealed yet. Their registers are distinct and established for smooth communication in their professional field. They use them very comfortably and boldly in front of the general public and share some jargons with their colleagues to fulfill their purposes.

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The Role of Temporal and Spectral Cues in Non-native Speech Production: Bangla Speakers' L2 English Tense and Lax Vowels

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of durational and spectral cues in second language tense and lax vowel contrasts produced by non-native speakers. To test previous claims that speakers primarily rely on durational cues over spectral cues to distinguish L2 tense and lax vowel pairs, citation style speech data were collected from 16 native speakers of Bangla; participants were all undergraduate students. The data were collected via a shadowing task where participants listened to a carefully constructed list of English words in random order and repeated each word immediately after they heard them. The utterances were recorded via a Zoom H1n voice recorder. Collected speech data were annotated and processed using the phonetic analysis software Praat and the semi-automatic annotation toolkit DARLA; statistical analyses were performed using R statistical computing software. Results indicate that Bangla speakers do not emphasize on durational cues to differentiate English tense-lax vowel pairs, contrary to the general patterns reported from other languages; rather, they prefer the spectral cues over the durational cues.

Keywords: non-native vowel production, non-native vowel perception, temporal cue, spectral cue, tense-lax distinctions

Introduction

The production of non-native tense and lax vowels distinctions has been studied from different perspectives, including the temporal and spectral properties of the vowel categories; more specifically, there has been a lot of interest in studying non-native English tense and lax vowels produced by native speakers of other languages (Cebrian, 2007; Leung et al., 2016, Ćavar et al., 2022). Native English speakers can effortlessly differentiate, both in perception and production, between tense and lax vowel sounds in minimal pairs like /bin/ "bean" and /bɪn/ "bin" in terms of their temporal and spectral cues. However, non-native or second language (L2) speakers often struggle to produce these distinctions consistently

and also reported that L2 speakers rely more on durational cues than spectral cues to distinguish between tense and lax vowel sounds (Cebrian, 2007; Chen, 2006; Gao et al., 2020; Rojczyk, 2010).

Research indicates that speakers do not place equal emphasis on the temporal and spectral characteristics of vowel sounds when producing non-native tense and lax distinctions. Studies reported that temporal cues often received more attention from non-native speakers when they try to produce English tense and lax vowel distinctions (Rojczyk, 2010; Mora & Fullana, 2007). In other words, L2 English speakers distinguish English tense and lax vowel pairs primarily via vowel duration and not so via the differences based on their formant frequencies. It has even been claimed that L2 English speakers "over-rely" on duration, and not spectral cues, to distinguish tense vowels from their laxed counterparts (Cebrian, 2006).

That L2 speakers are generally more likely to use durational cues over spectral cues, as claimed in previous studies, can be problematic. Whether speakers put more relative importance on durational or spectral cues for differentiating vowels of similar quality in a second language can depend on the vowel inventory in their first language (L1). For example, if the L1 has a tense-lax contrast that is phonetically implemented via spectral cues, speakers should be able to perceive and produce spectral differences for similar vowel contracts in their L2 as well. If, however, their L1 does not have a tense-lax contrast, speakers are open to using either durational or spectral or both cues; and the durational cue may be the easier choice since it is less complex than spectral cues (because duration is one-dimensional while F1 x F2 plane is two-dimensional).

To widen our understanding of the cues used in second language vowel perception and production, this study investigates whether native Bangla speakers are able to perceive and produce the durational and spectral cues in English tense and lax vowel pairs. While there have been previous attempts at studying the cues important in Bangla consonant production and perception (e.g., Islam, 2019; 2022), there is a general lack of studies attempting vowel production and perception. Previous studies on L2 English speech by Bangla speakers have claimed that Bangla speakers struggle to differentiate English tense-lax vowel contrasts (Rahman, 2018). This phenomenon has actually been reported for Indian English, in general (Payne et al., 2019).

Bangla provides an interesting opportunity to test the "universality" hypothesis of duration as a primary cue over spectral cues for the perception and production of L2 tense-lax vowel contrasts for two reasons. First, Bangla mid vowels have been phonologically described to have tense and lax contrasts though it lacks any tense-lax contrasts among high vowels (Shamim, 2011). Second, Bangla tense and lax vowel contrasts (available for mid vowels) have been reported to have spectral differences but no durational differences. This is a completely different phonetic implementation of the similar vowel categories in the English vowel system.

Besides, Bangla could be an interesting case to study regarding the L2 English tense/lax vowel productions since there is a lack of formal studies on Bangla speakers' ability to distinguish

tense/lax contrast vowel sounds in L2 English from temporal and spectral perspectives. Therefore, we conducted a study to address this research gap where we hypothesized that native Bangla speakers would put more emphasis on spectral cues (F1 and F2 values) than on durational cues since L1 Bangla tense-lax contrasts are not implemented by durational cues, even though English speakers use both durational and spectral cues predominantly

Background

The temporal and spectral characteristics of vowels have been investigated by many studies, including Cebrian (2007), Chen (2006), Gao et al. (2020), Rojczyk (2010), Leung et al. (2016), Fox and Maeda (1999), and Ćavar et al. (2022). Leung et al.(2016) specifically examined how clear-speech and tensity effects interact by comparing clear and plain productions of three English tense-lax vowel pairs (/i-ɪ/, /ɑ-ʌ/, /u-ʊ/). Clearly produced vowels exhibit longer duration and more extreme spectral properties than plain, conversational vowels. These features also characterize tense relative to lax vowels. This study analyzed both the spectral and temporal features of the vowels and found that from plain to clear vowel lengthening was greater for tense vowels compared to lax vowels. Furthermore, clear-speech modifications in spectral change were comparatively larger for lax vowels than tense vowels. The results also indicated that peripheral tense vowels showed more consistency for clear-speech modifications in the temporal domain than in the spectral domain.

L2 speakers of English have been found to have a stronger ability to distinguish tense/lax vowel pairs based on temporal cues rather than spectral cues. Chen (2006) conducted a study on Mandarin native speakers who use English as an L2 to investigate the temporal and spectral features of three English tense-lax vowel pairs (/i/-/ɪ/, /e/-/ɛ/, /u/-/ʊ/). The study compared the production of speech between 40 American English speakers and 40 Mandarin L2 English speakers, analyzing factors such as Euclidean distance based on F1 and F2 frequencies, durational differences, and perceptual judgment. The results indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups in their ability to distinguish English tense-lax vowel contrasts, with Mandarin speakers showing a stronger reliance on temporal features than spectral features.

Other studies, including Rojczyk (2010), Cebrian (2007), and Fox and Maeda (1999), have reported similar findings. Rojczyk (2010) conducted a study on Polish speakers learning English as an L2 and found that learners tended to rely more on durational cues than on spectral cues when distinguishing between English vowels /æ/, /e/, and /ʌ/. The study showed that learners reweight the cue hierarchy to rely on increased durations differentiating /æ/ and /ʌ/, and listeners demonstrated a strong bias to identify stimuli with longer durational values as /æ/ and with shorter values as /ʌ/. Similarly, Cebrian (2007) found that native Catalan speakers learning English as an L2 relied on the duration of English vowels in their perception of speech, while mostly unable to produce a spectral contrast in their L2 production.

Fox and Maeda (1999) also found evidence of the pattern of relying more on temporal rather than spectral cues for vowel contrast in a study on L2 Japanese speakers. The study

aimed to investigate whether Japanese speakers could differentiate between the two high front vowels (/i/ and /ɪ/) of American English in terms of both production and perception. The results showed that the participants consistently distinguished between the two sounds based on vowel duration, but showed variation in vowel quality where the distribution of the formant values overlapped.

To investigate the pattern of L2 production beyond the English language, Gao et al. (2020) conducted a study on Mandarin learners of German, a language that also has tense-lax pairs. They examined durational and spectral differences of seven German tense-lax vowel pairs in comparison to native German speakers. The results showed that Mandarin learners had a different production pattern for German tense-lax vowel distinction compared to German speakers. The Mandarin learners relied more heavily on temporal features than on spectral features, in contrast to German speakers.

More recently, Ćavar et al. (2022) investigated the reliance on quality and duration cues in the perception of English tense-lax distinction by L2 Polish and Croatian learners. They found that Croatian participants relied mainly on duration as a cue in categorization, whereas Polish learners relied predominantly on quality, even in back vowels where there is no quality contrast in Polish that would be parallel to the tenseness contrast in English. This provides an indication that L2 learners' preference between temporal and spectral cues is not a universal phenomenon; rather, the preference can vary cross-linguistically.

With regards to Bangla speakers, they have been reported to face difficulty in distinguishing the tense/lax contrast in English vowel sounds in their L2 speech production, except for high vowels (Rahman, 2018). This is because the Bangla vowel system does not have tense/lax sounds, and L1 Bangla speakers are not accustomed to distinguishing between vowel length and quality to create meaning contrast. Similar results have been reported for other Indic languages too; for example, Payne et al. (2019) reported that Telugu speakers also face difficulty in producing the tense/lax vowel contrast in their L2 English production due to the absence of such contrast in their L1 vowel system.

Bangla vowel system

Bangla can be an interesting case to study with respect to the L2 English tense/lax vowel productions since Bangla has been described by some researchers (Shamim, 2011) to have some tense/lax contrasts for mid-vowels, at least in terms of phonology, while the high vowels lack any phonological contrasts in tenseness or laxness. Bangla has a seven-vowel system (Islam & Ahmed, 2020; Alam, Habib & Khan, 2008; Barman, 2009; Shamim, 2011) with nasal counterparts for some or all of the oral vowels (cf. Islam, 2018, for this debate).

Figure 1 presents a vowel chart presented in Barman (2009). As the figure indicates, /i/ and /u/ are represented as high vowels while /ɑ/ is shown as a low vowel. The vowels /o/ and /ɔ/ are mid-back vowels while /e/ is a mid front vowel. The vowel /æ/ is an interesting case; it is represented as a low vowel (the position nearly the same as in the core IPA chart). One noticeable feature of this vowel diagram is the height difference between vowels /ɔ/

and /æ/; these two vowels are quite distant from each other in terms of their height. This assumption was, however, proved otherwise, specifically from the acoustic point of view, in some later studies.

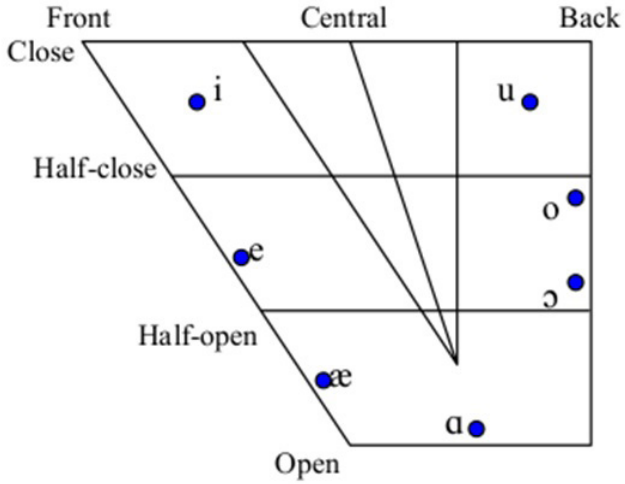

Figure 1: Bangla vowel system (Barman, 2009, p. 27)

Figures 2 and 3 present Bangla vowel charts based on acoustic measurements, as performed in Alam, Habib, and Khan (2008), and Islam and Ahmed (2018), respectively. Figure 2 presents the raw formant values while Figure 3 is based on normalized formant values.

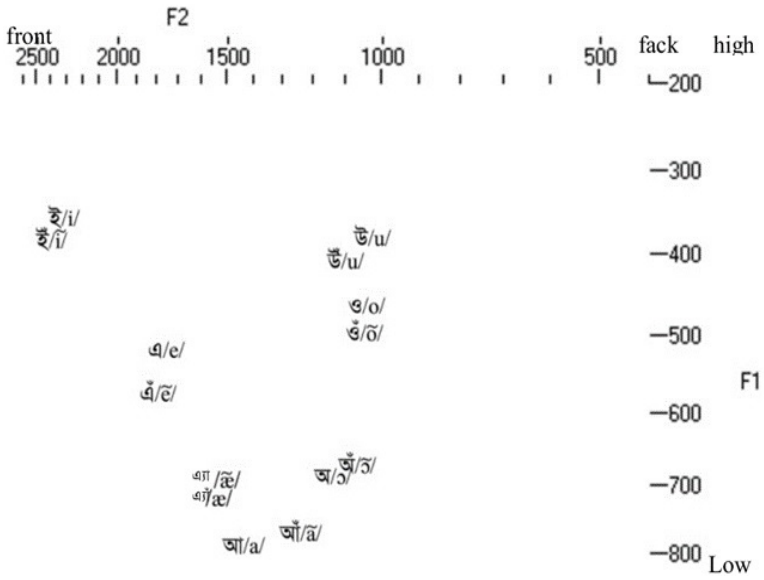

Figure 2: Bangla vowel formants (Alam, Habib, & Khan, 2008, p. 9)

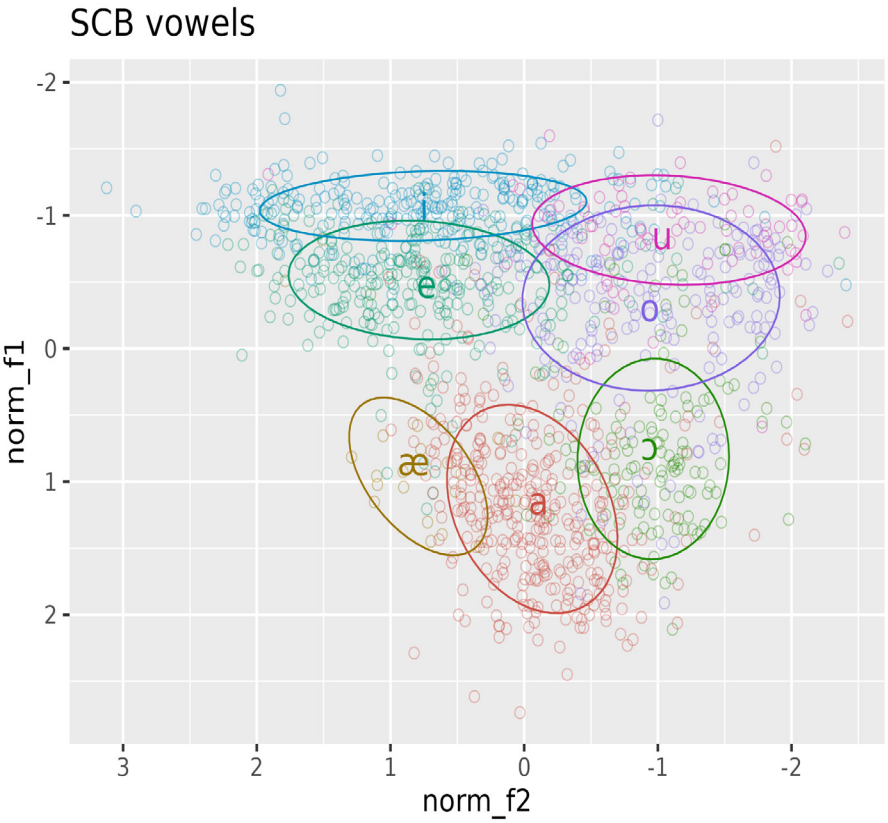

Figure 3: SCB vowels (normalized formants, Islam & Ahmed, 2018, p. 215)

As the figures indicate, the two vowels in question (/ɔ/ and /æ/) have very similar height in the vowel space. This information can have interesting implications when we turn to the phonological aspects of the vowels.

In terms of phonological representations, the features that have been used to describe Bangla vowels include the binary features [±high], [±low], [±back], [±ATR], and [±round]. While the representations of the high vowels and the low vowel /a/ have been unproblematic, the representation of the mid vowels, especially the front ones, is a debated issue among researchers. For example, the /æ/ vowel has traditionally been described as a "low" vowel (Morshed, 1972; Alam et al., 2008; Thompson, 2012) in terms of its phonetic characteristics; thus, it has been represented with a [+low] feature. However, Shamim (2011) preferred the symbol /ɛ/ instead of /æ/ to refer to the low front vowel and claimed that, phonologically speaking, /ɛ/ acts as the lax counterpart of /e/ in Bangla. This analysis of /æ/ as /ɛ/ derives from the phonological process called metaphony in Bangla where /ɛ/ and /e/ pattern together while /ɔ/ and /o/ pattern together. Thus, according to Shamim (2011), phonological features that produce contrastive distinctions among the four mid vowels in Bangla are [±ATR] (representing a tense/lax distinction), and [±round] where /e/

and /o/ are [+ATR] (tense) and /ɔ/ and /ɛ/ are their [-ATR] (lax) counterparts. Figure 4 provides the full featural representations for Bangla vowels.

	i	e	ɛ	u	o	ɔ	a
high	+	−	−	+	−	−	−
low	−	−	−	−	−	−	+
ATR	+	+	−	+	+	−	−
round	−	−	−	+	+	+	−
back	−	−	−	+	+	+	+

Figure 4: Phonological features of Bangla vowels (Shamim, 2011, p. 8)

Now, going back to the issue of temporal vs. spectral cues in vowels, we hypothesize that Bangla speakers will be more sensitive to and successful in following the spectral cues than the temporal cues in their L2 English tense/lax vowel productions. Our hypothesis is based on two assumptions. First, vowel duration in Bangla is not contrastive; in other words, vowel duration differences do not produce any phonological contrasts. (There can be systematic durational differences in the phonetics though, conditioned by discourse functions (cf. Ghosh, 2018)). And, second, the tense/lax contrasts in Bangla are phonetically implemented primarily in the form of spectral differences. Tense vowels have been reported to have similar duration values compared to their lax counterparts; and in some cases, the lax vowel has been reported to be longer than its tense counterpart (cf. Alam et al., 2008). Table 1 presents the average duration of Bangla tense and lax vowels in Alam et al. (2008, p. 7).

Table 1: Duration of tense and lax vowels in Bangla (based on Alam et al. 2008, p. 7)

Vowel	Tenseness	Avg. duration (in ms)
/e/	tense	75.45
/ɛ/	lax	90.89
/o/	tense	75.74
/ɔ/	lax	74.65

The above discussion indicates that Bangla tense and lax vowels are implemented in a completely different way than it is done in English and many other languages. Previous studies have predominantly reported that tense vowels are generally longer in duration and more peripheral in the vowel space (Roesler & Song, 2018; Lee, 2008; Zsiga, 2013; Botma

et al., 2012; Harrington et al., 2011), which is evidenced by their relative position in the vowel space. In contrast to the generally reported patterns, Bangla tense and lax vowel counterparts do not differ in terms of duration. Now, when it comes to the question of L2 English tense and lax vowel production (and perception), we hypothesize the following:

- Bangla speakers will be able to successfully produce the distinctions between English tense and lax vowel pairs in terms of their spectral properties (i.e., the formant values), unlike what has been reported from speakers of other languages.
- Bangla speakers will not be able to produce consistent durational differences between English tense and lax vowel pairs.

We will pursue these two hypotheses in the remainder of this paper.

Methods

The study was conducted in two distinct phases with comparable methodology. In the first phase, data were collected for only the high vowels in the English vowel inventory whereas the second phase involved the English mid vowels. The two phases included distinct sets of participants of similar demographics; more details on the participant demographics and experimental setup are provided below.

Participants

Participants in this study were recruited based on the following criteria:

A. *Demographic information*: The sample consisted of 16 participants, ranging in age from 18 to 25 years old (M=19.53, SD=1.50), with 8 female speakers and 8 male speakers. All participants were students enrolled in different undergraduate programs, including English, Business Studies, and Engineering. All participants were native speakers of Bangla with English as their second language, and all of them learned English primarily in the academic (in schools, for example) settings with no significant exposure to native speakers of English.

B. *Eligibility criteria*: Participants were eligible to participate if they were fluent in English, had access to the internet, and had not previously participated in a study on the same topic.

C. *Recruitment procedures*: Participants were recruited through various means, including online postings on social media platforms, flyers posted in the university notice boards, and word of mouth. Participants did not receive any direct compensations for their participation in the project.

D. *Informed consent*: Before participating in the study, participants were given a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and risks and benefits. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Participants were required to give their informed consent before beginning the study.

As mentioned above, half of these participants took part in the first phase of data collection which focused on the high tense/lax vowels only while the other half provided data for the

second phase where data were collected on the mid tense/lax vowels.

Materials

The entire word selection process was meticulously designed. This study avoided the words carrying nasal and rhotic sounds as they might affect phonetic environment, though few appeared due to consonant joining.

During the first phase of the study, we constructed a list of 30 isolated monosyllabic English words containing the high front and high back vowels (/i/, /ɪ/, /u/, and /ʊ/). 20 of them contained high front vowels (10 tense and 10 lax vowels) while the remaining 10 contained high back vowels (5 tense and 5 lax). The number of words containing lax vowels was smaller because of the dearth of tense/lax contrasts in monosyllabic words for high back vowels. The wordlist for the second phase included 20 monosyllabic English words containing the front and back mid vowels (/e/, /ɛ/, /o/, and /ɔ/). Out of the 20 words, 10 contained mid front vowels (5 tense and 5 lax) while the remaining 10 contained mid back vowels (5 tense and 5 lax). Tables 2 and 3 provide the list of words constructed for both phases of data collection. It can be noted that many mid vowels are diphthongized in quality; we chose them primarily based on their quality in the initial steady part of the vowel (often the first 30-40% of the vowel) and not based on the off-glides.

Table 2: List of words for phase-1 data collection

Front Vowel				**Back Vowel**	
tense		**lax**		**tense**	**lax**
/i/		**/ɪ/**		**/u/**	**/ʊ/**
bean	keel	bin	kill	boot	book
feat	leak	fit	lick	food	foot
deal	peak	dill	pick	kook	cook
heat	seat	hit	sit	pool	pull
green	teen	grin	tin	suit	soot

Table 3: List of words for phase-2 data collection

Front Vowel		**Back Vowel**	
tense	**lax**	**tense**	**lax**
/e/	**/ɛ/**	**/o/**	**/ɔ/**
bait	bed	boat	boy
cape	dev	goat	coy
lake	fed	toad	joy
pave	get	vote	toy
sage	peg	dope	fall

Stimuli

The stimuli used in this study consisted of isolated words spoken by a female native speaker of American English. The speaker was chosen based on her fluency in American English, and the fact that she was a native speaker of the language and had formal training as a linguist. The audio was recorded using a Zoom H4n voice recorder; the recording took place in a quiet room with minimal background noise. The speaker was given a systematically constructed list of real English words to read out loud. The list was designed to cover the contrasts between tense and lax vowels in the high front and high back region of the vowel space. Once the recording was completed, the audio files were transferred to a computer and were then reviewed for sound quality; any extraneous noise or errors were removed. Sound clips for individual words were extracted from the main audio file and were used as stimuli to be played to the participants in the study.

Overall, the recording process was designed to ensure that the stimuli used in the study were of high quality and accurately represented the phonetic characteristics of American English. The equipment used and recording conditions were carefully chosen to minimize noise and ensure clarity of sound. The resulting audio files were stored securely and organized in a way that facilitated ease of use during the experiment.

For the second phase (where we collected data on the mid vowels), the stimuli were collected from online Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OLD, 2023) as sound clips. For each word, the entry for the word was searched in the dictionary and then the American English pronunciation of the word was downloaded as an audio media file.

Experimental set up and procedure

For data collection, this study used "elicited imitation (EI)" method which McDonough (2017) defines as "a testing technique in which a speaker is asked to repeat a series of sentences verbatim" (p. 562). Tomita, Suzuki and Jessop (2009) stated that EI claims the subjects to hear a stimulus and imitate it in their default linguistic competency following reconstructive nature. As a method, EI has been widely used to study oral proficiency in second language. For example, Kwon (2021) used EI to study contrasting phonetic properties of voiceless stop sounds in South Korean English. In this study, participants were asked to shadow 50 words (each repeated three times) in random order. That is, a set of audio stimuli was played to the participants whose imitated productions were then audio-recorded.

As mentioned above, the data in this study were collected in two separate phases that were identical in design. In the first phase, we collected data for four high vowels (IY, IH, UW, and UH); participants were exposed to an imitation task where they shadowed 30 stimuli presented to them (with 3 non-consecutive repetitions of each). Sound clips of the stimuli words were presented to the participants using Praat's (Boersma & Weenink, 2023) ExperimentMFC; the order of the words was completely randomized. Participants were allowed to listen to each stimulus two times at most. Participants listened to the stimuli via an A4TECH Bloody G525 Virtual 7.1 Surround Sound Gaming Headphone, and then immediately repeated the words loudly. The second phase of data collection followed

the same procedure to collect data on mid vowels from a different set of demographically similar participants.

The recording sessions were done in a sound-attenuated media lab at Green University, Bangladesh; a ZoomH1N Professional Voice Recorder (Version 1.19) was used to record the imitated productions. All the recorded files were stored in WAV format. Participants spent about 5-7 minutes in the first phase and about 8-10 minutes in the second phase to complete the task.

The recorded files were transcribed at word-level in Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2023), an open-source software. Transcribed files were then processed and forced-aligned to phoneme-level annotations using DARLA (Reddy & Stanford, 2015). All the annotated phonemes were manually checked and cleaned. A custom-developed Praat script was used to extract the first two formants of the target vowels; results were extracted in a CSV file. Statistical analysis including visual inspections of the data was performed in the R Programming language (R Core Team, 2023).

In general, the formants (F1 and F2) were measured at the midpoint of the vowels. For the diphthong(-ized) vowels (/e/, /o/, and /ɔɪ/), the measurements were taken at 30% into the vowel after the vowel onset so that the measurements reflect the steady portions (and not the more dynamic gliding portion) of the vowels.

Results

This section presents the results of the study. We present the results organized as two separate phases: first for high vowels and then for the mid vowels.

High vowels

L1 vowels

Before diving into the results of the L2 productions, we need to confirm whether the tense/lax distinctions were consistently present in the L1 stimuli. Figure 5 presents the distributions of the four high vowels (front and back) on the F1 and F2 planes. The x-axis represents F2 which corresponds to the frontness of a vowel while the y-axis represents F1 which corresponds to the height of a vowel. Both axes are reversed since F1 and F2 are inversely correlated with vowel height and vowel frontness, respectively. The labels indicate the centers of the vowel distributions (in the form of mean F1 and F2); the ellipses show the confidence ellipses at a 95% confidence level (based on 2 standard deviations) for each vowel category. The degree of overlap between two ellipses indicates how overlapped the two categories are; a complete overlap would indicate no difference between the two vowels while no overlap would indicate that the two categories are completely different.

The symbols used for vowels in Figure 5 and the remaining plots follow the ARPAbet convention (Klautau, 2001), primarily because the DARLA forced aligner returned the vowel transcriptions in this convention. ARPAbet is the alphabetical presentation of phonetic transcription. It was developed by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). The list of ARPAbet corresponded to IPA used in this study is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: List of ARPAbet with IPA

ARPAbet	IPA	ARPAbet	IPA
IY	/i/	EY	/e/
IH	/ɪ/	EH	/ɛ/
UW	/u/	OW	/o/
UH	/ʊ/	OY	/ɔɪ/

As Figure 5 shows, all four vowel categories have non-overlapping distributions. This confirms that the distinction between the tense vowels and their lax counterparts is clearly available in the L1 audio stimuli. In terms of the durational characteristics, the tense vowels were longer than the lax ones, in general; Figure 6 confirms this trend. As Figure 6 shows, we checked for the durational differences between tense and lax vowels separately for the contexts where the vowel preceded a voiced vs. a voiceless consonant since vowels before a voiced consonant are typically longer than vowels before a voiceless consonant (Durvasula & Luo, 2012; Jacewicz et al., 2007). The figure clearly indicates that the tense vowels were longer than the lax vowels in the L1 stimuli presented.

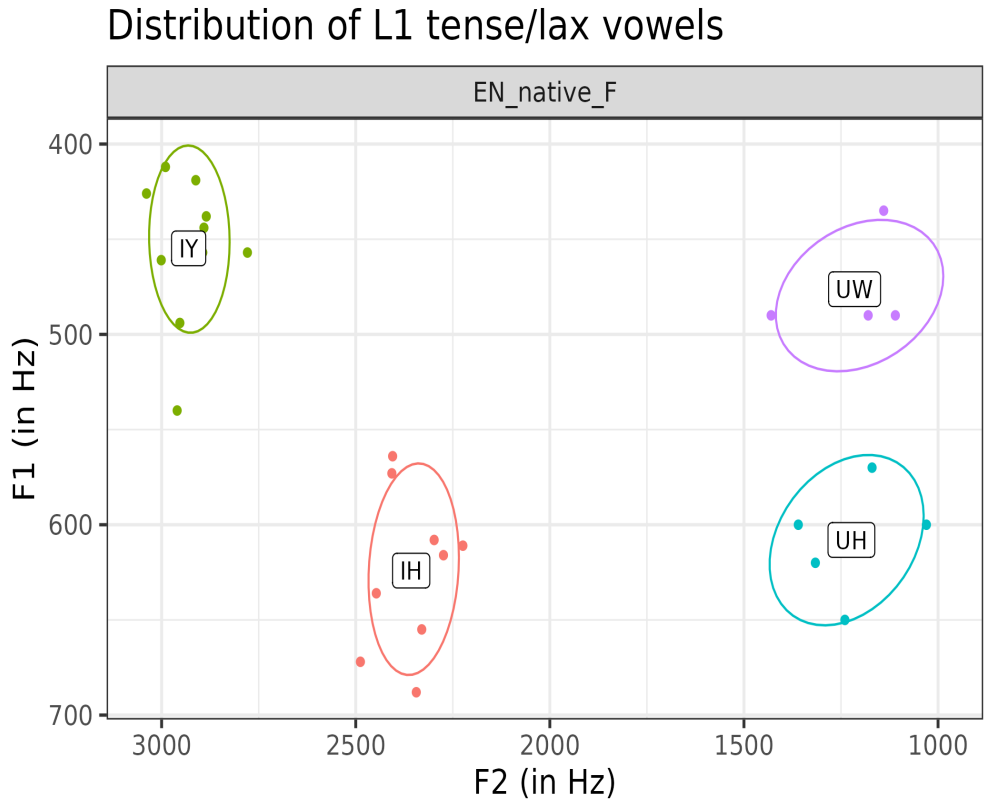

Figure 5: Distribution of vowels in L1 speech on the F1 x F2 plane (high vowels)

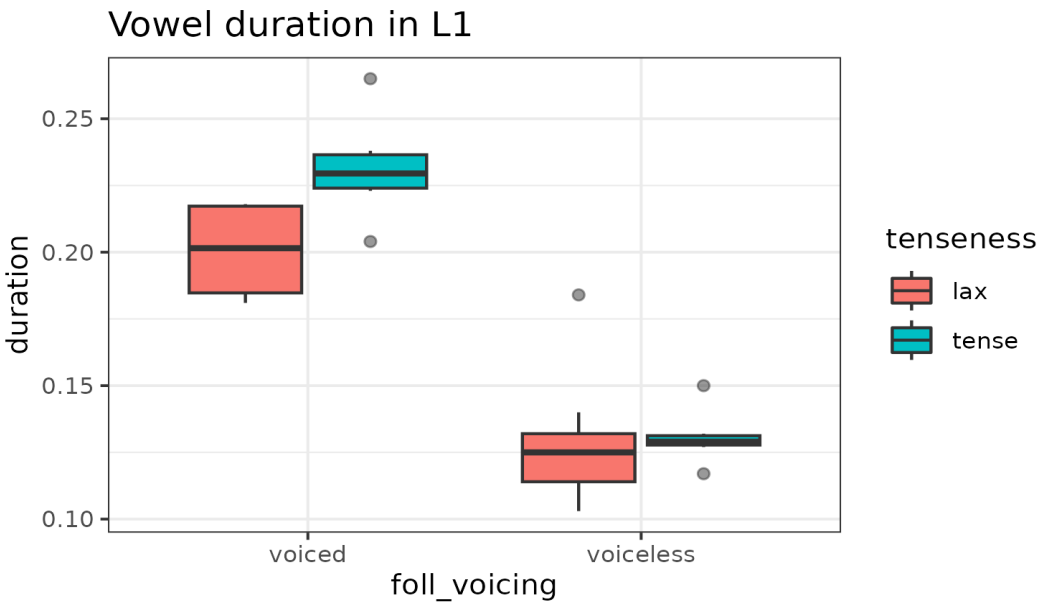

Figure 6: Duration of vowels in L1 English stimuli (Higher vowels)

L2 vowels: Spectral features

Figure 7 shows the F1 and F2 space for the L2 productions of the high vowels. Again, the x-axis shows the F2 values (in Hz) and the y-axis represents F1 values (in Hz); the ellipses represent 95% confidence ellipses for each vowel. Each speaker's data have been plotted in separate panels. As the figure indicates, most speakers tend to distinguish between the two front vowels more successfully than the two back vowels. We did not normalize the formant values since we are comparing vowel categories only within speakers (i.e., each speaker acts as their own baseline).

To focus on the overlaps between the pairs of confidence ellipses, Figure 8 shows only the ellipses without the individual tokens for the vowels. As the figure indicates, the two front vowels (IY and IH) had a considerably smaller degree of overlap, except Speaker "22M," compared to the two back vowels (UW and UH). The front lax vowel IH was less front (with lower F2) and lower (with higher F1) than its tense IY counterpart. The two back vowels, on the other hand, were less distinguishable for most speakers; only Speaker "03F" appeared to have produced the distinction between UW and UH. For other speakers, the two categories had considerable overlap or were often completely merged.

Thus, the results for the high vowels show that speakers were noticeably successful in producing the tense/lax contrasts with the front vowels (IY vs. IH) while the same speakers were not much successful in producing the distinctions for the two back vowel categories (UW vs. UH).

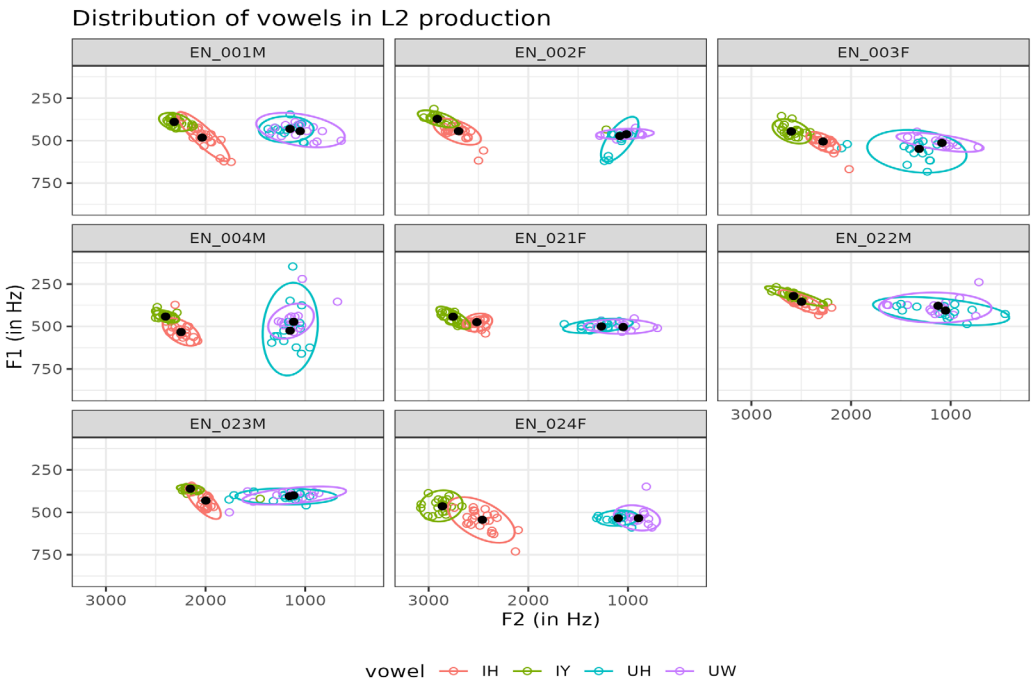

Figure 7: Formant distribution in tense vs. lax vowel in L2 speech (high vowels)

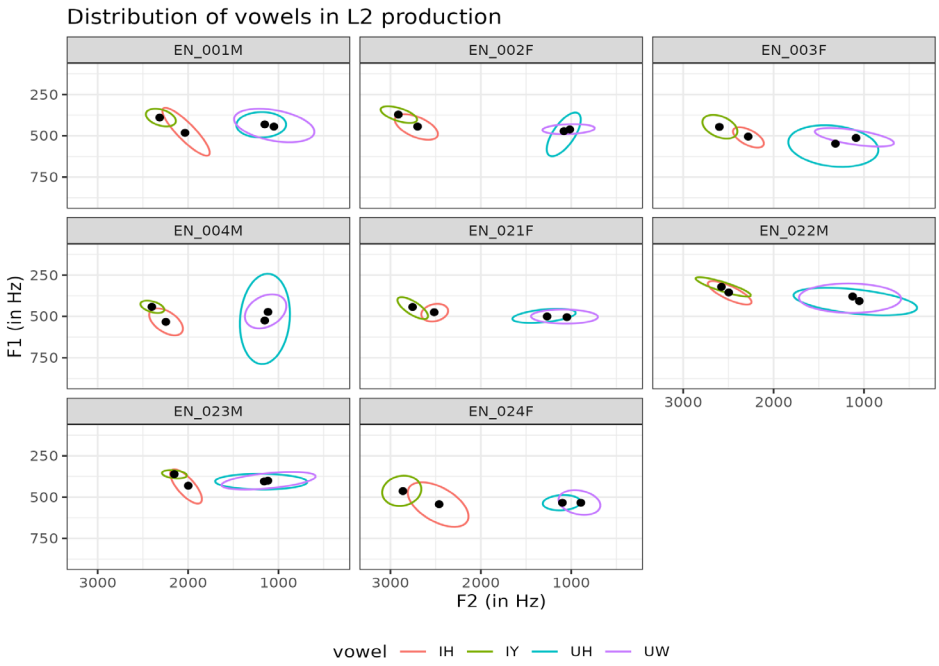

Figure 8: Formant distribution in tense vs. lax vowel in L2 speech (only ellipses)

Pillai-Bartlett Traces comparison

The Pillai-Barlett Trace has been a popular and effective method among phoneticians for determining the degree of overlap between distributions of two neighboring vowel categories (Nycz & Hall-Lew, 2013). The Pillai-Barlett Trace, informally known as the Pillai score, refers to a statistic that is produced by a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) model which is a particular case of regular ANOVA "that models variation with respect to more than one dependent variable simultaneously" (Nycz & Hall-Lew, 2014, pg. 5). Vowels are typically described by two dependent variables (F1 and F2), and that is why a MANOVA model can fit very well for the purpose of comparing two vowels in a bi-dimensional space. In addition, MANOVA output provides a p-value that indicates whether the Pillai score produced is statistically significant or not.

Pillai score is a value bounded between 0 and 1; a higher score indicates non-overlapping distributions between the two categories being compared. That is, a Pillai score of 1 indicates that the two vowels are completely distinct, while a score of 0 indicates that the two categories are completely merged. Pillai statistic for vowel comparison was introduced by Hay et al. (2006) and it has been widely used in linguistics to compare two mergers and splits. For example, Hay et al. (2006) used this method to compare distributions of [ɪə] and [ɛə] vowels in New Zealand English. Pre-lateral (before /l/) [ɔ] and [ʊ] vowels in New Zealand English were analyzed using this method by Kennedy (2006). Pillai trace was also used by Hall-Lew (2009) and Wong and Hall-Lew (2014) to study the differences between [ɑ] and [ɔ] vowels in San Francisco and New York City. In addition, Islam and Ahmed (2020) used this method to compare the mergers of the mid and low front vowels in the Mymensingh dialect of Bangla.

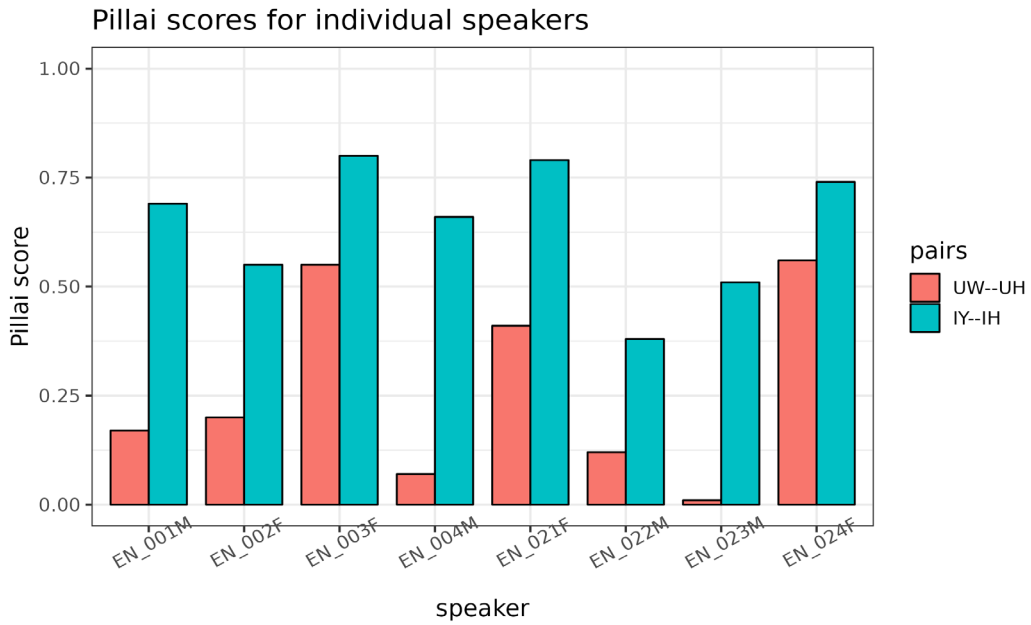

Figure 9: Pillai scores for tense vs. lax vowels distributions by individual speakers (high vowels)

As Figure 9 shows, the Pillai score for the tense/lax comparisons for the front vowels was considerably higher than for the back vowels for each speaker. MANOVA models returned statistically significant p-values for the front vowel comparisons for all speakers ($p < .001$ in each case). For the back vowel comparison, Pillai scores for only speakers "EN_003F" and "EN_024F" were statistically significant ($p < .001$); others were not statistically significant. These results provide a clear indication that speakers were consistently better at producing the tense/lax contrast for front vowels than the back vowels. We ran a Wilcoxon signed rank exact test to check if the difference of performance between the front vs. the back vowels was statistically significant; the results of the test confirmed that the difference is indeed statistically significant ($V < 0.001$, $p = .008$) with a large Wilcoxon effect size of 0.89.

L2 vowels: Duration

In terms of temporal characteristics, Figure 10 presents the temporal differences between the tense and lax vowels, separately for the voiced and voiceless contexts.

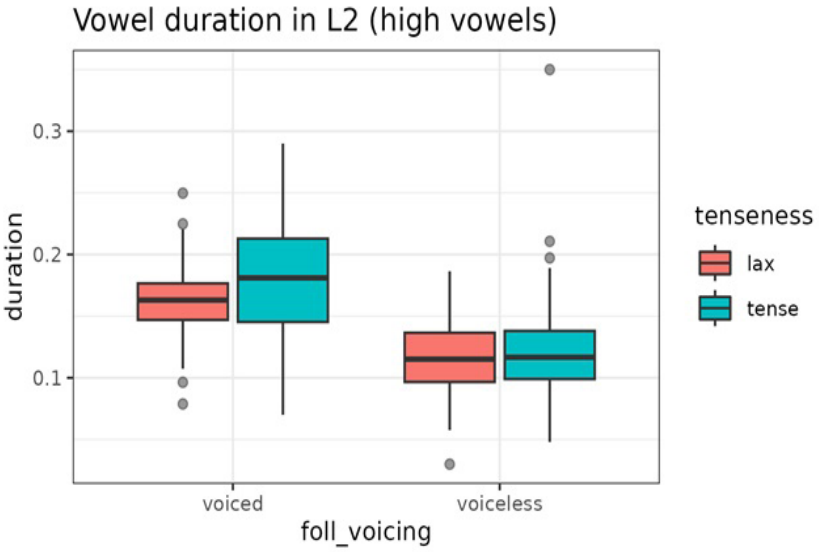

Figure 10: Duration of vowels in L2 tense vs. lax vowels (high vowels)

As the figure indicates, there are no obvious durational differences between the tense and lax vowels in the voiceless context. However, in the voiced context, the trend is not obvious. To investigate whether the tense vowels were significantly different from the lax vowels in terms of their length, we performed two separate two samples t-tests (two-tailed): one for the voiceless and another for the voiced context. Results revealed that the difference in the voiceless context was not statistically significant ($t = -1.49$, $df = 374$, $p = .136$). Contrarily, the difference between tense and lax vowels in the voiced context was found statistically significant ($t = -2.73$, $df = 164$, p-value = 0.007); it can be noted, however, that the effect

size of this difference, obtained via the R package rstatix (Kassambara, 2022), was found to be "small" (Cohen's D = 0.4).

Mid vowels

L1 English vowels (stimuli)

Next we come to the tense/lax contrasts among the mid vowels (the data collected in the second phase). Similar to what was done for the high vowels, we first aimed to confirm whether the tense/lax distinctions were consistently present in the L1 stimuli. Figure 11 presents the distributions of the four mid vowels (front and back) on the F1 and F2 planes. The x-axis represents F2 which corresponds to the frontness of a vowel while the y-axis represents F1 which corresponds to the height of a vowel. As before, the labels indicate the centers of the vowel distributions (in the form of mean F1 and F2); the ellipses show the confidence ellipses at a 95% confidence level. As Figure 11 shows, all four vowel categories have non-overlapping distributions. The two front vowels are considerably far apart from each other, indicating their complete distinctness in the vowel space. The two back vowels too are distinct from each other since the two ellipses do not overlap; however, the two categories appear to be very close to each other in the vowel space (compared to the two front vowels).

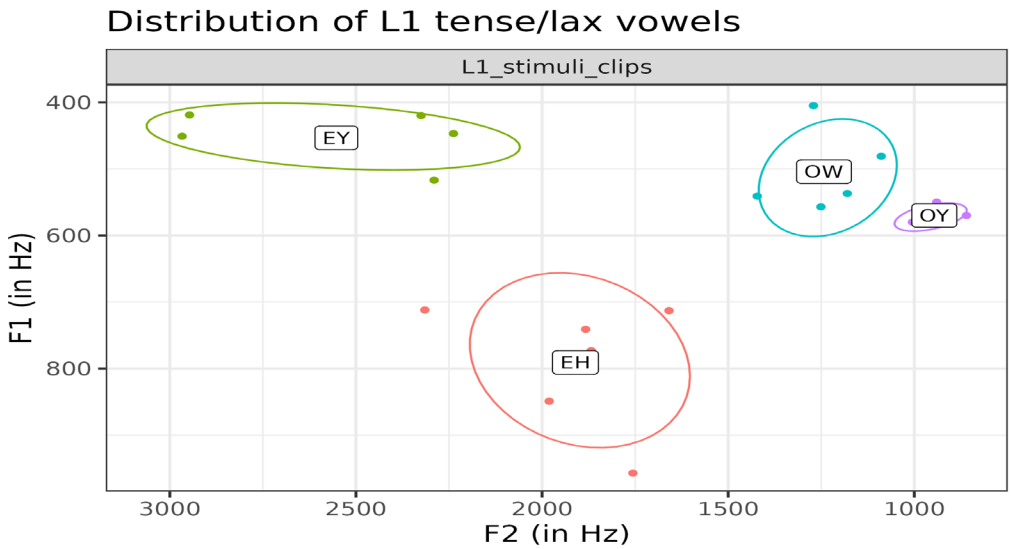

Figure 11: Distribution of vowels in L1 speech on the F1 x F2 plane (mid vowels)

L2 vowels

Analogous to high vowels, Figure 12 shows the F1 and F2 space for the L2 productions of the high vowels, with F2 values on the x-axis, F1 values on the y-axis and ellipses representing the 95% confidence ellipses for each vowel. Individual panels represent separate speakers. A quick visual inspection of the plot indicates that the tense vs. lax vowels among the front vowels had less overlap between them compared to those among the back vowels.

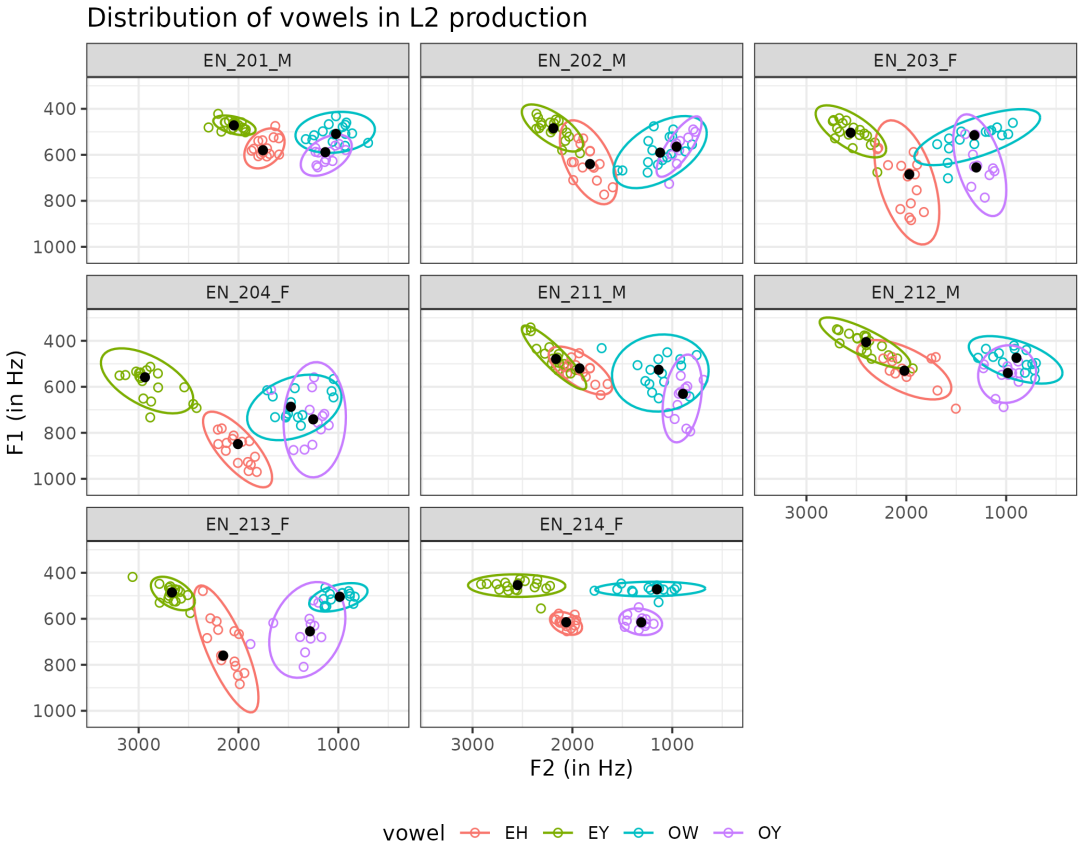

Figure 12: Formant distribution in tense vs. lax vowel in L2 speech (mid vowels)

Figure 13 shows only the ellipses without the individual tokens for the vowels; this plot makes it easier to see that 6 out of the 8 speakers were very successful in producing the distinction between EY and EH. The scenario was completely the opposite for the back vowels where six out of the eight speakers had a large degree of overlap between OW and OY vowels. Thus, the results look pretty similar to what we saw for the high vowels: speakers were more successful in distinguishing the tense/lax contrasts in the front of the vowel space than in the back of the vocal tract.

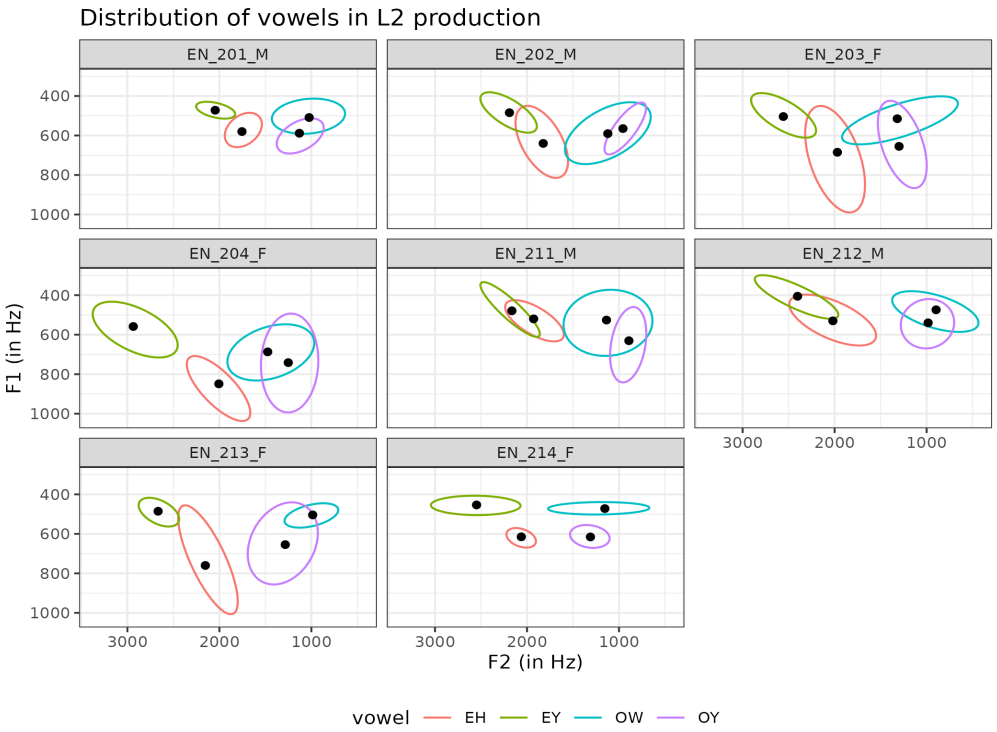

Figure 13: Formant distribution in tense vs. lax vowel in L2 speech (mid vowels, only ellipses)

Pillai scores

To statistically assess the tense-lax distinctions, Figure 14 presents the Pillai scores for comparisons between distributions of concerned vowel pairs in the front and back of the vocal tract.

As Figure 14 shows, the Pillai score for the tense/lax comparisons for the front vowels was consistently higher, with two clear exceptions (speakers EN_211_M and EN_214F). MANOVA models returned statistically significant p-values for the front vowel comparisons for all speakers ($p < .001$ in each case). For the back vowel comparisons, Pillai scores were statistically significant for speakers EN_201_M, EN_213_F, and EN_214_F ($p < .001$ in each case); others were not statistically significant. These results provide an indication that speakers were consistently better at producing the tense/lax contrast for front vowels than the back vowels. A. Wilcoxon signed rank exact test revealed that the difference of performance between the front vs. the back vowels in the form of Pillai scores was statistically significant ($V < 0.001$, $p = .008$, effect size = 0.89).

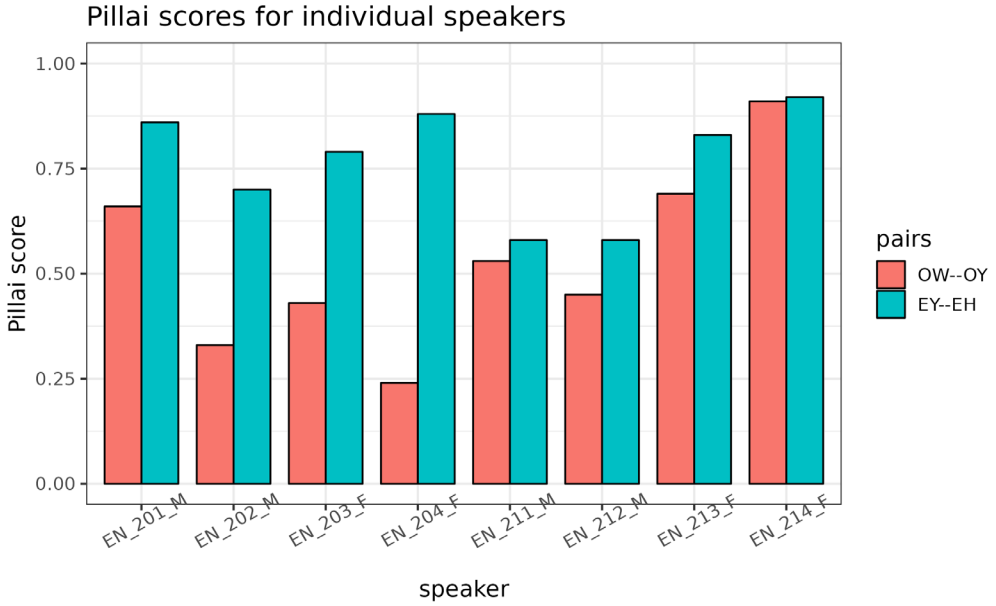

Figure 14: Pillai scores for tense vs. lax vowel distributions by individual speakers (mid vowels)

Discussion

While most previous studies reported that second language learners primarily rely on temporal cues (compared to spectral cues) while listening to tense/lax vowels, our study indicates that this may not be a universal phenomenon. We had two hypotheses in this study: 1) Bangla speakers will be able to successfully produce the distinctions between English tense and lax vowel pairs in terms of their spectral properties (i.e., the formant values), unlike what have been reported from speakers of other languages; and, 2) Bangla speakers will not be able to produce consistent durational differences between English tense and lax vowels pairs. And, generally speaking, we have found sufficient evidence in support of both our hypotheses.

Participants in this study did not consistently produce the durational differences between English tense and lax vowels even though the differences were salient in the L1 stimuli the participants shadowed. This indicates that Bangla speakers are not sensitive to the durational differences or they do not prioritize duration as a cue to differentiate between tense and lax vowels; this is consistent with L1 Bangla tense and lax vowels where duration does not differ systematically (as seen in Alam et al., 2008).

Contrarily, Bangla speakers were able to produce the spectral differences in terms of the F1 and F2 values in English tense and lax vowels more consistently than durational differences. Some noticeable patterns were observed for the spectral properties with respect to the vowel height and backness. First, speakers were able to distinguish the high front tense vowel (/i/) from its lax counterpart (/ɪ/) significantly better than the tense/lax pair in the high back position (/u/ vs. /ʊ/); in fact, the two high back vowels were nearly the same for

most speakers. One reason behind this discrepancy between the degree of success between the high front and high back vowels could be diagonal differences between the vowels, as presented in the L1 English stimuli. For example, /i/ is different from /ɪ/ in two ways: 1) it has a lower F1 value and 2) it has a higher F2 value (see Figure 5). Therefore /i/ and /ɪ/ are different on two dimensions. The two high back vowels, however, differ primarily on F1 (/u/ has a lower F1 value than /ʊ/); they have very similar F2 values. This reduced differences in dimensions may have contributed to the decreased success for differentiating the tense and lax vowels in the high back region. It remains to be seen whether Bangla speakers would be able to perform better if /u/ and /ʊ/ differed in F2 values as well (which is very much possible to observe in different dialects of English).

Secondly, even though Bangla speakers were not able to distinguish the English tense and lax in the high back region, they were much better for the mid back tense/lax vowels (less than 50% overlap between the two categories, compared to 70-80% overlap for the high vowels). A potential explanation could be that Bangla vowel inventory already has a tense/lax contrast in this region which is why they possess the perceptual sensitivity to detect the differences here (especially given that the Euclidean distance between /o/ and /ɔ/ was very small in the L1 stimuli (see Figure 9). This also indicates that Bangla speakers are less sensitive to F1 differences in lower frequency regions.

The results in this study contradict the claims from the previous studies from two perspectives. First, the claim that L2 English learners predominantly over-rely on durational features to distinguish tense and lax vowels (compared to spectral features) could not be corroborated; rather, this suggests that it is completely possible for L2 English speakers to emphasize spectral cues over durational cues. Second, unlike Rahman's (2018) study, our study indicates that Bangla speakers are indeed capable of distinguishing English tense vowels (though not like the native English speakers), even without being significantly exposed to live interactions with native English speakers, when they are forced to pay attention to the necessary details. It needs to be noted that the data used in this study are inherently different from Rahman's study. In Rahman (2018), participants read passages and sentences while this study collected isolated words through a shadowing task; therefore, the data used in this study is inherently less natural. In a shadowing task, participants have to listen to the auditory or perceptual cues very carefully before they can produce the sounds; contrarily, in a reading task, there is no direct perception involved.

Furthermore, most L2 English learners in Bangladesh have never had considerable exposure to native English speech in real life; therefore, it is very unlikely that they would be able to recognize and then learn those categorical differences between the tense and lax vowels. While it is possible to be exposed to native pronunciations through the media (e.g., movies, shows), very few people have access to them; more importantly, research has shown that language learning does not happen effectively in the media form without any live interaction with human beings (Kuhl et al., 2003). Therefore, Bangla speakers have possibly never had the necessary exposure to native English tense and lax vowels, and have not developed the perceptual categories in the first place. But this does not mean that

Bangla speakers are completely incapable of perceiving the spectral differences between English tense and lax vowels; rather, with proper exposure to L1 English, Bangla speakers can successfully distinguish between the concerned vowel categories.

Conclusion

In this study, we investigated whether temporal cues are more important to L2 English speakers than spectral cues when distinguishing English tense vowels from their lax counterparts. We also tested whether Bangla speakers are incapable of distinguishing English tense and lax vowels, as proposed in previous studies. Our results indicate that the over-reliance of temporal cues is not a predominant or universal phenomenon; rather, whether the L2 speaker prioritize temporal or spectral cues are primarily determined by the nature of the phonetic implementation of tense and lax vowels in the first language of the speakers. Our results also confirm that Bangla speakers are indeed capable of perceiving and producing spectral differences between the English tense and lax vowels, even without significant exposure or live interaction with native speakers of English. Furthermore, Bangla speakers put more emphasis on spectral cues, unlike many other languages, over temporal cues when perceiving and producing tense and lax vowels.

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Peer Feedback in Developing Writing in Tertiary EFL/ESL Education: A Review of Related Research

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Abstract

English language teachers and practitioners always look for effective methods to understand the strengths and weaknesses of students' writing. One of the effective methods is collecting the comments of students through the process of peer feedback, which can provide critical views and constructive suggestions about the strengths students have and challenges they experience in their writing classes. Peer feedback has gathered growing interest among tertiary ELT practitioners and researchers over the last few decades. In this paper, peer-reviewed research articles published mainly in the last three decades have been studied critically with a view to exploring the benefits and challenges of the use of peer feedback in the tertiary EFL/ESL writing classroom. In order to have a clear picture of the benefits and challenges of the use of peer feedback in the tertiary EFL/ESL writing classroom, the results and implications of relevant scientific studies have been presented categorically. This study offers the concerned stakeholders valuable insights into the impacts of peer feedback on developing tertiary EFL/ESL students' writing abilities. Towards the end, some recommendations for further research have also been offered.

Keywords: peer feedback, tertiary EFL/ESL writing, learner autonomy, formative assessment, process writing

Introduction

Peer feedback, often mentioned as peer assessment or peer review, is a category of formative assessment that allows writers to discuss different aspects of each other's written products and collect their peers' explanations of them (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). In other words, peer feedback is peer-to-peer collaboration that enables individuals to obtain constructive criticism on their work. In process-writing, peer feedback is considered an imperative task in developing writing and thus "is strongly recommended by many researchers and instructors" (Kangni, 2015, p. 480). Peer feedback permits fellow students to see actual examples of the strengths and weaknesses of their written texts and also offers an opportunity to give feedback to their peers as their audience (James, 2017). In formative assessments of contemporary higher education, there has been a growing interest in the practice of peer assessment or peer feedback (Topping, 2009). Fry (1990) observes that through peer feedback, students gain a greater understanding of formal and institutional assessment procedures. Topping (1998) further adds that if there are not enough formal assessment procedures in any institute, greater consciousness of peer assistance and peer feedback among students could create a "positive press toward improvement" (p. 285).

During the last three decades, a great deal of research has been conducted on peer feedback, and most of the results demonstrate that there is a significant positive correlation between peer feedback and students' writing development (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021; Min, 2005; Zhao, 2014). In summary, it can be said that by going through the process of peer feedback, students become more self-regulated and develop more audience awareness that consequently helps them increase their "awareness of their own learning" (Hansson, 2014, p. 1). However, some studies demonstrate that the tertiary EFL classroom encounters challenging contexts while implementing the peer feedback process. This paper highlights the impacts of peer feedback in writing classes at the tertiary level where English is taught in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) or ESL (English as a Second Language) contexts.

Topping (2009) maintains that peer feedback activities can vary in different ways. First, it can vary in terms of the variety products like writing, portfolios, test performances, etc. The participant patterns can also vary. The feedback providers and receivers may be pairs or groups. Finally, it can vary in terms of directionality too. Peer feedback can be a one-way or reciprocal process.

Method

The current study is a review-based study that involves only secondary research data. This paper critically studied a good number of peer reviewed research articles published mainly in the last three decades. The sources of these papers include databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, Science Direct, ERIC, Springer, Atlantis Press, *AJAP* (*Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics*), *PsycINFO,* ResearchGate, core.ac.uk, ijreeonline.com, and the *European Journal of Teaching and Education.* Peer-reviewed journals based on keywords such as peer feedback, peer assessment, types of feedback, types of assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment, etc., were also surveyed to collect the required data. The sources of all the secondary data have been appropriately acknowledged in this article.

Using Peer Feedback in the Writing Class: Different Aspects

While studying the usefulness of peer feedback in the assessment of students' writing assignments, both advantages and challenges suggested by different scholars have been explored. Some of those significant findings are presented and discussed below.

Advantages of using peer feedback

Positive impact on students' writing quality development

Topping (2009) observes that peer feedback in writing involves providing "either general feedback or very specific feedback about possible improvements" (p. 23). He also maintains that peer feedback can help develop writing in many ways, as it can cover the entire text or different steps of the writing process, such as "planning, drafting, or editing" (p. 23). Zundert et al. (2010) studied 27 peer feedback studies conducted with tertiary-level EFL students from different countries. From the results, he concluded that peer feedback has a positive correlation with the development of students' writing skills. Another significant finding was that there were gains for both the assessor and the assessee. Topping (2009) observes that as the principal goal of peer assessment is to provide "confirmatory, and suggestive, or corrective feedback" (p. 22), that could lead to a reduction in errors and

have positive effects on the development of writing. He further adds that the quality of writing gets better if and when the learner responds thoughtfully and positively to the peer feedback offered. In addition, Mangelsdorf (1992) observes that as peer feedback allows students an opportunity to scrutinize their peers' writings critically, it contributes to the development of their higher-order thinking ability. Zhao (2010) also finds that students' writing quality improves when peer feedback is reflected in revisions of their writing.

Wanchid (2020) reports the results of a study conducted with tertiary level EFL writing course students of Thailand. The sample of this study comprised 72 Thai undergraduate engineering students studying at King Mongkut's University of Technology. The study revealed that peer feedback made a great deal of contribution to EFL students' writing development.

Bolourchi and Soleimani (2021) conducted another study to investigate the influence of peer feedback on tertiary students' writing abilities. The sample of this study consisted of 48 Iranian undergraduate students doing a writing course at the Iran Language Institute (ILI). The study also revealed that peer feedback contributed to a great extent to EFL students' writing development (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021).

Impact on students' cognitive development and critical thinking stimulus

According to Berg et al. (2006), checking one another's writing products enables students to become familiar with the writing standard set by the teachers and empowers them to grade the texts better. This process of assessment generally has a positive impact on students' intellectual development (Fredricks et al., 2004). The learners, whose assignments are peer reviewed, usually benefit from the feedback and their critical thinking ability is stimulated (Rukanuddin et al., 2021). Likewise, the peer reviewers also benefit, as during the peer feedback process they gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their peers' writings. In this regard, Wessa and De Rycker (2010) maintain that in the peer feedback process, the reviewer benefits more than the receiver, as the writing of a peer review report usually entails "cognitive processes that encourage deep learning" (p. 409). The results from the study by Cheng and Warren (2005) also support the idea.

Improvement in overall and global aspects of writing

In terms of developing writing in the formative stages, peer assessment or peer feedback has been observed to be "as effective as teacher assessment and sometimes more effective" (O'Donnell & Topping, 1998, p. 259). The study also reports that peer feedback on writing can involve giving either general feedback or very particular feedback about possible improvements. Lundstrom and Baker (2009) conducted another similar study involving 91 ESL students. The participants in this study were the students of nine writing courses at Brigham Young University, USA. The researchers divided the participants into two groups. One group was given the role of giving peer feedback and the other of receiving peer feedback. The researchers selected an essay written by a student of a similar proficiency level and gave it to both groups. The results of the study revealed that the students who gave peer feedback improved their writing more than the students who received peer feedback. The students were able to enhance their overall and global aspects of writing, such as ideas,

focus, organization, development, clarity of purpose, cohesion, and awareness of audience. Regarding the benefits of giving peer feedback, Lundstrom and Baker (2009) say:

> The findings of this study suggest that L2 writing students can improve their own writing by transferring abilities they learn when reviewing peer texts. In addition, these findings also suggest that students taught to give peer feedback improve in their own writing abilities more than students taught to use peer feedback (p. 38).

Generating new ideas and overcoming errors in sentence structures

Zhao (2014) conducted a study in an English writing class at a Chinese university and reported some benefits of peer feedback. The sample consisted of 18 second-year English majors and the study lasted over four months. The results of the study demonstrated that students were able to minimize their grammatical errors and enrich themselves with new ideas while reading their peers' writing products. The study also revealed that the congenial peer feedback environment allowed students to discuss the feedback comfortably with their peers, encouraged more intense discussions among themselves, and ultimately contributed to further improvement in their writing. In a similar vein, Min (2005) conducted a study on 18 students in an EFL writing class at a Taiwanese university. The findings of the study suggested that students gained more awareness of their own writing difficulties while scanning their peers' papers and found solutions to their own writing problems while looking at solutions to the writing problems of their peers. On the use of peer feedback, Hansson (2014) suggests that through peer work, students can gain ideas reciprocally, share suggestions and ideas regarding ways to improve their peers' writing, and also develop their own writing. These benefits accrue from instances of both written and oral interactions (Hansson, 2014). In another similar study that compared the impacts of peer feedback and self-assessment with 40 Lebanese tertiary EFL students, Mawlawi Diab (2010) found that the students in the peer feedback group were able to correct more errors than the self-assessment group. The errors in focus involved subject-verb agreement errors, pronoun agreement errors, wrong word choice, and awkward sentence structure errors.

Peer feedback providers become more audience-conscious

Hu (2005) carried out a three-year study on some of his Chinese ESL students studying at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The students, at the end of the study, claimed that they had learned a great deal about writing by "reading each other's writing and by giving each other advice" (p. 339). Villamil and de Guerrero (1998) reported similar findings after conducting a study with some Malaysian EFL students. In this connection, Rollison (2005) suggests that to make their writing more real, writers need audiences that can give instant advice or feedback. For the students, the best audience can be their peers as their peers can give instant feedback to help improve their texts. This leads students to become more aware of their audience during writing and allows them to produce better and more audience friendly assignments (Rollison, 2005).

Peer feedback helps improve vocabulary and, hence, writing

Rothschild and Klingenberg (1990) studied the effect of peer feedback training on tertiary students. They conducted a survey with some students at a Canadian community college.

The results of the study showed that the experimental group, the students who had training in using peer feedback, developed more positive attitudes towards writing than the control group, the participants who did not have any training. The study also found that the grammar and vocabulary of the experimental group improved more than those of the control group.

Students provide scaffolding in peer feedback sessions

Tang and Tithecott (1999) conducted a study with some Asian ESL students studying in writing classes at a university college in Western Canada to investigate the effects of using peer feedback. The results demonstrated several benefits of using peer feedback. One of the benefits was "students provided scaffolding in peer response sessions" (Tang & Tithecott, 1999, p. 33) and it helped the writers use different techniques to overcome writing errors and develop their writing. They also added that the most common scaffolding strategies used by students were: "Instructing, Announcing, Justifying, Restating, Giving directives, Requesting clarification, Clarifying, Eliciting, Responding to elicitation, and Reacting" (p. 33).

Peer feedback helps students become confident autonomous learners

Liu and Carless (2006), regarding the benefits of peer feedback, suggest that peer feedback empowers students "to take an active role in the management of their own learning" (p. 280). Villamil and de Guerrero, in another similar study, found that the students became autonomous writers by giving and receiving feedback from their peers (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998). Topping's (1998) study also found a similar result. He found that during the peer feedback process, students get actively involved in the learning process and "promote a sense of ownership, personal responsibility, and motivation" (Topping, 1998, p. 256).

Challenges of using peer feedback in the writing class

Thus far, a significant number of studies have been investigated relating to peer feedback and its benefits in tertiary EFL/ESL writing classes. However, scholars and academics have identified a number of challenges with implementing the peer feedback process. Some of them are discussed below.

Friendship bias

In a study conducted by Cheng and Warren (2005), friendship bias was found to exist in the students providing peer feedback. The sample of the study was 51 Chinese undergraduate EFL students, and the objective of the study was to see the impact of peer feedback on students' both spoken and written English proficiency. The qualitative data revealed that the peer reviewers felt uncomfortable and lacked confidence "to assess the language proficiency of their peers" (Cheng & Warren, 2005, p. 110). In addition, most of the respondents felt it challenging to grade their close friends' writing entirely fairly. Similar results were also obtained in Tang and Tithecott's (1999) study with some ESL students at a Canadian university. Regarding the challenges of giving fair peer feedback to the written products of close friends, they observed that most of the students found it very challenging to give exact comments and suggestions "about something negative" (p. 32). In addition,

the student participants also believed that they had neither enough assessment skills nor adequate knowledge of the English language to conduct such a task.

Students' preference to teacher feedback and prejudice against peer editing

To explore tertiary EFL students' perceptions of teacher feedback and peer feedback in developing their writing, Hu and Lam (2009) conducted a study with 20 Chinese tertiary EFL learners. The learners were taking an academic writing course at a university in Singapore. The results of the study demonstrated that regarding assessing their writing products the participants showed "a strong preference for teacher feedback over peer feedback" (Hu & Lam, 2009, p. 387). A similar finding was revealed by Zaman and Azad (2012), who conducted a study with 12 Bangladeshi tertiary EFL teachers and 120 EFL learners. The survey results indicated that Bangladeshi EFL learners in the study also showed a preference for teacher feedback over peer feedback.

Poor reliability of peer feedback

Nilson (2010) reviewed a dozen research articles and concluded that students' concerns regarding the reliability of peer feedback are a major issue in implementing peer feedback. In his review, he found that many students considered their language teacher their lone audience and the most important person to keep happy. They also considered that peer evaluation or peer feedback was much more liberal than teacher feedback, and among the peer feedback providers "inter-rater reliability (that is, consensus) is low" (Nilson, 2010, p. 320). Hu (2005) also conducted a study among some tertiary ESL learners to understand the reliability of peer feedback. He ran the study with some Chinese tertiary ESL learners involved in an academic writing course at a Singaporean university. The results of the study showed that the student participants did not have trust in their peers' comments, as they thought their peers lacked adequate skills and knowledge to distinguish between "valid and invalid peer feedback" (Hu, 2005, p. 325).

Lack of positive feedback in the peer feedback reports

Yeung (2019) observes that among the popular approaches to teaching and learning writing, the process approach offers the highest potential for "encouraging the development in learner autonomy" (p. 43). Like teacher feedback and self-evaluation, peer feedback is also considered a vital facet of the process approach of writing (Hyland, 2000). However, Kangni (2015) observes that in the process writing approach, while giving feedback, peer editors mainly focus on the limitations and errors of their peers' writings, and often their feedback contains corrections and criticism. This negativity often causes "lack of encouragement"(p. 480) in the learners and hence affects the development of writing through peer feedback (Kangni, 2015).

Potential solutions to the challenges

The realistic implementation of peer feedback is a multifaceted task that requires a comprehensive understanding "of the goals of the task and the criteria for success, and the ability to make judgments about the relationship of the product or performance to these goals" (Topping, 2017, p. 25). The following section will present some possible solutions to some major challenges and difficulties that come with the implementation of peer feedback.

Training the peer feedback providers and receivers

Many researchers suggest that training the students of a writing class going through the peer feedback process is imperative to prepare them as confident peer feedback givers and receivers (Min, 2005; Rollinson, 2005; Topping, 2009; Zhao, 2014). According to Sadler and Good (2006, p. 28), the peer feedback process requires recurrent practice for students to become competent assessors**.** Brookhart (2017) suggests that the learners should be given proper training on how to provide peer feedback and be provided with peer editing 'ground rules' as guidelines. In this regard, she suggests seven guidelines. The guidelines she suggests are: reading a peer's work carefully; comparing the work against the set rubric; discussing the work, not the writer; not providing judgmental comments (e.g., don't write, "That's bad"); rather, describing the positive aspects of the work and mentioning what's missing; making specific recommendations; and sharing each other's views on the development of the work.

One method of conducting such training is described in Zhao's (2014) study. The study involved 18 Chinese tertiary EFL students. According to Zhao (2014), the teachers checked the students' writings and explained what to improve and how. They also shared their feedback-giving process with the students so that they could gain some practical ideas. Min (2005) used a similar approach in another study conducted with 18 Taiwanese tertiary students. The students were the first year students in the researcher's EFL writing class at a university in Taiwan. They were given the opportunity to scan the essays written by former students and study the strategies their instructor would use in providing feedback in their scripts. Min (2005) suggests that at the very beginning of their training in providing feedback, students can be given texts written by other students, not their peers, and learn how to give appropriate comments. This training will help them assess writing texts neutrally, avoiding friendship bias. Min further suggests that, the feedback providers should also be taught that they are to comment on their peers' products not as teachers but as readers, and this orientation will gradually help them learn to give feedback in a more considerate way.

Forming mixed ability peer feedback groups

The Zone of Proximal Development Theory suggests that peers' or teachers' support and guidance can help students reach a proficiency level that they cannot reach on their own (Vygotsky, 1978). The theory also infers that, for the low-competence learners, teachers should apply cooperative learning strategies in the classroom and seek out assistance from "more competent peers in the zone of proximal development" (Main, 2023). This concept of peer or pairing guidance is usually termed as scaffolding. According to Wood et al. (1976), scaffolding is the support and supervision that aid a student or novice to solve a problem or carry out a task that "would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (p. 90). From the overall discussion on ZPD and scaffolding, it can be deduced that peer feedback becomes successful when a less skilled peer and a more skilled peer work together.

Monitoring and evaluating peer assessors' performance

Topping (2017) observes that in order to have a better performance in peer feedback,

students require intense training and practice before full implementation of the process, and this whole process should feature "monitoring and moderation" (p. 13). He also suggests that during students' peer feedback process, teachers should "keep a low profile and circulate among them, giving feedback and coaching as necessary" (p. 12).

Zundert et al. (2010) reviewed 27 relevant papers. They found that the quality of the peer feedback process improved with "training and experience" (p. 278). In this regard, Topping (2017) suggests that peer assessors should work in small group sizes, be given specific peer feedback formats, and be allowed sufficient time for assessment and providing feedback.

In the Bangladesh context, Chowdhury and Akteruzzaman (2021) conducted a small-scale action research project with tertiary EFL students. The participants in the study were undergraduate students at two universities in Bangladesh. They were doing foundation courses in English (ENG 101). Their study demonstrated how Bangladeshi tertiary learners' perceptions of peer feedback changed by training. The study also showed that peer feedback can harvest productive outcomes in EFL writing classrooms "if applied correctly" (Chowdhury & Akteruzzaman, 2021, p. 184).

Creating a congenial environment for peer feedback providers

For making peer feedback easier and more effective, Hansen and Liu (2005) suggest that the writing classroom environment should be made congenial and engaging. Such an environment will encourage the feedback providers to work together at ease and to exchange "linguistic content, and rhetorical expressions and knowledge (i.e. scaffolding) when necessary" (Hansen & Liu, 2005, p. 33).

Guiding students to design their own peer feedback materials

A common concern regarding peer feedback exposed by many researchers is that students usually lack confidence in giving feedback to their peers. To overcome this concern, Hansen and Liu (2005) suggest students should be encouraged to devise their peer feedback sheets and assessment criteria on their own so that they can assess their peers' papers and give feedback confidently.

Making peer feedback available in greater amount than teacher feedback

Regarding the questions raised about the reliability and validity of peer feedback, Topping (2017) observes, the reliability and validity of peer feedback are as high as those of teacher feedback and sometimes higher. For greater reliability and validity, Topping (2017) suggests that the practice of peer feedback should be made available in greater volume than teacher feedback. For doing so, "a positive, encouraging, and collaborative workshop environment" (Tsui & Ng, 2000, p. 168) should be established in the writing classroom, where students can work with ease with their peers. In this regard, Rollinson (2005) observes that many students may not accept that "their peers are qualified to act as substitutes for the teacher, and critique their writing" (p. 26), and so they will need substantial amounts of understanding of the value of peer feedback.

Discussion

The reports presented above suggest that peer feedback is very helpful for tertiary learners

to improve their writing abilities. Although some practitioners face some challenges in implementing the peer feedback process, the reliability and validity of peer feedback are found to be as high as, and often higher than, teacher feedback (Topping, 1998). He adds that when teachers are involved and there is adequate training, support, and resources available, peer feedback can be of higher quality and more reliable.

Peer feedback is a practical assessment technique that can improve the teaching and learning environment in the classroom in a number of ways. First, peer feedback encourages students to take an active role in regulating their own learning, helping them to develop into self-assured, independent learners (Liu and Carless, 2006). Second, it can make a significant contribution by increasing the range of formative assessment in the classroom and lightening the load on instructors if used in accordance with the right standards. According to Rukanuddin et al. (2021), tertiary EFL instructors are frequently overworked and unable to provide students with appropriate feedback on their work. Hattie and Timperley (2007) further note that in the writing classroom, rather than providing genuine, educationally beneficial feedback to students, teachers frequently assign grades and marks. Peer feedback is a very effective remedy for this issue. Peer review in this situation has the potential to increase student feedback while also empowering learner autonomy. Peer feedback can be strengthened in the writing classroom by maintaining the custom of forming mixed-ability peer feedback groups of students and encouraging them to work together (Main, 2023).

Researchers have also identified two major obstacles that hinder the environment that gives importance to peer feedback. One obstacle is some students' lack of confidence in participating in the peer feedback process, and the other is its lack of reliability and validity. In addition, for different social reasons, "both assessors and assessees can experience initial anxiety about the peer assessment process" (Topping, 2017, p. 13). As a remedy to the first kind of obstacle, scholars involved in the research in this area suggest that tertiary EFL/ESL students require adequate training and practice prior to the initiation of the process, and the process should be accompanied by intensive monitoring and control.

The peer feedback team should then move on to the development stage. As a result, the peer feedback process will be more frequent, which will assist students in identifying their writing-related strengths and limitations and in building "meta-cognitive and other personal and professional skills" (Topping, 2009, p. 27). Another idea that can also add value is that the feedback providers should highlight positive feedback first in order to give the feedback receiver confidence and comfortability. Teachers should also emphasize how peer feedback fosters "activity and interactivity, identification and bonding, self-confidence, and empathy with others" (Topping, 2017, p. 13) as well as diversity and interest.

Regarding the other questions raised about the reliability and validity of peer feedback, Topping (1998) observes that the reliability and validity of peer feedback are as high as those of teacher feedback and sometimes higher. For greater reliability and validity, Topping (2017) suggests that the practice of peer feedback should be made available in greater volume than teacher feedback. To do this, teachers should create "a positive,

encouraging, and collaborative workshop environment" (Tsui & Ng, 2000, p. 168) in the writing classroom so that students may easily collaborate with their peers. According to Rollinson (2005), many students might not believe that "their peers are qualified to act as substitutes for the teacher and critique their writing" (p. 26), so they will need a deep knowledge of the importance of peer evaluation.

Conclusion

This article has explored the scopes of a non-traditional form of feedback, namely peer feedback. Insights from the literature discussed here show that peer feedback is significantly helpful in developing writing in tertiary EFL education. Although some practitioners face some challenges in implementing the peer feedback process, Topping (2017) suggests that the quality of peer feedback can enhance "when supported by training, checklists, exemplification, teacher assistance, and monitoring" (p. 13). For its strength in developing writing, peer feedback process is being increasingly used in tertiary EFL teaching, in many ways (van den Berg et al., 2006, p. 35), and it can also be a valid and reliable system of assessment in the tertiary EFL education of Bangladesh.

Tertiary students should also be involved in developing their own peer feedback checklists, sheets, and grading rubrics in order to improve the results of the peer feedback process. Through this position, they will have the chance to become familiar with the evaluation criteria applied to the written texts. They will be able to create their own writing method with the use of this knowledge. In order for all students to be positively and confidently involved in collaborative learning, teachers of tertiary EFL/ESL writing must establish a stress-free and welcoming learning atmosphere (Liu & Carless, 2006). Additionally, in the tertiary EFL writing classroom, peer feedback should be encouraged and made more readily available than teacher feedback in terms of volume and promptness. (Topping, 2009, p. 25).

Tertiary students should also be involved in developing their own peer feedback checklists, sheets, and grading rubrics in order to improve the results of the peer feedback process. Through this position, they will have the chance to become familiar with the evaluation criteria applied to the written texts. They will be able to create their own writing method with this knowledge. In order for all students to be positively and confidently involved in collaborative learning, teachers of tertiary EFL/ESL writing must establish a stress-free and welcoming learning atmosphere (Liu & Carless, 2006). Additionally, in the tertiary EFL writing classroom, peer feedback should be encouraged and made more readily available than teacher feedback in terms of volume and promptness.

For making peer feedback well-operative in the tertiary EFL writing class, "training the students is very crucial" (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021, p. 13). Students should be familiarized with their objectives and ways of accomplishing their assessment tasks. In this course of action, EFL teachers must consider different realities and limitations of their teaching contexts, such as students' English proficiency levels, cultural contexts, and education facilities, "before exploiting these activities in their writing classes" (Wanchid, 2020, p. 33).

Peer feedback is not likely to ever replace teacher feedback as the main form of assessment (Topping, 2017) for the limited time of their working week in the classroom. However, it is acknowledged that peer feedback can make a significant contribution to raising statndard of writing instruction and strengthening students' critical-thinking abilities (Topping, 2003b, 2009). Additionally, it is expected that the incorporation of peer feedback in the tertiary EFL classroom would have a significant positive impact on students' capacity to write, as well as their ability to become independent learners and acquire other life skills.

Finally, a suggestion for further research is offered. As a significant number of studies concerning peer feedback have already been carried out and their implications have also been uttered, it would be rewarding to see some research findings in this field from a South Asian context, preferably from a Bangladeshi tertiary EFL education context. It will be useful since there is a big scarcity of required data in the relevant field in this particular context. Given the varied responses to trusting the value and status of peers' feedback shown in some of the studies, it may also be found that cultural and other factors play a part in a particular context. The impact of these factors on the quality of the peer feedback process and the development of tertiary students' writing can also be an interesting area for further research.

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Identity Around Multilingualism: Characterization of Yolanda in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*

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Abstract

As no country houses people speaking solely one language in the present world, various studies regarding the use of multilingualism were done over the years not only in the field of empirical research but also in literary contexts. Code-switching has been the most researched phenomenon in literary language from a multilingual perspective. The debate between considering literary characters as real-life human beings or merely textual constructs has intensified over the years. Subsequently, a middle ground combining both humanizing and non-humanizing aspects of literary characters emerged. In this study, I analyze the use of multilingualism in a literary character's portrayal by examining her linguistic identity through her behaviors involving language use and comprehension. Yolanda, the second daughter of the De La Torre family depicted in the novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, written by Julia Alvarez in 1991, is the target character for this study. Using a qualitative research approach, Yolanda's character is analyzed by using the characterization model developed by Culpeper in 2001. Three textual cues, namely explicit, implicit, and authorial, are examined in the descriptions and language uses of Yolanda's character. The outcomes of the study not only portray Julia Alvarez's philosophy and attitude regarding multilingualism, but also show Yolanda's unique traits, struggles, confusion, liminality, and linguistic position in the world of the novel.

Keywords: Multilingualism, linguistic identity, characterization, literary linguistics, textual cues

Introduction

Multilingualism refers to the phenomenon whereby a speaker can have more than one language in her linguistic repertoire (Wei, 2008). Sometimes the notion of a geographical area housing speakers from different languages can also be referred to as multilingualism (European Commission, 2005). Multilingualism has long been studied by researchers from multifarious fields but most studies on this phenomenon have extensively considered real-life humans such as in school contexts, family language policy, workplace situations, etc. (Cenoz, 2013). Hence, very few studies considered literary characters as multilingual agents through researching their linguistic behaviors and expressions (Srieh, 2021). In studying literary characters, the code-switching aspect has gained considerable attention over the years (Albakry and Hancock, 2008). However, most characters are studied from the point of view of literary criticism which does not consider linguistic expressions much (Srieh, 2021). Due to the debate regarding literary characters as real-life human beings

or merely textual constructs, humanizing and de-humanizing aspects of looking at the literary characters have emerged over the years (Srieh, 2021). Still, the characters' linguistic utterances, emotional turmoil, confusing states of identity because of their multilingual or multicultural backgrounds, etc. have not been emphasized much in studies (Cenoz, 2013).

When it comes to literary pieces, the characters are the constructs of the authors or playwrights (McIntyre, 2014). The way language is used by characters in writing is not innate but rather controlled by the writers. Analyzing the intricate linguistic identities, expressions, and decisions of characters can shed light on authors' perspectives and encounters with language (Rees, 2020). Despite being associated with empirical research, a linguistic analysis can also look at literary languages which are sometimes representations of the author's personal experiences. In the target novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, the condition of Spanish-speaking Dominican people is portrayed from the period of Rafael Trujillo's reign which lasted from the 1930s to the mid-1960s. The attitude or tension around Spanish and Dominican identity was different from that of today. Therefore, the sociolinguistic situation of a literary text is important in analyzing its characters' linguistic behavior like analyzing real-life people's language use (Litvin, 2020).

Background and Rationale of the Data

The novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* was written by Julia Alvarez in 1991. The writing style of this novel is unique as the storyline is unraveled in a backward fashion toward the final five years of Rafael Trujillo's reign, unlike the traditional, chronological order of a novel (Llorente, 2001). Rees (2020) stated that,

> Written in English, but with the occasional sprinkling of Spanish, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* conforms to what Brian Lennon denominates as a "weak" form of multilingual literature. Nevertheless, while lacking this aesthetically multilingual element, an ontological form of multilingualism permeates Alvarez's novel as she delves into the identitarian complexities which arise from speaking two languages and belonging to two cultures. (p. 201)

Here, the debate between bilingualism and multilingualism might arise but I chose to use the term "multilingualism" for this study as it is widely accepted now that the phenomenon involving more than one language is known as multilingualism whereas bilingualism and trilingualism are parts of the umbrella term (Aronin and Singleton, 2008). In the Garcia de la Torre family, there are four girls along with their parents who migrate to the USA during Trujillo's rule as, in the Dominican Republic, the father, Carlos, was under the threat of Trujillo's government for his opposing stand against them. Therefore, the migration here does not happen spontaneously or with a happy connotation. Instead, the incident resembles the uprooting of a tree for the four girls on different levels (Rees, 2020). Bilingualism can be included in multilingualism as a part of the whole spectrum (Aronin and Singleton, 2008). However, unlike trilingual, a bilingual situation may imply a binary condition which, from a postcolonial perspective, may maintain and retain the linguistic power asymmetry between the Centre and Periphery (Phillipson, 1992). Through globalization and transnationalism, English, as the colonial language has reached

a new level of omnipresent authority in postcolonial countries. The concepts, methods, and treatment of English in education are just a few examples of how this predominance of English is maintained in these nations (Al Mahmud, 2020). In the Garcia girls' lives, English language played the similar role even when they go back to the Dominican Republic as adults.

The backward narration of the novel is structured into three parts each consisting of five vignettes. Among the four girls: Carla, Yolanda, Sandi, and Sofia, Yolanda narrates most parts of the novel and besides, only she gets to narrate from the first-person point of view in two of the vignettes. Besides, Yolanda's conflicted liminality is more evident than her sisters'. She finds herself stuck between two languages. This, in exchange, makes her stuck between two cultures (Llorente, 2001). This confusing state of being is defined by Cuban sociologist Rúben G. Rumbaut as belonging to a 1.5 generation where the immigrant children belong to an intermediate group between the first and second generations (Rees, 2020).

Although all four of them potentially belong to this group, Yolanda demonstrates more relevance to the liminal and uncertain state. Hence, I chose to analyze Yolanda's character from the perspective of multilingualism.

Aims of the Study

A multilingual person or character can be analyzed through two different approaches, namely the holistic and atomistic views on multilingualism (Wei, 2011). The atomistic view looks at one or two linguistic aspects at a time when a multilingual individual is regarded as having separate monolingual competencies in separate languages (Cook and Bassetti, 2011). This is not practical as a multilingual person can be involved in multifarious situations with different interlocutors, and she might draw linguistic resources from her multilingual repertoire (the system that stores the languages inside speakers' brains) depending on the situation (Canagarajah, 2007). Hence, considering a person, along with her linguistic behaviors and identity, would provide a researcher with broader perspectives (Kramsch, 2010). Therefore, the character of Yolanda is analyzed in this paper from a holistic view of multilingualism. As a literary character instead of a person from the real world, Yolanda's character needs to be studied using the characterization model from Stylistics. According to Nørgaard, Busse & Montoro (2010),

> Stylistics is the study of the ways in which meaning is created through language in literature as well as in other types of text. To this end, stylisticians use linguistic models, theories, and frameworks as their analytical tools to describe and explain how and why a text works as it does, and how we come from the words on the page to its meaning (p. 1).

To analyze the unique features of characters, many models including humanizing and de-humanizing approaches have been proposed by many scholars (Eder, Jannidis, & Schneider, 2010; Bradley, 1965; Propp, 1968). For this study, Culpeper's (2001) model following mixed approaches is selected as it not only involves both approaches: humanizing

and de-humanizing, but also looks at the linguistic prompts of literary texts in a more coherent fashion through different textual cues (Cenoz, 2013). As the linguistic behaviors, expressions, and language use of Yolanda are analyzed, this model seems the most suitable for this study.

Based on the aims of the research, this study addresses the following question:

- How does Julia Alvarez use multilingualism to construct the character of Yolanda from *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*?

Multilingualism and Multilingual Identity

In this study, I choose to look at how the character Yolanda, from the novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent,* is portrayed through the holistic view of multilingualism. I decided to apply Culpeper's model of characterization in analyzing the linguistic data from the novel. Therefore, here I review the relevant literature on multilingualism, multilingual identity, and characterization in Stylistics.

Multilingualism is a complex notion that has been studied in different fields such as linguistics, sociology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, etc. (Cenoz, 2013). However, the definitions of the term multilingualism and people who are multilingual have been provided by many scholars including Li Wei (2008), according to whom,

> A multilingual individual is anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active, through speaking and writing or passive, through listening and reading. (p. 4)

Moreover, the European Commission (2005) has given a more well-known definition of multilingualism: "The ability of societies, institutions, groups, and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives" (p. 6).

The term multilingualism generally refers to both multilingualism and bilingualism according to the present-day mainstream position although, previously, many debates were raised about the difference between these two terms (Cenoz, 2013).

Multilingualism can be related to both individual and social levels. The ability to speak more than one language of an individual or the use of different languages spoken in society can both be considered as multilingualism. These two levels are interconnected as for the presence of multilingual people, a society can be known as multilingual. However, individual multilingualism can be termed plurilingualism to eliminate any confusion. The definition of plurilingualism given by the Council of Europe (n.d.) states that individuals having linguistic repertoires consisting of various languages are known as plurilingual. On the other hand, the geographical area that possesses various languages spoken by the people that live there is multilingual (Council of Europe, n.d.). In this case, not everyone must be plurilingual; many speakers can also be monolingual.

In terms of how individuals conceptualize the languages in their linguistic repertoire, multilingualism can have two views: holistic and atomistic (Wei, 2011). Cenoz (2013) stated that,

> Holistic view is based on the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole and can be opposed to atomistic, which regards something as interpretable through analysis into distinct, separable, and independent elementary components. (p. 10)

Hence, the holistic view looks at a multilingual person as a whole and considers her multilingual competence, whole linguistic repertoire, and language use in a social context which leads to multilingual identity formation (Kramsch, 2010). To analyze everyday linguistic behaviors and the identities associated with language use, one or two linguistic aspects would not be practical to look at (Canagarajah, 2007). Therefore, I chose to analyze the target character based on the holistic view of multilingualism for this study.

Multilingual speakers are highlighted as different from monolingual speakers by the holistic view. According to this approach, multilingual speakers store their languages as resources at their disposal which is known as their multilingual repertoire (Block, 2008). This tends to have more linguistic resources than that of monolinguals (Block, 2008). Research shows that all the linguistic resources in the repertoire help in third or fourth language acquisition (Cenoz, 2009). The use of different languages is different for multilingual speakers based on the situations or contexts they are in. This notion also differs from monolinguals as they use one language in all situations whereas multilingual speakers navigate among their languages, being dictated by various purposes, communicative situations, domains, and interlocutors (Moore and Gajo, 2009).

In connection with the holistic view, the development of linguistic identity in multilingual individuals is another key topic for this research. Identity formation is a continuous process in human life. What people conceive themselves to be and their position in relation to the interactions and roles they play in society contribute to their sense of identity through different contextual, interactional, and psychological factors (Harklau, 2007). In the identity-developing process, language plays a key role in representing the world through a unique set of lenses to the people. Linguistic identity is a complex notion as it affects the ways in which a person chooses to look at the world, feel, think, and sometimes, infer the meaning of what other people are saying (Norton, 1997). It becomes even more complicated in the case of some multilingual speakers whose mother tongue is different from the language they are supposed to use after growing up (Henry, 2017). In their linguistic repertoire, all the languages acquired in childhood or learned in adulthood coexist with one another. As a result, they find themselves in a liminal position while comprehending the meanings of the utterances of their monolingual or other multilingual friends and family (Llorente, 2001).

Characterization

According to Culpeper & Quintanilla (2017),

> The topic of characterization has long been studied in literary studies and especially literary criticism. Nevertheless, the topic of character creation and interpretation in fiction attracts the attention of various disciplines and seems to be approachable from a multitude of perspectives. (p. 93)

Thus, language is regarded as the central feature of characters in analyzing them and the impressions created by languages are significant in forming any character (Culpeper, 2001).

In connection with this notion, Bousfield (2014) argues that,

> The style (or way) in which characters are described, and, indeed, the style (or way) by which characters themselves interact all reveal how we, within the cultural context in which we receive the information, are being invited to see, to understand, to appreciate, empathize, sympathize or antipathize with those characters, and what they literally, metaphorically or metonymically represent … Therefore, a stylistic approach to understanding characters should – indeed, must – explore the language that those characters themselves are presented as using. (p. 118)

Like Bousfield, many scholars agree with the significance of languages in studying literary or fictional characters. Among them, Culpeper's contribution is foremost and extensive through his substantial studies in this area (McIntyre, 2014). According to him, three issues are pivotal in determining any character including readers' prior knowledge, readers' way of inferring the characters, and the textual cues that demonstrate the characterization (Culpeper, 2001).

From the ontological perspective of characters, two extreme approaches are found, namely humanizing and de-humanizing approaches (Eder, Jannidis & Schneider, 2010). The humanizing approach refers to the characters of any literary text as real-life people whom readers can treat like the people they know in their lives (Bradley, 1960; Harvey, 1965). This extreme is contradicted by the de-humanizing approach which presents the complete opposite argument by stating that characters of literary texts are merely textual constructs and cannot be regarded as real human beings (Knights, 1963; Weinsheimer, 1979; Greimas, 1966; Propp, 1968). Peer (1989) narrated that,

> Both in narrative and dramatic genres (to a much lesser extent in poetry) the issue of character is an important one. … More important still is that the category of character is, for its very formation, dependent on linguistic forms. Character, it can hardly be denied, is what readers infer from words, sentences, paragraphs, and textual composition depicting, describing, or suggesting actions, thoughts, utterances, or feelings of a protagonist. Thus, the linguistic organization of a text will predetermine to a certain degree the kind of "picture" one may compose of a protagonist. Therefore, the forms by which this is achieved need to be studied in detail. It appears that at this moment there is hardly a theoretical framework providing for this necessity. (p. 9)

Culpeper (2001) decided to propose an approach that is in between the two extremes.

For this research, Culpeper's model is used which is explained in the theoretical framework. Here, I reviewed the studies and literature related to real-life people as well as textual characters. Thus, this study will connect the notion of literary character as an author's construct with more humanistic features in terms of the character's linguistic choices and expressions.

Approaching the text

A qualitative approach was selected for this research as the aims of the study are related to the interpretation of the subjective meaning and the description of the textual context within which the target character resides (Fossey et al. 2002). Although this research is not directly concerned with real-life human experiences, the humanizing aspect of the fictional character is important to consider here. Many arguments about the humanizing and de-humanizing aspects of fictional characters have been presented by many scholars where some of them attributed characters to real-life human existence and others stated that characters are only the constructs of the texts (Bradley, 1960; Knight, 1963; Harvey, 1965; Weinsheimer, 1979; Greimas, 1966; Propp, 1968). However, Emmott (1997) argues that,

> In reading narrative texts, we imagine worlds inhabited by individuals who can be assumed to behave, physically and psychologically, in ways which reflect our real-life experiences of being situated in the real world. (p. 58)

Many scholars like Styan (1969), advocating the de-humanizing approach, could not wholly refute the aspect by agreeing that

> But in some sense, we must feel Lear, Macbeth, Hamlet are humans. We pity or admire because we are throughout the performance in contact with humanity in human situations: the figures in the pattern are, after all, human figures in a human pattern. (p. 164)

Furthermore, among the holistic and atomistic views explained earlier, for this study, I chose the holistic view which will help to combine the humanizing aspect of the character with the dehumanizing aspect of a whole person (Canagarajah, 2007). Consequently, the most suitable approach for this study is the qualitative one.

Theoretical Framework: Culpeper's Model

The meaning representation level in this model is provided by the Textbase part. Here, what the characters say and what is said about the characters are crucial to acknowledge the linguistic impressions created through those characters (Culpeper, 2001). The Surface structure deals with the linguistic choices ascribed to the characters such as their lexical, syntactic, and semantic use of the linguistic expressions that they employ (Culpeper, 2000). Hence, these two issues are looked at for the present study based on Yolanda from the target novel. To apply these two issues of Culpeper's model in analyzing Yolanda's multilingual identity, linguistic repertoire, and attitude toward languages, three textual cues within the Surface structure and Textbase are chosen to look at. These cues are known as explicit cues, implicit cues, and authorial cues (Culpeper, 2001).

Explicit cues

These types of cues are found in how characters use explicit linguistic expressions to refer to themselves and other characters. The explicit cues, thus, depict the impressions a character provides to the reader to judge and analyze what type of traits she has in the world of the text. This cue is categorized into two subtypes namely *self-presentation* and *other presentation*.

Self-presentation refers to the explicit linguistic expressions a character uses to describe herself or give any information about herself in the presence or absence of other characters within the world of the target text. For example, in the regressive plot of the novel, after Yolanda's parents decide to stay in the USA rather than return to the Dominican Republic, they start to look at things more seriously regarding the US. Although both parents always wanted their daughters including Yolanda to speak English like native speakers, they did not want to lose touch with their roots. The extract below shows the dilemma of being too immersed in the US culture and losing contact with the homeland at the same time. This explicit cue also underlines the multilingual as well as multicultural identities of Yolanda and her sisters.

> The next decision was obvious: we four girls would be sent summers to the Island so we wouldn't lose touch with la familia. The hidden agenda was marriage to homeland boys since everyone knew that once a girl married an American, those grandbabies came out jabbering in English and thinking of the Island as a place to go get a suntan. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 109)

Other-presentation deals with the explicit linguistic expressions characters use to depict or provide information about other characters. This study does not look at this subtype because of the word limit and scope. However, an excerpt is given here from the point of view of Yolanda's sister, Carla, as an example:

> Sandi touches her hand. She looks at her other sisters. Clive, they all know, has gone back to his wife again. "He's such a turd. How many times has he done this now, Yo?" "Yolanda," Carla corrects her. "She wants to be called Yolanda now." "What do you mean, wants to be called Yolanda now? That's my name, you know?" (Alvarez, 1991, p. 61)

Here, if I were to analyze Carla's character instead of Yolanda, I would look at how she describes Yolanda's preference to be called by her original name as an other-presentation by Carla's character.

Implicit cues

Unlike explicit cues, implicit cues look at the underlying prompt of language use in a literary text. In other words, the indirect implications of the characters' linguistic behaviors are analyzed in this type of cue. These cues can surface in different forms in the text such as conversational structure, conversational implicature, lexical items (word choice, phrases, expressions, etc.), syntactic features, accent, dialect, verse and prose, paralinguistic features (movies or drama), visual features, context, etc. (Culpeper, 2000). An example of the implicit cue (based on lexical items) is given below.

In the initial days in the US, Yolanda took shelter in the language to express her creativity. As a poet from her childhood, writing poetry was a way to express herself and relate to the new language. Her enthusiasm for language and linguistic expression led her to embrace this new language more easily than her sisters. In the following excerpt, the lexical cues imply the emergence of her multilingualism as well as her personal attempt to develop a

new linguistic identity to belong with the new linguistic group. The lexical items here are underlined.

> This (at night) was Yoyo's time to herself, after she finished her homework, while her sisters were still downstairs watching TV in the basement. Hunched over her small desk, the overhead light turned off, her desk lamp poignantly lighting only her paper, the rest of the room in warm, soft, uncreated darkness, she wrote her secret poems in her new language. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 136)

Authorial cues

These cues include the language used by the authors to give information about the character either in the form of a narration or through the names they attribute to the characters (Culpeper, 2001). In the novel, Yolanda's name, and some incidents regarding her nicknames, are considered under authorial cues. For example, the name Yolanda has Greek and Spanish origins. The name means violet flower with which the author connected the incident of John's nicknaming her "Violet" (Alvarez, 1991, p. 4). Yolanda's ex-husband John used to call her "violet" after the shrinking violet metaphor as he believed Yolanda's mental state was unstable and she was unnecessarily obsessed with her multilingual self-expressions.

Therefore, in Culpeper's model of characterization, language plays a pivotal role to depict a character's existence as well as the traits that she possesses in the realm of the target literary text. Hence, two of the issues in the form of three different textual cues from this model were chosen for this study.

Analyzing the Text

The selected extracts demonstrating explicit cues are arranged by starting from Yolanda's young age to gradually moving toward her adulthood. Julia Alvarez used three types of narrative voices in this novel: first-person, third person, and first-person plural. The cues are found in all the three types of voices. The extracts containing the cues are chosen from the important stages of Yolanda's life.

1. This excerpt shows Yolanda's initial days in the US. She talks about how her teacher used to make her feel at ease and at home in the foreign country:

   > Our first year in New York we rented a small apartment with a Catholic school nearby, by the Sisters of Charity, … I liked them a lot, especially my grandmotherly fourth-grade teacher, Sister Zoe. I had a lovely name, she said, and she had me teach the whole class how to pronounce it. Yo-lan-da. As the only immigrant in my class, I was put in a special seat in the first row by the window, apart from the other children so that Sister Zoe could tutor me without disturbing them. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 166)

2. The following section depicts Yolanda's high-school days where she tried to fit in with her peers. She expresses her lack of English vocabulary in this cue:

   > Back in those days, I had what one teacher called "a vivacious personality." I had to

> look up the word in the dictionary and was relieved to find out it didn't mean I had problems. English was then still a party favour for me – crack open the dictionary, find out if I'd just been insulted, praised, admonished, criticized. (p. 87)

3. The next extract shows Yolanda's first day of college where she met a boy named Rudy Brodermann Elmenhurst. In this cue, she talks about her alienating state from the American society through her then linguistic expressions:

> This guy with a name like a title leaned over and asked if I could lend him a piece of paper and a pen … I tore some pages out of my notebook, then rummaged in my pocketbook for another pen. I looked up with a sorry-eyed expression. "I don't have an extra pen," I whispered, complete sentences for whispers, that's what tells you I was still a greenhorn in this culture. (p. 90)

4. The extract below shows the end of Yolanda's relationship with Rudy when she met his parents, and, in this cue, she states how Rudy's parents complimented her "accentless" English:

> Rudy did not come calling the next day. I bumped into him as he was leaving with his parents and I was exiting my dorm to take the taxi to the bus to my parents' in New York … His parents did most of the chatting, talking too slowly to me as if I wouldn't understand native speakers; they complimented me on my "accentless" English and observed that my parents must be so proud of me. (p. 100)

5. Yolanda and her husband, John, used to have countless disagreements and arguments in their life together. Here, Yolanda talks about the emotional as well as linguistic detachment she felt with John after such an argument. This cue is presented through a third person narrative voice:

> He came home with a bouquet of flowers that she knew he had paid too much for … But as he handed them to her, she could not make out his words. They were clean, bright sounds, but they meant nothing to her. "What are you trying to say?" she kept asking. He spoke kindly, but in a language she had never heard before. She spoke precisely as if she were talking to a foreigner or a willful child. "John, can you understand me?" He pointed to his ears and nodded. Volume wasn't the problem. He could hear her. "Babble babble." His lips were in slow motion on each syllable. He is saying I love you, she thought! "Babble," she mimicked him. "Babble babble babble babble." Maybe that meant, still love you too, in whatever tongue he was speaking. (p. 77)

6. In the last paragraph of the novel, Yolanda recounts the incident about a kitten which she displaced from its mother when she was a child. She expresses her guilt over the act and the connection she felt with the kitten in terms of liminality in this cue:

> Then we moved to the United States. The cat disappeared altogether. I saw snow … I read books … I grew up, a curious woman, a woman of story ghosts and story devils, a woman prone to bad dreams and bad insomnia. There are still times I

> wake up at three o'clock in the morning and peer into the darkness. At that hour and in that loneliness, I hear her, a black-furred thing lurking in the corners of my life, her magenta mouth opening, wailing over some violation that lies at the center of my art. (p. 290)

To analyze the implicit cues in the selected extracts, I looked at two main recurring lexical items (according to the research question) or keywords: languages and liminality and the related words and phrases with each of them. The keywords and key phrases are illustrated below in Figures 1 and 2.

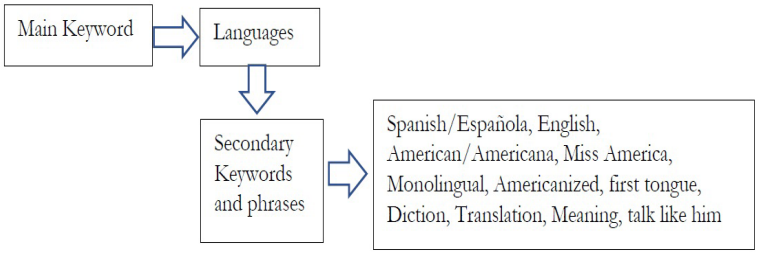

Figure 1: Keywords and phrases related to Language

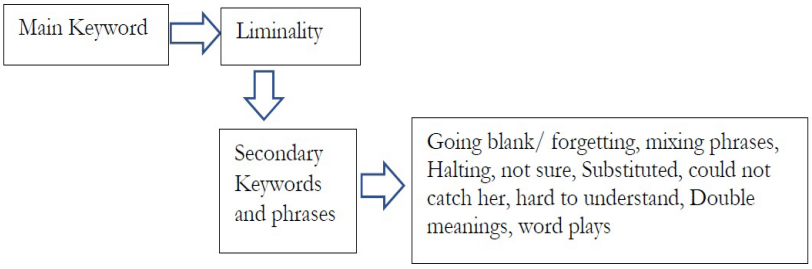

Figure 2: Keywords and phrases related to Liminality

1. The following extract represents Yolanda's earlier days in the US when she was having difficulty in agreeing to deliver the speech at her school assembly. The key-phrases here are forgetting, Spanish, hard to understand, and diction:

   > Several times that weekend around the supper table, he recited his own high school valedictorian speech … Laura sat across the table, the only one who seemed to be listening to him. Yoyo and her sisters were forgetting a lot of their Spanish, and their father's formal, florid diction was hard to understand. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 142)

2. During her stay in the Dominican Republic, Yolanda had difficulty communicating with her aunts in her mother tongue which was disapproved by them. This cue is depicted in the following extract through the key-phrases: halting Spanish, Español, going blank, and mixing phrases:

   > In halting Spanish, Yolanda reports on her sisters. When she reverts to English, she

> is scolded, "En Espanol." The more she practices, the sooner she'll be back into her native tongue, the aunts insist. Yes, and when she returns to the States, she'll find herself suddenly going blank over some word in English or, like her mother, mixing up some common phrase. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 7)

3. In the ensuing passage, Yolanda's confusion in understanding two Dominican men who wanted to help her is demonstrated. The key-phrases indicating the cue are Americana, no comprende (does not understand), and not sure:

> "Can we help you?" the shorter man repeats. The handsome one smiles knowingly … "Americana," he says to the darker man, pointing to the car. "No comprende." The darker man narrows his eyes and studies Yolanda a moment, "¡Americana?" he asks her, as if not quite sure what to make of her. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 20)

No authorial cue was considered for analysis due to the scope and word limit of the study.

Results and Discussion

Yolanda faces a constant sense of liminality regarding her linguistic identity and sense of belonging (Luis, 2000). Because of her multilingualism, she sometimes cannot understand the plain English expressions of monolingual speakers. Although she wants to belong to the US society, the English language, and culture, she still feels grateful when someone shows respect to her multilingual state and she feels insulted when the opposite happens. The unbalanced nature of her multilingualism is, hence, another important aspect of her character (Block, 2008).

In the first explicit cue, Yolanda praises a native English-speaking teacher who values her multilingual identity and foreign name instead of excluding her from her peers. Yolanda receives extra attention from the teacher so that she can teach her English vocabulary and pronunciation without disturbing the class. This incident makes Yolanda grateful to be acknowledged as a multilingual individual.

In the second explicit cue, Yolanda is explaining her linguistic situation in high school. Whatever new words and expressions she used to hear, she needed to look for the meaning in the dictionary. She says, English was still a "party favour" for her which shows the intermingling of two languages: Spanish and English in her repertoire but she was still not "fully competent" in the latter. This also shows a somewhat imbalanced multilingualism in Yolanda's character.

Yolanda describes her first college day in the third explicit cue. She recalls the time when a classmate asked for a pencil, and she whispered that she did not have one. This indicates that "native" speakers generally whisper sentences in fragments, not a complete sentence unlike her. Yolanda believes this tiny distinction shows her "greenhorn" status in American society. Due to her multilingualism, she struggles to fully belong to her new linguistic and cultural identity (Barak, 1998).

In the fourth explicit cue, Yolanda meets Rudy's parents for the first time. When they hear her speaking with "accentless" English, they praise her, saying that Yolanda's parents would

be very proud of her. This demonstrates how other people living in the US society view multilingual people and their accents. Besides, they speak to Yolanda slowly so that she can understand them which seems patronizing to her.

Yolanda and John had several fights, as shown in the fifth explicit cue. In this excerpt, John gives Yolanda an expensive bouquet of flowers as a peace offering after an argument. His apology words are incomprehensible to her. She tries to understand but only hears "babble babble." She calls John a "wilful child" for not communicating clearly. This displays the language difference between monolingual John and multilingual Yolanda. This incident exaggerates verbal misunderstanding, but it highlights their continual linguistic and emotional incomprehension during their marriage.

In the last explicit cue discussed in this research, Yolanda recounts an incident from her childhood where she displaced a kitten from its mother as she wanted to keep the kitten. Although she let the kitten go after a few moments, the wailing of the mother cat haunted her for a long time. Even after migrating to the US, she can still hear the cat crying with a deep sense of grief. This event does not only depict the kitten's displacement and its mother's wailing but also underlines Yolanda's displacement from the Dominican Republic when she was also a little child. She tries to cope with the linguistic and cultural change by fitting in with her American peers but deep down, she still feels the pang of liminality, being stuck between two languages and two cultures (Llorente, 2001).

In the first implicit cue, Yolanda is asked to give a speech in the school assembly. However, she is hesitant to take on the role as everything around her is still new and she feels too anxious to take any risk. Her father, Carlos, tries to convince her by saying how prestigious this role would be for her. In this regard, he recites his own valedictorian speech in Spanish during dinner time. However, Yolanda and her sisters do not understand the formal dictions in Spanish as they had already begun to forget a lot of their vocabulary in that language. Back in 1991, Spanish was not as prestigious or popular as it is today and thus, this incident shows English to be prioritized from her multilingual repertoire (Llorente, 2001).

In the next implicit cue, Yolanda visits the Dominican Republic as an adult when she begins to forget a lot of her Spanish while English takes control of her linguistic repertoire over time. She tries to reply to her aunts and cousins in Spanish but cannot help reverting to English as she struggles to find proper Spanish vocabulary to carry out her conversation despite being scolded because of it. This shows her unbalanced nature of multilingualism but only this time, English takes control over the languages in her repertoire. However, as her aunts scold her for her poor Spanish, she thinks that if she wants to improve her Spanish now, she will forget her English after going back to the US which further portrays the struggle of multilingual speakers.

The last implicit cue analyzed in this study depicts another incident from the same time as the eighth cue. Here, Yolanda's car tyre gets flat in the middle of the road and two Dominican men come to assist. However, though Yolanda can understand the men's

questions, she cannot bring herself to answer them in Spanish. This gives the Dominican men the impression that she is an American and cannot understand them. Both the long detachment from her motherland and the familiarity she feels toward English make her stuck and confused.

Conclusion

The notion of multilingualism has been extensively studied by researchers from various fields including linguistics and literature. However, the multilingual existence of literary characters through their linguistic expressions has gained little attention over the years (Cenoz, 2013). This study looked at that aspect from the perspective of the cognitive stylistics of characterization using Culpeper's (2001) model along with a holistic view of multilingualism to include both humanizing and de-humanizing aspects of the character (Canagarajah, 2007; Kramsch, 2010). The character, Yolanda, from *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* written by Julia Alvarez was analyzed in this study.

The aims of this research were to analyze the character's construction based on multilingualism, how it affects her life, and how her linguistic identities develop differently from those of her monolingual peers. According to the aims, the research question included the topics of the character's multilingualism, different linguistic features, practices, and multilingual repertoire.

The novel's plot is based on the sociolinguistic context of Rafael Trujillo's reign from 1930s to mid-1960 when the position of the Spanish language in terms of prestige was not as favorable as it is today (Llorente, 2001). However, the liminal state that multilingual, immigrant children feel, and the challenges they face because of it turned out to be very similar in Yolanda's character and many empirical studies that have been done before (Norton, 1997; Harklau, 2007; Racicot, 2001; Garett, 2006). Any one or two linguistic aspects of her character were not looked at for this study. Instead, through the holistic view of multilingualism, the character of Yolanda was analyzed as a whole person making use of different languages in different situations. Besides, the impacts of multilingualism that are found on her sense of existence were also studied through analyzing her linguistic identity and repertoire.

The findings from the data analysis section show that regarding her linguistic identity and sense of belonging, Yolanda has a constant sense of confusion because of the presence of multilingualism. Being a multilingual individual, she occasionally finds it difficult to comprehend what monolingual people are saying in simple English. Despite her desire to integrate into American society and the English language and culture, she feels appreciative when others acknowledge her multilingual state. On the contrary, if people demonstrate a pejorative or condescending attitude toward her multilingual identity, she feels hurt and insulted. Another crucial element of her personality is the unbalanced nature of her multilingualism where two languages from her repertoire, English and Spanish, are never equally dominant.

Through this research, a linguistic analysis of a literary character is demonstrated. Readers can sometimes relate to the complex nature of literary characters more than their real-life peers. Additionally, the characters do not just offer predetermined linguistic expressions

fashioned by authors; they also offer insight into the authors' linguistic inclinations and beliefs intertwined with their creativity (Rees, 2020). Hence, it is recommended to consider literary characters both from humanizing and dehumanizing perspectives to analyze their linguistic contributions. This study adds to the existing literature on characterization and literary multilingualism. This is also expected to contribute to more studies on literary characters' linguistic behaviors and expressions in the future.

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Book Review

The Living Mountain: A Primer for Our Troubled Times

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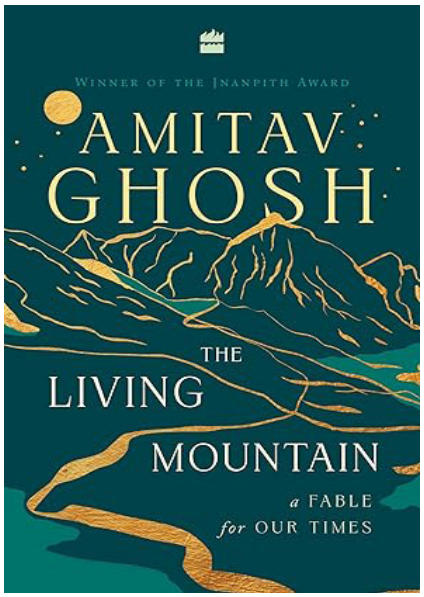

The Living Mountain
Amitav Ghosh
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The twentieth century witnessed the rapid growth of urbanization all over the world. In place of natural forests, the concrete jungles sprang overnight like mushrooms. This was in total contrast with the sylvan settings of the previous era. This sudden change brought about new human habitats and also a new set of problems which initially defied solutions due to the changed human mindset. Since literature is said to be the mirror of societal norms, the new social conditions began to make inroads into the realm of literature too. Gradually, the focus was shifted to day-to-day struggles of human beings and the writers were busy painting the real-life travails and moments of happiness on the broad canvas of life. In the process, the man-nature interaction, which had been center stage in literary writings for generations, took a back seat. In the wide spectrum of Indian writing in English, not much has been written with focus on man-nature interaction. However, this theme can never be out of place.

Amitav Ghosh is a renowned author on the Indian literary scene. He is one of the most prominent litterateurs who has profusely written on the theme of man-nature relationship. In this connection, his book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* directly deals with the ominous crisis of climate change which has started troubling mankind in ample measures. This is an open secret that the present situation is created by disturbing the fine balance between man and nature. In this ground-breaking work of nonfiction, Ghosh examines our inability, at the level of literature, history, and politics, to grasp the scale and violence of climate change. He has changed the narrative of climate change as a scientific question into the wide precincts of culture, politics, and power. His recent book, *Jungle Nama*, is a story of the Sundarbans where he has narrated in verse the popular fictional tale of Dokkhin Rai and the Mistress of the Forest, Bon Bibi. The story mirrors the intricate human-nature relationship which is so relevant in the current perspective.

The original print version of this legend dates back to the nineteenth century, composed in a Bengali verse meter known as dwipodi-poyar. *Jungle Nama* is a free adaptation of the legend, told entirely in the same meter, replicating the cadence of the original. Incidentally, he wrote this tale in prose in his famous novel, *The Hungry Tide*, a few years ago. His latest book, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, brings to life alternative visions of humans flourishing in consonance with the rest of nature.

His recent book *The Living Mountain* "is a cautionary tale of how we have systematically exploited nature, leading to an environmental collapse," according to the introductory comments on the book. This is a fable, narrating a dream about Mahaparbat, the Living Mountain. One fateful day, a girl named Maansi randomly selected a book for reading. The book was about some poor people stranded on a remote island suffering a terrible fate. The whole scenario gave birth to a haunting dream in the night that was reproduced in the present form of a fable by the illustrious writer. In the dream, the young girl found herself living in a valley which was a "cluster of warring villages" in the Himalayas. The Great Mountain, Mahaparbat, a gigantic and snowy mountain peak, remained firm overlooking the valley. There was a storehouse of a large variety of herbs, trees, and other natural resources. But the inhabitants of the valley strictly followed a cardinal rule that they would never set foot on the slopes of Mahaparbat. Besides, they considered it very alive. They told stories, sang about it, and danced to it. In a nutshell, the Great Mountain was an object of great reverence for the local communities. Their dances were led by women including Adepts who were undoubtedly, most skilled amongst them. Adepts, while dancing, would go into a trance and it was believed that the Great Mountain spoke to them through the soles of their feet. The communities were aided and advised by the elders, both men and women, who were worldly wise and the real protectors of the natural resources lying in the lap of the great mountain. Once a year at the time of melting snow, they proceeded towards a fixed point outside their villages and indulged in a barter trade with the foreigners who came there for trading purposes. The whole idea was that no person from the outside world should cross the threshold of the valley. They revered their Great Mountain and cared for it at all costs. In return, the inhabitants of the valley surrounding this gigantic Mountain had survived the ravages of time under its sprawling shadows. However, a dent was successfully managed by the people from outside, known as Anthropoi, who gathered the knowledge about the geography and the natural resources found in that hinterland first by sending their savants. Thereafter, they sent their armed forces to infiltrate the area surrounded by the Mahaparbat. They crushed the local resistance without making any serious effort and rushed forward along the high peak in search of the most valuable natural resources. Adorned with the colonial mindset, they replaced the old village elders and introduced the new faces of their choices. Elderly women who were the repository of age-old wisdom found no place in their scheme of things. They deliberately tarnished the image of the old village system which was based on practical experiences and worldly wisdom. The inhabitants there were made to believe that they were inferior in all respects to the Anthropoi class. They plundered the natural wealth of the region at their own sweet will. But with the passing of time, their strength was reduced and their appetite for more

riches had also diminished. Consequently, the baton was taken by the interested locals who saw an opportunity there in the exploits of the outside invaders. They filled up the gap created by the Anthropoi. The same vices and the elements of avarice crept into their behavior, leading them to natural calamities such as avalanches, landslides, crevices in the slopes of the mountain, etc. The people below, toiling in the fields, and others were the worst casualty. The unbridled avarice for the natural resources resulted in the gradual destruction of the once flourishing human habitation. In the process, they learnt that they had forgotten the stories, songs, and steps to dance in the praise of Mahaparbat. In the last sequence, when an Adept, the skilled dancer, dances like before, she could feel the Mountain reverberating under her feet as though in response to her dance. Thereafter, she scolds her fellow inhabitants and gives the message that the people are not the masters, and the Mountain is not the child which needs care. The only thing is that humans should understand nature and honor her majestic presence.

The fable is a reminder of the colonial approach in the political field being replicated in the realm of nature. Here also, the faces change with time to do the damage. Every newcomer barges into a country or specific territory and starts by attacking the very roots of its intellectual and moral moorings. Next lies the step of imposing the new philosophy, morality code, and the principles of ethics. This has been well articulated in this fable. By the end, the reader is apprised of the genesis of climate catastrophe and the frightening results of wantonly playing games with nature. But the question remains as to what is the way out? How can people exactly know about the coming tragedy? Moreover, how to balance the development process necessary for human beings with the conservation of nature or the natural resources? These questions require plausible answers given the condition that people now are more aware about the phenomenon of climate change and global warming. Everyone is in search of answers which are missing in this otherwise interesting literary fable where it was possible to conceive some solutions. People want answers and solutions to these horrendous problems of our times. This book is a must read for those who care about nature and the environment.

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