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Editorial Note

Volume 12 of *Crossings* upholds the journal's commitment to rigorous scholarship. Over the last "era," the peer-reviewed journal has offered a platform for critical dialogue and debate, participated in by both eminent and emerging scholars. The previously published volumes show how English Studies has evolved in the last decade or so. The connectivity and mobility of scholarship, thanks to the growth in technology, have further impacted the change. Twelve years ago, we started as a local journal, and now we can claim to be a truly international open-access journal as reflected by our editorial board and contributors.

It has been the journal's policy to publish articles on different issues in contemporary criticism and culture without any particular bias. The scope developed is enterprising as we incorporate topics on language, linguistics, literature, and cultural studies while the occasional papers allow us to incorporate interesting discourse not necessarily laden with academic jargon.

In this volume, Prof. Ian Almond's talk given at ULAB is featured as an occasional paper. Prof. Almond reflects on the hotel as a site of stories with a particular focus on the "political, psychological, and existential" implications of hotel narratives to remind us of an experiential reality that we often take for granted.

The literature and cultural studies section critically engages with both cutting-edge thought and traditional ideas. Topics range from the film trilogy *The Matrix* to Naya scroll printing in India; Emily Dickinson's negotiations of patriarchal expectations in the nineteenth century to the abolition of gender in speculative fiction; the "still activism" in the indigenous narratives of North America to the tribal resistance to State oppression in India; tracing Bengal in East Africa through the avant-gardist experiments in the 1960s to locating Keatsian Romanticism in our national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam; from domicile loci of a homemaker in Ismat Chughtai's novels to the docile representation of women in young adult fiction. The current discussion on biopolitics and eco-concerns permeate the volume with textual analysis. The section truly represents the changing paradigm of English Studies and subconsciously captures the essence of world literature.

The language section includes a careful semiotic analysis of Bangladeshi TV programs, an insightful piece on the loan words in the Saharan language Kanuri as well as skill-based teaching in a Bangladeshi classroom.

The book reviews introduce us to the short stories of Shakti Ghosh and a festschrift published on Prof. Amritjit Singh.

We welcome your feedback on the journal for its overall improvement.

On behalf of the Editorial Board,

Shamsad Mortuza, PhD

Editor

Occasional Paper

The Hotel Narrative in Turkish, Mexican, and Bengali Fiction

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It is a great honor to be able to speak at this webinar,¹ and I thank the ULAB authorities for giving me this time. I came to ULAB a year ago, and I have very fond memories of Dhanmondi and all the friendliness and hospitality I received. The feeling is definitely reciprocated.

Today I am going to talk a little bit about the hotel in world literature. I am going to go through it as quickly as possible without getting too bogged down in the minutiae of what the text says. We are looking at three hotel novels. The talk is based on a chapter of my new book, *World Literature Decentered*. I think it is important to start by saying why I am talking about Mexico, Turkey, and Bengal. The book largely comes out of a series of frustrations with current concepts of world literature and world history, concepts which I, and an increasing number of scholars, feel are overwhelmingly Euro-American in nature. I always begin by saying that the West is ten percent of the planet or that Europe and America make up ten percent of the planet. So the non-West is not some token minority that needs our attention – it is the overwhelming majority of this world. So that really is the wider context here. Instead of theoretically deconstructing notions of world literature, I am trying really to performatively engage with it through three non-Western regions, and those three regions, those three literary traditions if you like, are Turkey, Bengal, and Mexico. And there are about five topics that I choose: I look at melancholy, I look at the ghost story, I look at Orientalism ... but one of those chapters is on the hotel.

So, that is really where this is coming from today; it is a chapter within this wider text. Why the hotel? There is something quite curious about the hotel. In a way, it is a collection, a box of stories. I think what is curious about the hotel narrative is that it addresses simultaneously the question of the micro and the macro. So, on the one hand, it is an accommodation of a whole series of miniature existences, and in a sense, it reflects the hotel itself. The hotel is an accommodation of the particularities of individual existences. I mean, in many ways, what is interesting about the hotel,

¹ This webinar was presented on November 27, 2020 at the Fall 2020 Seminar Series organized by the Department of English and Humanities (DEH), University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). The lecture was transcribed by Khadija Rubaiyat Tasmia (Supervisor, The English Zone, ULAB), Mashiur Rahaman, Vincent Dip Gomes, and Shahriyer Hossain Shetu (students of DEH). It is based on a chapter taken from Ian Almond, *World Literature Decentered: Beyond the 'West' through Turkey, Mexico and Bengal* (Routledge, 2021). The lecture may be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/125162620861384/videos/222975315894460>.



in a macro political sense, is that it is on the cusp of a series of overlapping paradigms within modernity. So the most obvious thing to say here is that the hotel is largely a nineteenth-century product of industrial and, indeed, colonial modernity. It is a consequence of an increasingly bourgeois society, the leisure needs of an increasingly bourgeois travelling class, and it is certainly connected to empire itself. In some ways, it could even be seen as a facilitator of colonial influence – you do not need me to tell you how much this is reflected in South Asian cities.

The main hotels here have always had these imperial sounding names, so I think what is perhaps most interesting is that the hotel is a moment of alienation. It is where you purchase alienation if you like, you purchase for a limited amount of time, a space, and a time in which you can separate yourself, at your own expense, from your community. And for that reason perhaps it often has these seedy images. Because you escape momentarily from your community in a hotel, it is a place that invites transgressive practices. So, for all of these different reasons, the hotel tells a great deal about larger issues, larger frameworks, socio-political frameworks, and indeed even, I would argue, theological and philosophical questions. And that is what we are gravitating towards today in looking at these three novels. Shankar is obviously the pen name derived from Mani Shankar Mukherjee. His novel *Chowringhee*, translated by Arunava Sinha in 2010, appeared in the original Bangla version in 1962. Yusuf Atilgan's *Anayurt Oteli*, the Turkish novel written in 1973, *Motherland Hotel* in English, was translated, I would say, five or six years ago, and then finally we have a novel which is yet to be translated in English, Guillermo Fadanelli's *Hotel DF*, a Mexican novel from 2010.

What I am really interested in here is examining what the function of the hotel is in these narratives, what role it has, what implications – political, psychological, existential – it has, and to what extent hotel narratives, in particular from these three very different regions, reflect transcultural patterns of modernity, and the transcultural mechanisms of modernity's project. When I say hotel narratives here, what I mean is a text that has the hotel as the center of its narrative. The hotel narrative is not simply a narrative, which has a hotel playing a function in the background, in a peripheral way. There are lots of stories like this. In Roberto Bolano's *2666*, the first volume starts at a hotel. There is Elena Garro's *Memories of Things to Come*, a Mexican novel which has the Hotel Jardin as a kind of Edenic space within the novel. And, of course, other texts in Turkish literature, for example, Tomris Uyar's *Guests of the Dying Hotel*, can be considered as hotel narratives. Adalet Agaoglu's *Ölmeye Yatmak (Lying Down to Die)* has not been translated into English, but it is a suicide novel set largely in a hotel, and so on. So what we are really looking at are novels and short stories which revolve around the idea of the hotel in a kind of referential way, as they stage, or if you like, foreground the device of the hotel. And,

of course, I should just finally add that these three novels are all based on physical hotels.

Shankar's *Chowringhee* is based on the hotel Shahjahan, a fictitious hotel based on a real hotel in the heart of Calcutta. Yusuf Atilgan's *Motherland Hotel* is a fictitious hotel but based on a town, probably in present-day Manisa in western Turkey, and Guillermo Fadanelli's *Hotel Isabel* is also set in the middle of DF, the acronymic name for Mexico City (Distrito Federal).

We will start with Shankar's *Chowringhee*, a funny, interesting, and brilliantly written novel, which tells the tale of the narrator Shankar who gets a job working in one of the largest hotels in the immediate aftermath of the Raj in 1950s India. It was the subject of a very famous 1968 film. It has been called "India's corporate story" but I think that it does a disservice to the much more ambivalent relationship to capitalism that you get in the text. So, even though of course there is ultimately the authority, and particularly the sentimentality which is sometimes given to the Hotel Shahjahan in the text, the ultimate legitimacy of the idea of a five-star hotel is never really called into question. Nevertheless, there are extremely acidic moments where Shankar almost references a kind of poison that the hotel oozes, one that has an enormously corrosive atmosphere on whoever works or lives in it. I will get into this a little bit later but there is even a sense in which there is something quasi-supernatural about the hotel. There is something about the number of deaths that are connected with the hotel which I think in many ways highlights a much more materialistic, cynical attitude towards the concentration of capital which obviously a five-star hotel like that represents.

I think the most obvious thing to say about the idea of the hotel here is that you get the idea of the hotel as a tomb of Empire. In *Chowringhee* the protagonist is the clerk of the last English barrister of the Raj before independence came. Moreover, the hotel owner's name is Marco Polo. He has a resemblance to Churchill, and, in fact, there are all kinds of ways in which Empire and not just the British Empire but also the Moghul insinuates itself in the text – we will see this also in the other texts. In the Turkish novel, the *Motherland Hotel* is basically an Ottoman palace from the Tanzimat period. And we will also see this in *Hotel DF* – even the name of the hotel is Hotel Isabel, after the queen of Spain who, together with Ferdinand, "discovered," so to speak, their *Nuevo Mundo*, the new world, and we see all of these imperial echoes in these three texts. But certainly in *Chowringhee*, you do get the sense of the Hotel Shahjahan as a kind of last tenuous link to the dying Raj. So there is an almost displaced sense in which the literally postcolonial atmosphere of the Raj with its muffins, and English tea, and English menus, and Indian workers called Johnny and Rodger and Sally, persist almost in a kind of sepulchral way. To underline that,

let us have a quick look at some examples here:

The centuries-old spirit [*shotabdi prahina atma*] of Shahjahan Hotel kept asking, ever louder, “Who are you? Why are you here?” (85, 73)

Life, youth and everything else in this city are transitory – nothing can defy eternity and keep standing in Calcutta. But Shahjahan Hotel stands upright with unbelievable arrogance ... It survives [*tike thakbe*] – and not even Simpson [the hotel founder] could have imagined that it would have withstood the ravages of time and lasted so long. (85, 75)

And the third one:

... we went to the Lower Circular Road cemetery ... Flowers in hand, we entered that silent city of the dead. ... None of them [boys of William Lane] ... was probably alive any more, but Shahjahan Hotel lived on, eternally young, beckoning the hungry, the thirsty and the lustful with its bewitching charm. (137, 119)

What I would like to stress here is really a sort of the sense of the undead, the idea that the Empire persists in a kind of lurid, obscene fashion. And I am thinking here openly of Freud and the notion of the Death Drive, and the idea that there is something about the spirit of Empire which is obscene and lewd, and persists in its own almost lugubrious obstinacy. It does really make me think as well of Lacan’s idea that authority and obscenity are somehow linked. That obscenity is like the unspeakable inverse of authority, and certainly, there is something of this sense in the Hotel Shahjahan. And as I said, it even lends the physical place an almost uncanny atmosphere, an uncanny feeling in this respect.

The second thing I just want to say about *Chowringhee* before I go on to the next novel is that there is another aspect of this, which is really the idea of misogyny. The idea of the hotel as a femicidal space; and again you find this in all three novels. In *Hotel DF* there is the murder of one of the guests, Sophia. There is also this sense that it is a hotel that is regularly used for sex trafficking and the murder of women. And then of course in the Turkish novel, there is the pivotal moment – his murder of the chambermaid – which changes the hotel owner and turns him into a kind of maniac.

But certainly, the misogyny is also there in Shankar’s *Chowringhee*. And I would argue that although it is a very funny novel, and it is a brilliantly funny novel, some of the darkest subtexts in the novel are the way a sort of under-age prostitution takes place and where the hotel owners are trying to get dancing girls and making sure they are as young as possible, but also the various ways in which female workers in the story are killed or commit suicide. And again, it does suggest that there

is something not just patriarchal but *femicidally* patriarchal about the idea of the hotel. Maybe this is not wholly unrelated to the point I just made previously about the lurid undead feel of the hotel as a *topos*.

So that brings us on to the second novel which is Yusuf Atılgan's *Anayurt Oteli* or *Motherland Hotel*. This is a novel, which is written in 1973, and like *Chowringhee* it was the subject of a very famous Turkish film in 1980. So both of the texts led to successful cinema adaptations. I think the main thing to say about *Motherland Hotel*, with respect to the other two, is that it is a much darker novel. In terms of the hotels, whereas Hotel Isabel and Hotel Shahjahan are flourishing city center institutions that attract a lively and diverse clientele, *Motherland Hotel* is a little seedier, located in the back of a railway station in a provincial town in post-war Turkey. The customers that come through its doors are usually either prostitutes, unmarried couples, or homosexuals. So it is definitely highlighting them in all transgressive aspects that we might associate with hotels. Like *Chowringhee*, it starts off in a comic way because the hotel owner Zeberjet is a classic case of OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder). The first third of the novel documents quite comically the extent to which he has special routines, all the various things he puts in various pockets and the pathological way he observes these routines. For example: the legal, aboveboard things he puts into his right pocket, and all the kind of *haram*, morally dubious things go into his left pocket. The pathology of the hotel owner in the second half of the novel becomes very unfunny. Because the chambermaid whose sexual services he has always enjoyed is suddenly murdered by him in a fit of rage, primarily because another very beautiful woman with whom Zeberjet has fallen in love at first sight, promises she will come back on the next train from Ankara and never arrives. The crushing disappointment of this, ontologically if you like, causes his world to collapse and what you get in the second half of the novel is a series of increasingly bizarre, maniacal gestures as Zeberjet in effect mentally dissolves.

One final thing I would like to suggest here is the use of the hotel as a secular space, perhaps not just as a secular space but a godless space, a place that resists religion. We have seen this in the other two novels as well. In *Chowringhee*, in the Hotel Shahjahan there is really only one religious character, Nityahari, who goes around singing *Kaali Maa Kaali*. He is really the only religious figure; otherwise, it is an extremely secular novel. And also, when we get to *Hotel DF*, the only religious moment there is a sort of pseudo-Catholic moment of vision as the narrator describes the girl of their dreams, and how she appeared in an apparition to him. But otherwise, both novels very much rest on an animosity, I would say, towards the notion of another world. And it is certainly seen in *Motherland Hotel* as well.

So what do I mean when I say the “hotel as a secular space?” This is partly seeing the

hotel as a development of modernity, as something which perhaps even offers services which parallel religion: the idea of a community, the idea of a self-mythologizing entity, the idea of a venue where one might find refuge, but I think also, what obviously lies within this, is a sense of a kind of nihilism, which perhaps, results from the withdrawal of the subject from a community, the creation, if you like, of a God-proof pocket where one might seek refuge from the outside laws of religion, modernity, and morality.

And, of course, in the Turkish novel, this coincides with the establishment of the Turkish Republic, specifically the culture. I am going to be culturally specific here for a moment. In Atilgan's novel, there is an explicit series of allusions to the *Jumhuriyat*, to the Turkish republic. The *Motherland Hotel*, unsurprisingly, is founded in 1922, the same year as the republic, and there is a portrait of Atatürk on the wall. There is definitely a sense of some kind of a very uncomfortable allusion, as the metaphor of the secular republic is being played out in this form of a hotel – of a failed hotel in many ways, and a hotel which attracts homicide and suicide, because the owner hangs himself at the end in the hotel. This is the idea of the hotel as the antithesis of a religious narrative. And then secondly, perhaps, we might also consider the work of Siegfried Kracauer and his famous essay on the hotel lobby, “Die Hotelhalle” (1922), where he argues that the hotel might be considered almost the inversion of the image of God's house, a place where we congregate with no overarching transcendental vision to bring us together. That text is, ironically, as early as 1922, so very early on people were glimpsing that there is nothing new about the idea of the structure of the hotel as having very secular metaphysical possibilities. I think I'll mention another thing about the novel before going on to the third novel. We do see an emphasis on the concept of history and indeed even on the practice of history, in all three of these novels. So, one of the characters in Fadanelli's *Hotel DF* is a historian. In Shankar's *Chowringhee*, there is a very curious sense that, all the way through the novel, there is a constant, almost archival obsession with the history of the hotel. There is almost something quasi-theological about the way we never really meet the English founder – he is kind of mythologized, all we hear are records about him, so there is a vague obsession with the chronicling of the hotel. We certainly see this obsession reflected as well in *Motherland Hotel*, if we look at this passage from the middle:

Registers from the previous years were stored in a chest under the stairs together with some thick history books of his father's, printed in the old Arabic script (*eski yaz birkac tarih kitabıyla birlikte*). Once Zeberjet was out of grade school his father had taught him this script.

Zeberjet does not know why, beneath the stairs of the hotel, there is an old set of

ledgers written in the Ottoman Arabic script. First of all, for people who are not familiar, this is an explicit reference to the Romanization of the Turkish alphabet, which took place in 1928. So this rupture, this orthographical rupture, shows where a whole generation was made illiterate overnight. What we see here is, increasingly as the novel progresses, the gradual implosion and then explosion of history. We start out with very little sense of the *Motherland Hotel*, and we are brought into this world of anecdotes and stories, and we begin to get a much deeper sense of its history. It's almost the idea of history as a depth charge, and of this, if you like, subversive Arabic script (it was illegal to write in Arabic script after these alphabets were switched). There is something about the way in which the hotel becomes a reflection on history. The hotel is almost a kind of archival space in which history is meditated upon, but not in a healthy fashion, but rather almost incestuously and compulsively.

The third novel, Guillermo Fadanelli's *Hotel DF* (2010), is a recent novel, from ten years ago. Guillermo Fadanelli is a very prolific writer. He has written eleven novels, and this is the eighth one. His writings are sometimes referred to as "literatura basura," "garbage literature," literature which concerns the abject of society, the marginal of society, you might say almost the urban detritus of society. This novel has had a mixed reception, so people like Valeria Luiselli, the famous Mexican writer, have praised it as a voice from the margins, whilst other critics, most notably Diana Palaversich, have argued that this is actually a very misogynist book filled typically with male fantasies of the female. Whatever we feel about that, here is very much a sense of the hotel as a melancholic space. That is probably the main thing I would like to underline. At the same time, we find this melancholy in all three novels we are looking at. There is certainly an incremental secession from reality in Zeberjet in the Turkish novel, in the way he half lives out his unfulfilled life, and the melancholy expectations of a life that is never quite realized. And the Hotel Shahjahan is definitely melancholic, not just nostalgic – a longing for the good old times of the hotel's heyday – but also the broken dreams of the various people who work within the Shahjahan. Karabi, one of the female workers, hopes to marry the owner's son, and when this is denied, she commits suicide. Suicide and melancholy seem to belong almost intrinsically to the genre of the hotel novel. Certainly, in the Mexican novel *Hotel DF* too, we find a very melancholic space, I would say primarily because there is a diverse range of characters, socioeconomically. So we have drug dealers, academics, tourists, we have the whole gamut of demographics. But many of these characters are frustrated – fixated hopelessly on goals outside their means, trying to recover things that are irrecoverable, trapped in difficult relationships, and certainly the epitome of this is the protagonist whose name is Frank Henestrosa. Frank is, in many ways, a very saturnine protagonist. He has a melancholic air about

him. What he has in common with the other characters is that there is almost a sense of what Heidegger called *geworfenheit* or “thrownness.” The various characters in the novel (I am talking about all the guests in the *Hotel DF*) almost feel like they are thrown into the world – to use Heidegger’s term, *geworfen* – as they are senseless and drifting randomly. Here are a couple of quotes from Frank, the protagonist of the novel:

If I wasn’t a hypocrite, I would help [the chambermaid] do the cleaning. But if I did I would lose her respect. (130)

What am I looking for I don’t know, perhaps my own face (80)

In front of an old mirror on the wall that suddenly reflects the reception of the Hotel Isabel, I observe my own sad image [*observo mi triste imagen*] ... If I didn’t have money on me it would probably depress me just seeing the orderly, modest gentleman. And who doesn’t get depressed at my age. (41-2)

Certainly, what we are seeing here is the idea of the hotel as an alienating space, as a space in which, I was about to say, a forced introspection takes place. In many ways, this space subtly inflicts a melancholic introspection upon the guests. Some of this is due to physical isolation, but of course, partly through the psychological and mental isolation which occupying a small room entails. There is this sort of dissolution of identity that we get in several of the characters. I am interested in the way the hotel is seen as emblematic of the modern crisis of the subject, and the way the characters are existentially blended together in this novel to provide a larger comment on Mexican society, and, I think, in many ways as well, getting back to religion, on the idea of a fallen world. So we have very much a godless world.

From the hotel lobby of the Mexican hotel, the portrait of Queen Isabel is removed by the end of the story. It is almost explicitly a theocidal moment, when we have Hotel Isabel without its Isabel. But there is the world of centerless crime where we hear of a lot of crime going on, but we are not quite sure of who is doing what to whom; we are told it happens on the 2nd floor – which reminds me of José Emilio Pacheco’s wonderful short story about, among other things, someone who digs a tunnel and discovers a corpse in this tunnel, and the idea that whenever you dig a tunnel in Mexico you always come across two other tunnels. Whenever you try to investigate a crime, you come across two or three crimes that you are not looking for. The world is intrinsically lost, beyond any kind of moral order or moral recoverability. Certainly, the *Hotel DF* communicates this in a very saturnine way. It does make you wonder why these writers inject this sense of melancholy into the hotel novel. And I would say there is almost a sense of mimetic compensation here, that there is something about the melancholic atmospheres that are injected into

these hotel stories. It reminds me actually of Deleuze's idea of the Baroque. Deleuze talks about the multiple chambers of the Baroque, whether it is in Leibniz, whether it is in Bach, whether it is in the *Trauerspiel*. Deleuze argues that the Baroque is the last attempt to restore the broken shattered fragments of the classical before it is lost completely. And you get the sense here perhaps that in the multiple chambers of these hotel narratives, in the melancholy they instill, again we see this idea of a final, failed attempt at recovering some sense of order.

What we are really gravitating towards here actually is the idea that there is some kind of relationship between death and the hotel in literature. There is some sort of connection or some sort of fundamentally-constituted relationship between death and hotels when we encounter them in literary texts. We can just hop around the Western canon and we know this much, right? The Gresham in James Joyce's "The Dead," Hotel des Bains in Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice," "To Room Nineteen" by Doris Lessing; and then, of course, we find these in the regional literatures we are speaking of as well. So there's some sort of connection here, something almost thanatological about the motif of the hotel. And why? There is definitely a local reason that we could give in each of these cases. We can certainly suggest that in the case of the Shahjahan we are looking at the death of the British Empire and the various literary ways in which, wittingly or unwittingly, the spirit of the Raj is trying to resurrect itself in these texts. The literary text is a kind of wake for the empire. In the case of Turkey, again, we could look at the ways in which the Ottoman Empire is often thanatologized, is often as seen as synonymous with death. And certainly the idea of the ghost of the Ottoman Empire spectrally persisting in this hotel and even perhaps the kind of comment, on a different note, on the suicidal nature of secular modernity that Atilgan is making about the Kemalist modernizing project. The fact that the hotel owner in the end kills himself, and that too at the exact time and day of Ataturk's funeral, again would suggest some sort of political comment here linking death with secular modernity. Finally, I think with the Mexican novel there is a whole range of already extant criticism, I think most famously in the work of Claudio Lomnitz, which talks about the way Mexico is a classic text on – how does he put it? – the nationalization of death, how death has been incorporated in Mexican society as a motif. Xavier Villarutia, the Mexican poet, famously said that life is a nostalgia for death. We could go on, it is a very lugubrious thought-train, but my point is that you could find some sort of local specific reasons for this synonymy of death and the literary hotel. But I think that for me at least there are two theoretical avenues as well.

The first would be a psychoanalytical one, so we would see, if the hotel is seen as a sexually transgressive place (a place you could go to for extra-marital sex or prostitution or homosexual sex). The text here might be seen in a psychoanalytical

way as punishing the transgression, a textual sort of punishing. Interestingly, you see this in particularly the *Shahjahan*, how all of the moments were some kind of boundaries overstepped by the female protagonists they have murdered. Not certainly murdered by other people, but the author textually murders them. All three protagonists of these novels are, sort of, sexually frustrated, impotent weak men. And that violence, the culminating death that drives these texts, may well have some kind of psychoanalytical relationship to them.

Another avenue might be a historicizing attitude towards the secular, seeing the hotel, if you like, if you can think of a fictional approach to the project of secular modernity, as something which sees in the structure of the hotel an almost allegorical version of the nation, of the country. These allegorical allusions are explicit in all three texts. All three hotels are at various points associated with India, Mexico, or Turkey. Maybe here there is a comment on the kind of nihilism which ultimately culminates within these projects. So it is almost like the hotel is a kind of experimental petri dish, in which the processes of the secular are examined and led to a mortal conclusion. I think I am going to wind up with that.

Literature and Cultural Studies

The Abolition of Gender: Postgender Technologies in Sayuri Ueda's *The Cage of Zeus*

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Abstract

This paper studies a contemporary example of postgender science fiction, *The Cage of Zeus* by Sayuri Ueda. Postgenderism, a cultural movement towards the deconstruction of the gender binary, is often assisted in science fiction by postgender technologies such as reprognetics or advanced bioengineering that alter the human body and its social perceptions beyond simple binary categorization. My paper will explore how, in the world of *The Cage of Zeus*, postgender technologies are used in an attempt to build an ideal postgender society in which binary gender no longer exists. However, the attempt ultimately fails, because those very postgender technologies undermine their own purpose by inadvertently promoting binary thinking. The paper is organized into three broad sections; the first section introduces postgenderism, the second section offers an overview of postgenderism in speculative fiction, and the third section engages deeply with the postgender technologies and world-building of *The Cage of Zeus* itself.

Keywords: postgenderism, science fiction, technology, gender studies, literary studies

Postgenderism is a cultural movement which argues that “gender is an arbitrary and unnecessary limitation on human potential” (Dvorsky and Hughes 1). As such, postgenderism is “a radical interpretation of the feminist critique of patriarchy and gender, and the genderqueer critique of the way that binary gender constrains individual potential and our capacity to communicate with and understand other people” (Dvorsky and Hughes 13). Postgender literature espouses this same philosophy, and postgender speculative fiction speculates as to the existence or emergence of worlds with non-binary gender models, that is, of worlds with no genders, multiple genders, or an amalgam of genders. Postgender science fiction, specifically, explores the technologies that assist in, contribute to, indirectly enable, or directly cause the abolition of the gender binary. My paper will conduct a close textual analysis of Sayuri Ueda's *The Cage of Zeus*, a contemporary science fiction novel that builds a postgender world through postgender technologies, which are depicted as being crucial to the postgender revolution. As Dvorsky and Hughes say in the abstract of their defining essay on postgenderism:

Postgenderism is an extrapolation of ways that technology is eroding the biological, psychological and social role of gender, and an argument for why



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the erosion of binary gender will be liberatory. ... Postgenderists ... foresee the elimination of involuntary biological and psychological gendering ... through the application of neurotechnology, biotechnology and reproductive technologies. (Dvorsky and Hughes 1)

However, just as vital as the technologies themselves are the cultural, socioeconomic, and ethical approaches to gender adopted by the users of postgender technologies. After all, technology itself is intersectional and exists in inextricable dialogue with culture, society, and economics, through what Arjun Appadurai calls a five-point “global cultural flow” whose points are: “(a) ethnoscapas; (b) mediascapas; (c) technoscapas; (d) finanscapas; and (e) ideoscapas” (Appadurai 296). Each of these landscapes intersect with all the other landscapes with Gordian knot-like complexity, but the most relevant intersection to my paper is that of the “technoscape” and the “ideoscape” of gender. What Appadurai describes as “the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (295) can certainly be applied to gender; binary gender is one such homogenization, and postgenderism is the movement towards a more heterogeneous (but not heteronormative) plethora of overlapping and coexisting gender identities, including non-binary gender identities. If technology can move “across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (Appadurai 297), then the boundary between the so-called male and female sexes and genders should be transgressive as well. This connects with Donna Haraway’s concept, in *Manifestly Haraway*, of the cyborg as a symbol of boundary-crossing and liberating technology.

Like Haraway’s posthumanism, postgenderism holds that under the gender binary, “[w]e have all been injured, profoundly. We require regeneration, not rebirth, and the possibilities for our reconstitution include the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender” (Haraway 67). Technology – particularly postgender technology that seeks to tangibly alter or erase the distinctions of biological and social sex and gender – keeps that “utopian dream” alive in postgender science fiction. Despite being utopian, the dream is still “monstrous” because, under the current hegemonic totalism of the gender binary, the non-binary is seen as monstrous, even though that seeming monstrosity is the only means of healing the injuries done unto societies and individuals by that very binary. It is a case of the addiction (binary gender) training its host (society) to behave as though the removal of the drug is a threat in itself. To the addict, recovery is as monstrous as it is impossibly utopian.

This battle instigates in the collective body of our culture(s) a fever, a confusion, fits of action and reaction, the thrashing of a being mid-transformation as the addictive substance fights for dominance with the body before the addiction breaks.

Much as with the biological recovery from addiction, there is a cognitive rewiring (Costa et al.) that must occur in our collective minds in order to re-route the mental connections we have made between the signs and symbols of gender as we have come to know it, and gender as it *could* be.

Modes of social behavior and patterns of collaborative world-building must be revisioned, renewed, and reenacted. Fiction offers us an opportunity to gradually rewire our brains with new concepts of gender, including new gender technologies, because technology is among the chief means by which we physically renew and reenact social and cultural patterns. The novel studied in this paper performs just such a technological revisioning; the postgender world-building of *The Cage of Zeus* is a step towards Haraway's "utopian dream" of a "monstrous world without gender." Even if it does not reach that utopia, the novel has at least begun to chart a path to it, and has become part of a growing literary movement towards postgenderism, a movement "away from binary thinking and toward hybrid beasts, open-ended quests, and new tales" (Lacey 63).

Postgenderism has been increasingly prevalent in science fiction, and in speculative fiction in general, for decades. I have chosen to narrow the scope of this paper to only *The Cage of Zeus*, because the novel deeply engages with postgender technologies in particular, and because earlier, classic explorations of postgender worlds – such as Ursula K. Le Guin's seminal *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) – have already received significant critical attention.

Focusing on contemporary postgender world-building through the lens of postgender technologies will enable me to make a more original contribution to the academy, and will address the need for fresh research into more recent postgender works, as well as into how postgenderism is developing as a subgenre of speculative fiction. I will now briefly look back at the history of the postgender subgenre of speculative fiction in order to establish a framework within which to locate *The Cage of Zeus*, and in order to describe the overarching literary tradition of which the novel is a part.

Aside from the aforementioned *The Left Hand of Darkness*, other twentieth century examples of postgender speculative fiction include *The Dark Light Years* by Brian Aldiss (1964), *The Gods Themselves* by Isaac Asimov (1972), *Xenogenesis* by Octavia E. Butler (1989), *Distress* by Greg Egan (1995), *Commitment Hour* by James Alan Gardner (1998), and the *Worldbreaker Saga* by Kameron Hurley (2014-2015). One series, the *Wraeththu Histories* by Storm Constantine (1987-2017), has bridged the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This explosion of postgender speculative fiction in the last few decades demonstrates a marked rise of interest in postgenderism in the past half a century, both as a fictional and as a potentially real social model

whose viability has been and *is* being continually tested by ever-new speculative texts. *The Cage of Zeus* (2011) is among the more recent science fiction contributions to postgender world-building.

Such postgender worlds offer queer alternatives to the ubiquitous, heteronormative worlds of mainstream science fiction that reinforce and perpetuate the “absolute despot duality” (Anzaldúa 41) of the gender binary. Postgender worlds have the capacity to release genderqueer and gender non-conforming people from the oppressive, othering narrative of being “unnatural,” “prohibited and forbidden” (Anzaldúa 25), and to provide them with an affirming narrative that naturalizes and normalizes their gender identities instead of erasing and pathologizing them.

In ideal postgender worlds, gender diversity is no longer “perverse” or “troublesome” (Anzaldúa 25), but natural. Heteronormative privilege is, if not altogether dismantled, then at least interrogated; unlike heteronormativity, which interrogates the genderqueer, in postgender worlds, the genderqueer interrogates the heteronormative. The language in which that interrogation is conducted is often technology, at least in postgender science fiction. In these science fiction worlds, heteronormativity is not simply the unalterable, involuntary assignation of one half of the male/female gender binary to a person based on their biological sex at birth, but the absence of a choice at all, even in gendered systems with multiple genders.

It is “normativity” in general, as a system of thought, social policing, and enforcement that is anathema to postgenderism. Heteronormativity is the most commonly understood example of such normativity, but as the above postgender novels explore, heteronormativity’s insidious practice of enforcing genders can persist, like a wolf in sheep’s clothing, even in more progressive-seeming systems. The ideal postgender world is not always achieved. In *The Cage of Zeus*, prejudice against genetically engineered intersex people exists alongside otherwise progressive attitudes towards non-binary identities, and alongside the technological ability to (seemingly) freely choose one’s gender expression and biological sex, with sexual organs and characteristics treated as optional technological accessories. Progressiveness, in nearly all of the postgender novels mentioned above, is associated with the societal acceptance of individual agency. Despite this progressiveness sometimes being incomplete or problematic within the texts themselves, the progressive journey *towards* an ultimate acceptance of all genders is very much in line with the postgender manifesto. As Dvorsky and Hughes state,

Postgenderists do not call for the end of all gender traits, or universal androgyny, but rather that those traits become a matter of choice. Bodies and personalities in our postgender future will no longer be constrained and circumscribed by gendered traits, but enriched by their use in the palette of diverse self-expression. (1)

The postgender novels listed above offer their characters many such palettes of “diverse self-expression,” with each palette featuring a different but no less vibrant combination of gender identities and gender expressions. In doing so, postgender worlds bring genderqueer, genderfluid, transgender, agender, intersex, and non-binary people in from the borderland of society to the mainland: “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary ... The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants ... the perverse, the queer, the troublesome ...” (Anzaldúa 25).

A “borderland,” in sociological terms, is created by geographical and sociopolitical borders which “are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*” (Anzaldúa 25). In the context of this paper, the heteronormative border that exists in contemporary society between “straight” and “queer” or “cis” and “trans” is an artificial and unnatural division based on prejudice and privilege, where the straight experience is identified as the default/self, and the queer experience as the aberration/other. *The Cage of Zeus* presents a similar division between the Rounds and the Monaurals that I will soon explore. This attempt to divide that which should be whole – the universal human experience of love, desire, and self-expression – results in the forced, painful, and messy surgical removal of the LGBTQIA+ community from the “mainland” of mainstream society.

However, a “borderland” has the potential to be a fruitful, hybrid, and reparative “Third Space” (Bhabha 74-75) instead of merely a “fractured landscape” where “[i]nterstitial terrains” (Lakomäki et al. 251-260) between apparently different communities are perpetually combative and fractious. Instead, a borderland can be open to mutual acceptance and dialogue. It need not be a space of division but a space of merging, where “the lifeblood of two worlds merge[s] to form a third country – a border culture” (Anzaldúa 25). This border culture, instead of surviving solely on the outside and on the edge of a cliff, always on the brink of extinction and erasure, can itself become a return to the center and a reclamation of and amalgamation with the center. A border culture can, through a hybridized “reparative turn” (Wiegman 7), dismantle the oppositional binary framework which resulted in that culture’s own exile:

The notion of queer as ethnic and gender multiplicity delineates a politics of difference that subverts the segregating order. Anti-homophobic interventions ... should target a binary system of exclusion; heterosexual versus homosexual, masculine versus feminine, white versus all other races, demonstrating that such a binary distribution is asymmetrical. (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 84)

All postgender texts are, in this sense, “borderlands,” for they dismantle binary

systems. An intersectional reparative approach is capable of deconstructing the false divisions imposed on gender and sexuality by heteronormativity, by addressing not only heteronormativity in isolation but the entire, interlocking system of binary oppositions on which narratives of privilege and exclusion are based. This more inclusive perspective “emphasize[s] the importance of building bridges in order to neutralize exclusionary practices [and] posits an enveloping community that overcomes interethnic and international segregation” (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 84). Bridge-building across borders creates an osmotic dialogue that eventually erases those borders, because there is enough of a blurring between previously held concepts of “self” and “other” that borders are no longer required. When borders are eliminated, the divisive rhetoric of “borderland” vs. “mainland” becomes irrelevant and obsolete.

Postgender science fiction uses technology to blur the existing borders between male and female, straight and gay, cis and trans, binary and non-binary, and does so through recontextualizing the notion of the borderland within new, complex fictional worlds which contain species, races, genders, religions, technologies, and cultures that are markedly different from our own and yet reenact many of the same injustices. In these speculative worlds, borders still exist, but the key distinguishing factor is *where* the borders are drawn; the shifting of these borders from between the borderlands/mainlands we expect (such as homosexual/heterosexual) to those we do not (such as AI/human) is what calls our attention to the problematic existence of such borders in our own world.

The technique of recontextualization makes strange that which was once familiar, and hence draws the reader's attention to it, ringing an alarm that reminds the reader of similar borders in modern society and the need for eliminating those borders. In essence, the postgender texts mentioned above provide social commentary on gender by couching that commentary within a broader critique of us/them binary ideologies, such as those of racism (superior/inferior), colonialism (civilized/barbaric), capitalism (rich/poor), technospeciesism (AI/human), tyranny (powerful/weak), and monarchy (ruler/subject). This critique is enacted through the use of fictional postgender technologies. As Haraway observes:

[C]ertain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man. (Haraway 59-60)

These various facets of oppressive binary thought are deconstructed by the numerous postgender works listed earlier. All of the texts take intersectional approaches to postgender world-building, and do so through technologies that confront the socioeconomic, philosophical, ethical, and medical ramifications of binary social structures including and beyond gender.

Thus, my paper studies postgenderism in the larger, cohesive picture of technological world-building as engaged in by *The Cage of Zeus*. I will conduct an intersectional “reparative reading” (Wiegman 7) that will explore how complex, multilayered postgender world-building occurs within the primary text through its deployment of postgender technologies.

The two most recent novels from the past decade that use postgender technologies to construct postgender worlds are Kim Stanley Robinson’s *2312* and Ann Leckie’s *Ancillary Justice*. Since those two novels are the immediate contemporaries of *The Cage of Zeus* (having been published within one to two years of Ueda’s novel), and are part of its literary and cultural context, I must briefly comment on their approaches to postgender technologies, so that I might compare them with Ueda’s approach in *The Cage of Zeus*.

Robinson’s novel, *2312*, features a humanist, Mondragon-inspired economy maintained and regulated by a set of qubes, or quantum computers of immense intelligence. The socioeconomic utopia portrayed by the novel has a direct impact on the proliferation of non-binary gender identities in this postgender world, where gender diversity is approached with the same rational humanism that the economy is.

Leckie’s Radch empire, however, does not take such a utopian approach to the technological abolition of gender. In *Ancillary Justice*, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is depicted as the primary postgender technology, given that the proliferation of AI has led to the deconstruction of the gender binary, and, indeed, the gradual dissolving of the concept of gender as a whole. An AI-run society sees no worth in gender models at all. However, this democratization and equalization of all gender identities is arguably also a *flattening* of those identities, particularly in Radch-occupied cultures that seek the freedom to identify differently. Technology as a tool of colonialism and cultural assimilation makes it an ambivalent device for the seeming liberation of (and from) gender.

Similarly, Ueda’s *The Cage of Zeus* presents a multi-gendered society that, although enriched by advanced gender technologies, nonetheless continues to engage in deep-set prejudicial behaviours, sexism, and sexual objectification, all of which are inadvertently powered by those same technologies. Ueda’s novel, as I will study it,

contrasts drastically with both the gender utopianism of *2312* – in which postgender technologies are democratized and gender diversity broadly accepted – and with the dystopianism of *Ancillary Justice*, in which postgender technologies are at least partly inhuman, with Artificial Intelligences inhabiting and controlling human bodies, or ancillaries, which are then used as soldiers and cannon fodder. Ironically, the dystopianism of *Ancillary Justice* is what leads to the deconstruction of gender identities and the emergence of a pseudo-utopian postgenderism, as the AI does not consider gender relevant, and the Radch empire consequently does not distinguish people by gender. Hence, the cause of this world's fundamental injustices is also the cause of its utopian attitude to gender. Domínguez-Ruvalcaba point out that

The utopian horizon of queer perspective must be articulated with an inclusive notion of identity and citizenship, canceling the oppositional [and] deconstructing heterosexual hegemony in a manner that focuses on and calls into question the exclusion and prejudices of the modern state ... and examining oppression grounded in the critical assessment of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. (84)

Like *Ancillary Justice*, *The Cage of Zeus* presents the “utopian horizon” of postgenderism while concurrently examining the multifaceted modes of dystopian oppression (be they cultural, colonial, technological, or sociopolitical) that exist in these new postgender worlds, where “identity and citizenship” are being continuously negotiated and in which there is always an Other who is *not* granted citizenship, be it based on gender or on other factors, although I will of course be focusing on gender in this paper. What differentiates *The Cage of Zeus* from its two immediate postgender contemporaries is that its entire narrative is diametrically opposed to the indifference to gender that *Ancillary Justice* represents, and the relatively uncomplicated acceptance of all sexes and genders that *2312* represents. In the world of *The Cage of Zeus*, the public is obsessed with gender and its various biological reflections, permutations, and ramifications, often to the detriment of the world's (and its government's) own stated, postgender agenda.

Hence, the technological abolition of gender is not a one-dimensional, utopian revolution, but a complex, dangerously entangled process which, like the excision of a tumor from the brain, may result in healthy tissue being removed alongside cancerous ones. The deployment of gender-abolishing technologies is depicted, in these examples of contemporary science fiction, as a promising but ultimately ambivalent tool that must be used carefully to avoid causing more of the very damage it was originally designed to prevent.

Now that the literary context of *The Cage of Zeus* as well as the literary tradition of postgenderism have been elucidated, I will delve into the construction of the

seemingly postgender world of *The Cage of Zeus* using postgender technologies, within the aforementioned intersectional framework of “technoscapes” reflecting and intersecting with the “ideoscapes” (Appadurai 296) of gender.

Before analyzing Sayuri Ueda’s novel in-depth, I must note that it was translated from the Japanese, and that throughout the text, Spivak pronouns are used:

In order to reflect the bigender state of the Rounds, this English-language translation of *The Cage of Zeus* employs Spivak pronouns – a set of gender-neutral pronouns devised by mathematician Michael Spivak – to refer to the Round characters. Spivak pronouns are formed by dropping the *th* from the plural pronouns “they,” “them,” “their,” etc. Although gender-specific pronouns exist in Japanese, they are used less frequently, making it easier in Japanese to avoid using pronouns that specify gender. (Ueda ch. n)

The above explanation is from the Translator’s Note at the beginning of the book; the translator is Takami Nieda. Key in Nieda’s note is the acknowledgement of linguistic bias inherent in the languages that we use, and the implication that the gender binary is more entrenched and less escapable in English than it is in Japanese. Taking this into account, we can then allow for the interesting – if problematically othering – deployment of the term “Rounds” for the genetically engineered intersex people who struggle against the prejudices of the “Monaurals,” the non-intersex majority who form the society of the novel.

The Cage of Zeus depicts a society that has, at least legislatively, made significant progress in the direction of postgenderism, and in which gender technologies such as gender confirmation surgeries and “reprogenetics” (Simonstein 1) are used to grant people the sexual or gender outcomes they desire, and to allow them to change their physical sexual characteristics repeatedly, not just once; these people are termed “Fluids.”

However, the novel’s fictional society as a whole has not entirely accepted complete gender diversity, and cisgender parents are depicted as preferring that their children also remain cisgender, or that, if they do opt for sex-altering surgery, they do so only once and not repeatedly, i.e., that they do not become “Fluids,” who are seen as capricious and harmful to morality and the public good.

Thus, there is still a pressure – given voice repeatedly through bigoted Monaural characters – to conform to the gender binary, even if *technically* the society portrayed in the novel is postgender. A major complicating factor is the concurrent existence of the genetically engineered, intersex “Rounds,” who are created on a space colony known as Jupiter-1 in order to experiment with a potentially utopian society in which differences in biological sex are absent from the very beginning. Rounds are created:

To resolve the issues raised by gender differences. Our society has not been able to overcome gender discrimination with our laws and ethics alone. We're incapable of eliminating the conflicts stemming from the differences in sexes. And that's only natural. Our physiology is different. So are our hormonal cycles. There's no way to understand the other completely. That's fine, I suppose. You might say that such issues are what make humanity so fascinating and profound. But now as we've left the tiny confines of the solar system and are attempting to embark on a journey into the dark expanse, we can't afford to quibble over such trifling matters. Which is why we should dispense with the problems that can be resolved by reinventing the body. A society where we are equals, where only individual differences exist. That was the ideal scientists proposed (Ueda ch. 3)

Despite living in what is at least nominally a non-binary, postgender society – citizens can change their sex and/or gender whenever they wish and can wed people of any sex/gender – the Monaurals nonetheless discriminate against the Rounds by calling them unnatural. This is, arguably, because the Rounds are products of the very technology that aims to liberate them from the sex binary and the gender binary; as manufactured beings, they are often described as unnerving or disconcerting. Ironically, the same postgender technology that creates the Rounds as potentially exalted beings also condemns them in the eyes of the rest of society, who are revolted by the engineering of intersex people, not out of empathy for them as subjects of medical experimentation, but by their status as apparent lab rats and by their alleged, stereotypicized promiscuity.

Rounds are often compared to animals within the text and are termed as inhuman or animalistic – a familiar, pejorative heteronormative narrative used for centuries to oppress the queer community. Indeed, given this stereotyping, the world of *The Cage of Zeus* is only partially progressive, and seeks to approach the postgender ideal from which it is still distant, not because of a lack of the appropriate technology but because of a lack of commensurate open-mindedness in the still largely binary-thinking culture:

He wanted Rui to go on being a girl, of course, but if she were to declare herself a fluid transsexual, Hasukawa didn't have the right to reject her even if he might protest. The Planetary Bioethics Association had done away with such restrictive sociopolitical paradigms and established laws to guarantee one's gender and sexual identities. The individual's choice to change one's gender however many times and to marry someone of any gender was now protected by law. There was only one choice forbidden on Earth and Mars, and that was the bioengineering of an intersex human having both male

and female reproductive organs and then actually registering that person as *intersex*. Of course not everyone chose to live as a fluid transgender, even while that right was guaranteed by law. Fluids were a minority, and an overwhelming majority still held prejudices and bigoted views on such a lifestyle. (Ueda ch. 1)

Thus, even though non-binary people exist among the Monaurals and have their rights legally protected, public opinion has not wholly swayed away from heteronormativity. This heteronormativity expresses itself most vigorously in the Monaurals' descriptions of Rounds as barely human or not human at all. One Monaural says that Rounds "don't deserve to call themselves human," and directly compares them to beasts by saying, "They're the same as sea hares and snails, with the ability to inseminate and be inseminated at the same time" (Ueda ch. 2). This dehumanization is brought about by a "paranoid reading" (Sedgwick 126) of the Rounds by the Monaurals, who are willing to believe the worst of the Rounds based solely on their status as manufactured intersex beings. Perhaps this is because Rounds are meant to replace Monaurals as the primary gender, and are consequently perceived as a threat to society as it exists – a society still clinging to the vestiges of the gender binary.

The Rounds are also sexualized and are depicted as being sexually promiscuous and constantly primed for sexual encounters, in a negative, bestial, inhuman light. Disturbingly and perhaps problematically, the novel itself temporarily employs this language of objectification in introducing a Round character, via an unnecessarily sensual, borderline masturbatory shower scene of the sort typically used to objectify women in contemporary film (Paszkievicz 48). This raises the question of whether Rounds are the oppressed sex in the world of Ueda's novel, and whether they are deliberately fetishized by the text to draw a parallel between the fetishization of women's bodies in contemporary society and that of Round bodies in Ueda's imagined society.

Tei continued to shower, caressing eir body with both hands. The roundness of eir breasts, though not glamorous by Monaural standards. The smooth and supple skin. The subtle curve of eir waist. The visibly bony figure. The firmness of eir joints. The tautness of eir muscles. Tei's fingers slid from the swell of eir breasts down past the torso to between eir legs where both genitalia were tucked away. Ey fondled the soft flesh. A moist slit and a copulatory organ protected by a thin sensitive skin. A Round possessed both sexual organs similar to those that female and male Monaurals had. Tei was no different [G]enetic sequencing making the Rounds perfect hermaphrodites (Ueda ch. 2)

The author's decision to describe Round anatomy through this sexually fraught, disconcertingly titillating language echoes the sexualization that Rounds are subjected to elsewhere in the narrative, by the occasional Monaural character who gives voice to their anti-Round prejudices. That the Rounds may have partly internalized their own sexualization is a distinct possibility, and explains the Round's, Tei's, bodily descriptions of eirself in the above passage. The only (if significant) difference is that from the Round's point of view, eir own sexualization of eirself portrays eir body as beautiful and desirable, as opposed to the monsterizing, alienizing sexual vernacular used by Monaurals to describe Rounds as disgusting.

This revulsion-driven fetishization is also a direct result of the perceived *artificiality* and non-originary nature of the Rounds. Just as the products of mimesis in Plato's theory of Forms are seen as inherently inferior imitations of a perfect, original Form (Plato 286), so is the Round seen as an inferior imitation of the Monaural template, and a corrupt and adulterated imitation at that. While Rounds were intended to be an improvement on Monaurals, much of society believes that their manufactured-ness makes them inferior. In being products of postgender technology, Rounds are seen as lesser creatures instead of as the improvements upon the heteronormative *status quo* that the government had intended them to be.

As *The Cage of Zeus* illustrates, it is important that the postgenderism achieved via gender technologies does not itself become an example of what Appadurai calls "production fetishism" (306), in which biological androgyny or non-binary biology is fetishized. While Appadurai's criticism of production fetishism is grounded in the socioeconomic reality of the fetishization by transnational manufacturing companies of "the idiom and the spectacle of local ... control" (Appadurai 306), postgender texts such as *The Cage of Zeus* must likewise avoid fetishizing "the idiom and the spectacle" of non-binary identity. Another parallel fetishism to be avoided is "the fetishism of the consumer" in the sense that:

[T]he consumer has been transformed, through commodity flows (and the mediascapes, especially of advertising, that accompany them) into a sign, both in Baudrillard's sense of a simulacrum which only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent; and in the sense of a mask for the real seat of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production. Global advertising is the key technology for the worldwide dissemination of a plethora of creative, and culturally well-chosen, ideas of consumer agency. These images of agency are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser. (Appadurai 307)

Again, while Appadurai is speaking of standard commercial products and consumers and not of gender specifically, the thorny issues he explores are very relevant to intersectional postgender worldbuilding, be it in the world of fiction or the real world. Essentially, if gender is to be *produced* via gender technologies, and is therefore a product, then what prevents its commodification, regulation, and objectification? If the government is the standard “producer” of gender – as it is in *The Cage of Zeus*, wherein the government manufactures the intersex Rounds – then this model is not genuinely postgender in terms of postgenderism’s loftiest goals. Even the seemingly utopian, freed-from-the-constraints-of-binary-sex Rounds are mere products and do not have much, if any, agency in selecting their own biological sex and social gender, unlike the rest of the populace of *The Cage of Zeus*. In being *consumers* of gender rather than producers of gender, the Rounds are disempowered. Despite being technologically constructed as the non-binary human ideal, the Round is merely a “simulacrum” of agency “which only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent,” and whose technology-based production is “a mask for the real seat of agency” (Appadurai 307). The Rounds are not free because they did not choose to be who they are, even if the government touts them as being superior while the public condemns them as being inferior.

However, the oppression of the very Rounds who the government intends to be the godlike progenitors of a new, non-binary, space-faring society *also* reflects on the lack of agency of the Monaurals. The Monaurals, despite being seemingly empowered by postgender technologies to change their bodies and their gender performance at will, are convinced by the *marketing* of gender agency to believe that the Monaural is “an actor, when in fact [they are] at best a chooser” (Appadurai 307). While they are a step above the Rounds in terms of agency, Monaurals are not free, either. Choosing biological sexual characteristics like items from a pre-existing menu, in search of a body that suits them, is a commercialized illusion of freedom that has resulted in a society where postgender technologies are a means of self-expression *through self-negation*, i.e., through pre-chosen technological processes that hijack an individual’s agency while still leading them to believe in the illusion of choice. In giving Monaurals their pick of biological sex, the postgender technologies of *The Cage of Zeus* sabotage their own postgenderism by grounding gender in biological sex, thereby reinforcing the very system of binary gender that these technologies were initially created to deconstruct. To tie gender inextricably to biological sex is transphobic and goes against postgenderism.

In becoming preoccupied with biological sexual characteristics as the only meaningful markers that determine their gender identities, and in pursuing the inadvertently anti-trans vision of gender identity as being inseparable from biological sex (even if it is a customized, individualized biological sex with endless permutations of various

sexual traits), the society of *The Cage of Zeus* remains anchored in the heteronormative concept of biological sex as the sole determinant of gender expression and identity. In attempting to free the bird from its cage, the postgender technologies of this world have *made the bird into its own cage*. Hence the novel's title.

All the characters of Ueda's postgender world have complicated relationships with postgender technologies. In this world, the technological movement towards the abolition of gender threatens to also become a movement towards the abolition of truly free, non-binary, trans-positive gender expression and agency. Perhaps this would be a difficulty that we would encounter in the real world as well were we to implement Dvorsky and Hughes' postgender manifesto using the previously discussed gender technologies that they mentioned in their 2008 paper.

In any case, the hypothetical exploration of postgenderism in this science fiction novel has established that the use of postgender technologies to abolish gender is not without its risks, and must be pursued only with the utmost caution. Still, these technologies hold promise, and are worth exploring further. The novel itself, after raising the many issues and difficulties postgenderism faces – including the very postgender technologies designed to create and sustain it – eventually concludes on an open-ended but tentatively optimistic note.

Perhaps Lanterna was too small to light humanity's way into space. But any amount of illumination was better than nothing. Much better. Would there ever come a day when Monaurals and Rounds together journeyed past the eye of Zeus and saw what lay ahead? The answer was nowhere yet to be found. (Ueda ch. 6)

The ending of the novel looks forward to a more harmonious future and, self-aware of its own limited progress towards true postgenderism, suggests that “any amount of illumination” is “better than nothing.” In this sense, postgender technologies are still promising, in that they do offer at least partial illumination of a far greater phenomenon – the utopian challenge of building a truly postgender world. The world of *The Cage of Zeus* describes a cage (binary gender) and a flawed means of escape from it (postgender technology), and leaves it to the reader and to society to improve on that means and make the ultimate escape.

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Rape, Bodily Presence, and “Still Activism”: Agency of Indigenous Women

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Abstract

The vulnerability of Indigenous women has been portrayed in Native American novels such as *Three Day Road* (2005) by Joseph Boyden, *The Round House* (2012) by Louise Erdrich, and *There There* (2018) by Tommy Orange. These three novels are similar in their portrayal of Native women who are raped, traumatized, and yet survive. Boyden’s Niska, Erdrich’s Geraldine, and Orange’s Jacquie go through sexual assault and rape either by non-Native white men or by Native men. None of them exhibit the types of concrete resistance we as readers might expect. Rather the victims seem to remain visibly indifferent to their physical assault and surrender their agency. However, despite having gone through such traumatic experiences, they do not stop living, neither do they let their bodies break down. Building on Kelly Klein’s “still activism” theory as a mode of protest, Judith Butler’s concept of how the body speaks politically, and Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of passive resistance, this essay examines these three characters’ apparent non-resistance to their assaulters and establish their silence, survival, and continuity as strong resistance to the sexual, mental, and historical violences that they have experienced.

Keywords: Indigenous women; sexual assault; resistance; bodily presence; still activism

Sexual violence to Indigenous women’s bodies remains an invisible stigma that denies the bodily integrity that Native women deserve. Because of prolonged exposure to trauma, including sexual trauma, throughout their histories, many Native women have developed a kind of outward indifference to such physical injuries that allows them to bury their unheard agonies. Though an active physical intervention is absent from these women’s responses to violence, their survival and persistence after a sexual assault are a form of resistance. The vulnerability of Indigenous women has been portrayed in Native American novels such as *Three Day Road* by Joseph Boyden, *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich, and *There There* by Tommy Orange. Written and published in the twenty-first century, these novels chronicle the persistence of agonized Native women who appear to us as non-resistant and silent. These three novels are similar in their portrayal of Native women who are raped, traumatized, and yet survive. Boyden’s Niska, Erdrich’s Geraldine, and Orange’s



Jacque go through sexual assault and rape either by non-Native white men or by Native men. None of them exhibit the types of concrete resistance readers might expect – such as fighting back, involving the legal justice system, or advocating for change. Rather, the victims seem to remain indifferent to their physical assault and surrender their agency. However, regardless of having gone through such traumatic experiences, they do not stop living, neither do they let their bodies break down. In this essay, I examine these three characters' apparent non-resistance to their assaulters by using Kelly Klein's theory of "still activism" as a mode of protest, Judith Butler's concept of how the body speaks politically, and Mahatma Gandhi's concept of passive resistance. This paper aims to establish their silence, survival, and continuity as strong resistance to the sexual, mental, and historical violences that they experienced.

Native American authors, critics, and ecofeminists such as Paula Gunn Allen and Leslie Marmon Silko promote the strong role of Native women as storytellers, which is essential for Native culture to survive. Allen emphasizes women's role as mother, grandmother, Spider Woman, Thought Woman, or Yellow Woman in Native American tradition and folklore, who embody healing, survival, and continuance. Likewise, Silko connects women with nature and storytelling. While my argument does not disagree with their presentation of women, my discussion focuses on how women are treated in the Indigenous society where a woman's body is thought to be the symbol of the community itself. While these women are the victims of non-Indian men's animal instincts, they are equally victimized by Native men too. The criticism of this ironic social structure is clear in Sherry B. Ortner's words: "woman is being identified with – or, if you will, seems to be a symbol of – something that every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself" (25). Thus, besides their role as storytellers, it is also essential to investigate how these women react to this double threat through their bodies. It is also required to reflect on how, without inciting action, they exercise restraint as a non-violent way of protest.

My project, as a whole, emphasizes the importance of Indigenous activism in women as a reaction to the violence done to their bodies and draws attention to the caveats in Indigenous feminist movements and tribal laws. I investigate the agonized women's portrayals in these three novels and explore how their "let it go" stand after the rape exposes the futility of both the Indian criminal justice system and any feminist movement in Indigenous women's lives. I suggest that we should reflect on and recognize the Indigenous women's mistrust of the legal justice system, and see their apparent indifference to rapists as their self-devised apolitical action that speaks through their physical and psychological sustainability. Looking back to the long history of sexual violence against Indigenous women, it requires us

to rethink how these women can fight back when the legal system or any social organization fails to ensure them a secure life. Thus, it is essential to redefine their silence and indifference, and to reinforce the fact that these women should neither retaliate nor submit; rather the stillness of their bodies, even as individuals, has far-reaching significance.

Since the 1980s, feminists in the United States such as bell hooks, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and Patricia Hill Collins have denounced the racism of white feminism and the lack of attention it pays to issues of class and race. The postcolonial feminist writer Chandra Talpade Mohanty questions the colonialist discourses of white feminism toward women of the so-called third world through their victimizing representations. Yet not much has been done to promote indigenous feministic approaches, nor is there enough scholarship on this subject. The complexity of Indigenous feminism has already been discussed by Cheryl Suzack et al. in *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*. According to them, concern for Indigenous autonomy makes feminist research “often appear to be irrelevant to the concerns of Indigenous communities” (2). Moreover, the imposition of western patriarchy has diminished Indigenous women’s position, power, and experiences. This concern is apparent in Emma LaRocque’s emphasis on Indigenous feminist politics and Fay Blaney’s observation that “a key goal of Indigenous feminism must therefore be ‘to make visible the internal oppression against women within our communities’ as well as in the dominant society” (qtd. in Suzack et al. 3). Thus, I bring attention to these women’s inner power of resistance to sexual assault and also explore the necessity of its acknowledgment.

The after-effects of sexual assault or rape on women burden them with unspeakable trauma. In Indigenous societies, “many Indigenous women endure the prolongation of a structure in which abuse and violence are the ‘norm,’ lacking the necessary support from the justice system, male chiefs and council members, and society at large” (Mitchell and Ezcurra 209). According to a study done by the Department of Justice in May 2016, “out of the 2,000-plus Native American and Alaskan Native women surveyed (who lived both on and outside of reservations), 56 percent had experienced sexual assault and rape; the report blamed the high rate of sexual violence on a ‘flawed tribal court structure, little local law enforcement, and a lack of funding’” (Arnold). Responding to this structural oppression, Sarah Deer, an anti-violence activist and scholar, asserts that the “people who are violently assaulted should be the central focus of our criminal justice system” (xi). She also states that “rape is a fundamental result of colonialism, a history of violence reaching back centuries ... rape is a crime against humanity” (x). In a recent article, Valerie N. Wieskamp and Cortney Smith argue that “regarding sexual violence against Native women, the discourse of settler colonialism renders Native bodies as disposable

and blames Native women for the violence committed against them in ways that disguise the influences of structural oppression” (73). They explore how “survivorship – a rhetoric of resistance that emphasizes empowerment by asserting Native presence and rejects dehumanizing narratives – provides an important resource for communities struggling with the effects of violence ... [and] enhances the voices of Native women who experience sexual assault and rebuffs the notion that violence against their bodies is a non-event” (73). Another scholar Igor Primorac, in the article “Radical Feminism and Rape,” emphasizes that rape is not just sexual assault; it is a violation of a woman’s right to bodily integrity, her personal autonomy, and thus, a violation of personhood (499). Yet, most of the actions or laws are restricted to theories without any practical consequences. Most of the rape cases are either not reported or the raped victims are offered romanticized sympathy. What remains ignored is that these women need both collective support and recognition of their resistant spirit to decolonize the concept of rape. In Sarah Deer’s words, these women “deserve a tribal-centric response to their experiences ... a response that centers a contemporary Native woman in her unique place and time” (xiv). In line with these scholars’ critiques, I will analyze how Indigenous women’s survival and bodily presence can be seen as a stronger mode of protest even though they appear not to raise their voices or demand counter-action through concrete or organized protests. I also examine how the stories of their trauma and healing logically reflect the survival of their body, identity, and community.

Trauma, Healing, and Rape of the Metonymic Feminine Body

According to the Native Americans, their traditional stories have a “healing” power. N. Scott Momaday finds an interaction between language, storytelling, and place, because, for him, “the place of infinite possibility is where the storyteller belongs” (112) to preserve the history. Leslie Marmon Silko also states that “if you don’t have stories, you don’t have anything” (xxvi). For Jace Weaver, traditional storytelling is the medium by which the storyteller “participates in a traditionally sanctioned manner in *sustaining the community*” (42). Hence, the Native Americans struggle to keep themselves and their history alive among posterity. The elders enliven the forgotten past by reminding their children of the connection between their identity and the place they belong to. This tribalism is centered on creating culture and community. It is a strong feeling of identity with and loyalty to one’s tribe or group denying self-sufficiency as the ultimate aim or the notion of “every man for himself” and preaching the individual’s responsibility for the common good. The American Indian tribes, as Paula Gunn Allen states, “do not celebrate the individual’s ability to feel emotion” and they are alien to the concept of “private soul at any public wall” (63). The sacred aim of their life is the “intermingling of breaths” and merging the personal into the public to seek reality in harmony and to fulfill the meaning of

good life (Allen 63). Even under the domination by outsiders, these tribes cohere through their songs, ceremonies, legends, sacred stories, myths, and tales. Weaver affirms that “there is always something beyond the dominating systems . . . there is always an alternative” by which the oppressed people survive (11-12). They employ storytelling as an effective tool for community building and, thus, as the best way to transfer the legacy of tribalism among the new generation or urban Indians.

This tribalistic attitude fights the myth of “vanishing Indians” and carries their “grief” orally or in written forms to avoid “psychic suicide” as a way of healing (Weaver 43). However, the Native communities keep experiencing their historical trauma through other forms of violence. While these communities aspire for psychic healing through the protection of their cultural territory, the white intruders treat the Native woman’s body as the easiest way to pollute the sanity of their tribalism. This rape of Native bodies in Indigenous societies is not only a physical assault; it is a metaphor that is historically connected to colonialism. In colonial discourse, “the forced penetration of the virgin land” is metaphorically seen as an act of sexual penetration through which they justify colonial expansion as a positive phenomenon (Sharkey 18). Therefore, as ecofeminists claim, “rape of the Earth and rape of women are intimately linked both metaphorically in shaping worldviews and materially in shaping women’s everyday lives” (Mies and Shiva xvi).

In Indigenous society, rape of Native women by non-Natives has a symbolic meaning other than just sexual violence. Following that trend, recent critics identify Louise Erdrich’s *The Round House* as a tale of an entire community seeking vengeance on a single person who poses a common threat. As the central female character Geraldine is raped by the white man Linden Lark at the round house, her son Joe, consequently, takes vigilante action by killing that person, which receives indirect support from the community. Declaring the round house as a metonymic feminine body, Bender and Maunz-Breese write: “In violating Geraldine within the precincts of the round house, Lark simultaneously profanes the sacred feminized body representative of the Ojibway tribe and culture. This is rape not only of one woman but of an entire community” (145). Erdrich herself calls it a novel about her crusade against rape. In the Afterword of this novel, she declares that “the tangle of laws that hinder prosecution of rape cases on many reservations still exists” (319). Though many organizations are working to restore justice and security for Native women, the novel, set in 1988, hints at the continuance of this sexual violence perpetrated by white men. In Julie Tharp’s words, this story is about “both the trauma of sexual violence and the trauma of being denied justice” (26). Tharp focuses on the loss of tribal jurisdiction to protect Native women from sexual violence and criticizes the knots in the system of justice. She interprets Geraldine’s silence as Erdrich’s intentional challenge to awaken the readers’ conscience. Erdrich presents her

characters as being well familiar with the laws because it will allow her “to make real world critiques without damaging the verisimilitude of the novel” (Tharp 29). While all these critical discussions highlight the essential problems in the Native American community, Geraldine’s continuity after the physical and mental shock rarely gets prominence.

The same negligence of a Native woman’s survival is apparent in discussions on Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road*. Niska’s story as a windigo killer is revealed to us through her three-day journey home with her nephew Xavier after World War I. Niska, as a girl, never compromises with anything. By inheriting her father’s spiritual gift, Niska lives in the bush alone because she “had a gift that others wanted and needed” (154). Eventually, she chooses a Frenchman, the *wemistikoshiw*, for a mate despite her mother’s warning that “*wemistikoshiw* were not to be trusted” (152). Using her shamanic practice as an excuse, the Frenchman leaves her forever. This leads Niska to discover through an old woman in the Indian part of Moose Factory that the Frenchman “has a taste for red meat that he can’t satisfy. There are little half-French, half-Indian children running around this place that he refuses to claim” (157). Yet, her sudden meeting with this man makes her forget his past and falls into his trap after being drunk. He rapes Niska in the church near the reservation school, where “a man takes a woman to be his forever ... a holy place” (160). Niska’s realization of being raped comes when he utters: “I fucked you in a church ... I fucked the heathen Indian out of you in this church I fucked your *ahcahk*, your spirit” (161). According to Susan K. Moore, “Niska embodies this feminine source of life, but also that which threatens paternal authority (symbolized by the school and church). Indeed, as a healer, visionary, and windigo killer, she is positioned at the boundary of the sacred, between semiotic authority and symbolic law” (73). Thus, while Niska’s rape symbolizes the rape of the Indigenous community, it also reflects how her body and her healing power pose a threat to the western patriarchal system. Yet, the critics limit Niska’s role in this novel to someone who brings a cathartic effect on Xavier’s life through storytelling, and thus, her survival of rape remains an invisible and unrecognized incident.

While Niska’s rape is perpetrated by a non-Native in Boyden’s *Three Day Road*, Tommy Orange’s *There There* presents a sixteen-year-old girl named Jacquie who is raped by a Native youth, Harvey, on an island near the reservation in Alcatraz. Being just a teenage girl, Jacquie could not fight it and, after returning home, she “went to sleep in the cell” as she usually does and “the days just passed, and nothing happened” (57). Her sister Opal convinces Jacquie not to abort the baby she is carrying. Opal’s words that “It’s not over. We can’t just give up, Jacquie” create hope of agency (60). As the story advances, we see that Jacquie suffers from this trauma throughout her life, which makes her isolated, causing her to desert her

daughter Blue who is the consequence of that rape, and eventually leaving her grandchildren from another daughter, Jamie, in Opal’s care. After forty-two years, Jacquie meets her rapist Harvey at a conference in Phoenix, and both drive together toward Oakland to attend the powwow. Orange writes: “Jacquie can’t remember a day going by when at some point she hadn’t wished she could burn her life down. Today actually, she hadn’t had that thought today” (152). Jacquie recovers from the trauma that kept haunting her since she was sixteen years old. Her rape cannot be called symbolic of community rape, but Jacquie goes through the same traumatic moments as all other women do. While most discussions find the dilemma of urban Indians as the key concept of this novel, *The Guardian* defines this novel as one of compassion: “Harvey, the bumptious MC of the powwow, and Jacquie bring to the novel a strong element of compassion. The two of them reconnect after a fateful encounter decades before during the Occupation of Alcatraz.” However, no discussion emphasizes Jacquie’s continuity and persistence as a significant strength of her character; rather her alcoholism gets prominence. Thus, I focus on these three characters’ still mode of resistance that not only keeps them alive but also preserves the foundation of their Indian communities.

“Still Activism” as a Mode of Resistance

As a mode of protest, the body exercises enormous power and asserts the reality of existence. Susan Leigh Foster, a choreographer and scholar, approaches “body as articulate matter” because physicality plays a significant role in “constructing both individual agency and sociality” (395). She describes “active stillness” as “not a state of non-action but rather a kind of motion” (412). Her approach resonates with Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violent passive resistance, the concept of *Satyagraha*, a forceful means of achieving socio-political goals without using violence. Gandhi uses “passive resistance” as the English version of his philosophy of *Satyagraha* to refer to resistance by inertia or refusal to comply, as opposed to resistance by active protest or physical fight. In Bhikhu Parekh’s words, Gandhi aimed “to reach out to and activate the soul of the opponent” by compelling and forcing to negotiate (68). While Gandhi sees non-violent resistance as both moral and political virtue to attain justice, Foster finds the physical presence and motion as a powerful means to protest. Similarly, photographer and activist Kelly Klein also asserts the power of stillness by saying that the body has the power to interrupt regimes of capital and subjectivity through non-violent means, which she calls “still-activism.” This still-activist body, for her, is “an alternative mode of being” (211). The same assertion is echoed in Janet Fiskio’s words: “Both kinds of bodily presence – movement and stillness – perform the resistance and continuance of Indigenous sovereignty” (102).

Hence, I investigate this form of resistance – a kind of still-activism – among the

three literary characters portrayed in the three Indigenous novels under discussion here. These characters are neither shown as still activists nor are they shown as demanding any change or protesting on the street against any crime. Most of the scholarly and critical discussions define these women as suffering from traumatic experiences silently after being raped. However, I prove that their silence and survival testify to their passive resistance through stillness, bodily presence, and continuity, which can be termed as “still-activism.”

In Boyden’s *Three Day Road*, Cree native woman Niska’s rape by the Frenchman in the church is a crucial scene. The Frenchman treats her like a “squaw whore” and justifies his sexual assault as Christianizing a heathen through rape. She recalls how she ran away and says to Xavier: “I crouched and sobbed, afraid that his magic had killed my family’s fire inside of me, and it was only then that I realized he was a spell-master of some kind and he’d stolen my strength” (161). Despite being a girl who used to lead an adventurous life, she prays hard to regain her spiritual power. Niska says: “I prayed harder for purification until the pain became ecstasy ... I tried not to think of that night again. A sense of peace came over me as I prepared for another winter alone in the bush” (162-163). Her mother later informs her that the Frenchman had gone mad and committed suicide. Niska says: “She watched me for a reaction, and when I did not give her one, she finished her story” (163). Niska has already erased the rape from her mind and learned to find “ecstasy” in pain. This is an incredible psychological strength that lets old Niska share her experiences with her nephew Xavier. Niska’s rape is much more profound in the novel apart from simply the traumatic effect it has on Niska. On the one hand, this rape is symbolic of the white culture raping the Native American culture, seeking to eliminate their “heathen” belief systems; on the other, Niska’s indifference to this rape and silent return to bush life reveals the failure of the legal system that, instead of preventing the rape, prepares the women to accept it. Thus, Niska’s survival and continuity act as a concrete denial and silent response to the white rapists who neither could kill her nor bend her; rather, her still bodily presence articulates her resistance, motion, and humanness.

Generational sexual trauma and women’s bodily rejection have also been pictured by Louise Erdrich in *The Round House*. Narrated from the perspective of a thirteen-year-old boy Joe, this novel exposes the hollowness of the American judicial system which still practices racial discrimination regarding justice for indigenous people. The central character Joe, perceiving the inability of the tribal legal system to bring his mother Geraldine’s rapist under trial, deploys the traditional practice of “wiindigoo” justice to ensure justice not only for his mother but also for the whole reservation community. Geraldine, after being raped in the round house by a white man named Linden Lark, makes herself aloof and silent. Yet, the issue is more complicated than

it appears. Erdrich situates the rape of Geraldine by a white man at the round house to highlight the American judicial pitfalls that advocate racial superiority of white men. Geraldine, in spite of being an employee in the tribal registry office and her husband Bazil, in spite of being a respected tribal judge, fail to achieve justice. Neither could they fight strongly, nor they could dare to violate communal values. The inaction of the State Government and their indifference to the sexual violence inflicted on Native women lead Joe to become a vigilante by taking revenge against the criminal without legal approval. The silence of the tribal court and the Natives in his community forces Joe to grow up quickly and to understand that there is no hope of justice.

However, most of the discussions around the novel highlight the fact that the criminal justice system in America denies the human rights of justice to the Native Americans. While this issue demands continuous action, I draw attention to the fact that Geraldine’s silence after the rape incident entails deeper meaning that needs to be addressed and exposed. As Geraldine’s son Joe says, “She went rigid and closed her eyes” (10) but does not tell who the rapist is. While Joe and his father both feel that the criminal “should be found, punished, and killed” (12), Geraldine remains silent, and does not ask for any intervention. She refuses to talk to the FBI agent Soren Bjerke. Joe says: “There was no movement or sound from my mother. Bjerke tried again. But she waited us out. She didn’t turn to us. She didn’t move. It seemed an hour that we sat in a suspense that quickly turned to disappointment and then to shame” (151). The description of the rape scene that she later shares with her husband Bazil and son Joe demonstrates the level of violence she had encountered. Geraldine avoids the imminent death that Lark initiates by pouring gasoline on her and escapes from the round house. Her consequential silence shows her inner trauma and frustration with the legal system, but she does not let the sufferings destroy her. She recovers slowly, begins “regular hours at her office” (212), and does not resort to alcoholism. Even when Joe avenges her rape by killing Lark, we do not see any excitement in Geraldine. She utters: “Lark’s trying to eat us Joe. I won’t let him, she said. I will be the one to stop him” (248). I want to assume that she stops Lark (symbolically all sexual assaulters) by her bodily presence and survival. She maintains her indifference and keeps life going. This intentional indifference to sexual assault deserves more scholarly attention. The long-accepted belief that “nothing will happen” does prove that neither the legal system nor feminism could reach the bottom of this stigma. Yet, these Indigenous women do not surrender their bodies after the rape. They let their body and mind survive the invasion and violation. Though we do not see any active motion, their continuity is their motion – a passive act of resistance that we should acknowledge.

We see the same role assigned to the raped woman in Orange’s *There There*. While

we sympathize with Jacquie for being victimized, her actions as a grown woman raise a concern. At a conference on the Native women's safety in Phoenix, she meets the old Harvey again. As an immature girl, she let the rape go, but as an old woman, she still lets it go. Harvey seeks to apologize and justifies their past by saying: "The reason is we're both fuckups and the Indian world is small" (115). This leads them to take a drive together. In a text message, Jacquie informs Opal that she has met "*Harvey, as in: father of the daughter I gave up*" (108). When Opal asks what she is going to do, Jacquie says "Idk." After some initial indifference, Jacquie starts behaving normally with Harvey. While as an outside reader we want to see Jacquie react, she presents herself as a strong woman in front of Harvey. Her indifference, continuity, and bodily presence cannot but humiliate Harvey. The body that he expected to shatter is still alive and in motion. This indifference or non-resistance of Jacquie's unfolds the failure of the theories and concerns shown for Native women so far, on one hand, and the strength of these women's bodily presence on the other. This persistence attests to the fact that the feminine body is not so fragile to be broken down; rather it has enormous power to speak and act. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the activists, scholars, and critics to make the rape survivors in American Indian communities feel their worth with much more gravity so that the rape victims do not resort to alcoholism or commit suicide.

Persistence and Body as Performative

The bodily persistence articulates a form of resistance that can be seen in Indigenous women's survival through sexual violence. In Gerald Vizenor's view, survivance means the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb survive, "to remain alive or in existence" (19) – "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion" (1). This notion of bodily survival and presence has also been theorized by Judith Butler in a lecture held in Venice in 2011 where she discussed how the "body 'speaks' politically" without any vocal or written language and asserts the performativity of the body that necessarily does not need to be present in a public space or appear to others. In contrast, Giorgio Agamben defines the exclusion of body from political action as "bare life" and demands physical appearance in the public space to be part of plurality. Rejecting this notion of "bare life," Butler states that "it is not that bodies are simply mute life-sources that counter existing modalities of power. Rather, they are themselves modalities of power, embodied interpretations, engaging in allied action ... these bodies are productive and performative" (Butler). Thus, while many native women do not join political action in a public space, they yet perform their resistance through their body language. For instance, Niska in *Three Day Road* returns to nature to live her life, persists throughout the long periods of time, attains the strength to tell her rape story to her nephew, and engages in acts of continuance through passing her traditions along. She gets support from nature

and reenergizes her body. Similarly, Geraldine in *The Round House* returns to her family and gradually adapts herself to her usual official life. While her silence and tears demonstrate her agony, it also demonstrates her power to persist. The assaulter of her body, as we see, can only be truly punished through her continuity that she does being supported by her sense of belonging to a family. A similar performativity is seen in Jacquie in *There There*. Though she cannot fulfill her motherly duties and becomes an alcoholic, she fights with her trauma, learns to persist, and becomes a substance abuse counselor. Her work supports her persistence and without any verbal attack, she defies Harvey’s male ego. Thus, her bodily presence and survival themselves act as an agency. Moreover, her presence at a conference on the theme “Keeping Them from Harm” can be seen as a living example of a Native woman’s bodily resistance by defeating the suicidal tendency.

A body suffering under violence and trauma persists and resists. To echo Butler, to persist individually is to resist politically too. Butler responds to Hannah Arendt’s theory of “concerted actions” as political resistance and asserts that to disregard the significance of the individual body is to devalue their political agency and without appearing to someone, the body can exist politically. These three characters in the novels are representative of those Native women who suffer but survive. Though they are not seen to assemble for plural political action, they establish a perspective by existing bodily as a “being” for the others.

Referring to the three above-mentioned literary characters, we can deduce that these women not only preserve themselves but also protect the Native social structure through their sustainability. Moreover, in the Indigenous community, the women’s survival of rape means more than any political action. As a private body reflects the public body and rape is not only an individual but a public assault, their persistence also represents public existence. Thus, these women exhibit their agency in saving and surviving. Niska, Geraldine, and Jacquie do not kill or destroy life. Instead, they create life; they give birth to generations through their bodily existence. This bodily return after being sexually assaulted certifies their agency which does not fall into any traditional categories. So, we cannot establish them as feminists, activists, or political agents, but their agency resonates in their silence, in their survival, in their indifference, and in their persistence. Their non-resistance hides inside itself their passive resistance, their activism that is still, yet performed. It is, therefore, essential to re-configure the stillness and sustainability of Native women’s body that speak louder than words and resist more strongly than action. While their agonies remain unheard and invisible, I suggest that their power of survival must be recognized while they also continue their protest against the inactive Federal laws and Tribal laws for the protection of Native women.

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Metaphors and Metamorphosis: The Politics of Sexuality in Ismat Chughtai's "The Homemaker"

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Abstract

Ismat Chughtai, a prominent feminist writer of twentieth century India, has often been criticized for her iconoclastic stand on the treatment of female sexuality in her stories though she has always used strong metaphors to subtly express such boldness in her heroines. In "The Homemaker," she presents the characters, Lajo and Mirza, in a relationship that involves a certain pattern of sexual politics. Mirza, driven by Lajo's sexuality, falls in love with her, and, bugged by his sense of religiosity and patriarchy, attempts to make a "decent" woman out of her. Chughtai's brilliant narrative establishes here two strong metaphors, lehnga (a long skirt worn by Indian women) and pyjamas (trousers worn by Indian women), to capture two phases of metamorphosis that Lajo goes through from being a maid to becoming a homemaker first, and then from a maid to a wife, followed by a retreat to being a homemaker again. Drawing from Simon de Beauvoir's theoretical reflections on sexual politics, this paper will show how Lajo's journey from lehnga to pyjamas, and her retreat from pyjamas to lehnga metaphorically tell the story of her metamorphosis within the sexual politics of her relationship with Mirza.

Keywords: metaphors, metamorphosis, sexual politics, patriarchy.

Ismat Chughtai, one of the most controversial feminist writers in Urdu literature, has created a great number of female characters in her short stories who experience their sexualities on equal terms with men of their time. Her story, "The Quilt" ["Lihaaf"], is considered the first Urdu story to explore lesbianism. That Chughtai is a writer of unapologetic demeanor is proved by the other short stories that followed the obscenity trial on "Lihaaf" in 1945. As a member of the Progressive Writers' Movement of India, her approach of presenting female sexuality is often coined with strong metaphoric expressions in her stories. This is exemplified in the story "The Homemaker" ["Gharwali"].

Before moving to the main discussion, it is necessary to understand the words "metaphor" and "metamorphosis" first. M. H. Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* presented some significant ideas of the metaphor which came in the twentieth century. From the traditional perspective, a metaphor "involves an implicit



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comparison between two disparate things” and “a metaphor serves mainly to enhance the rhetorical force and stylistic vividness and pleasantness of a discourse” (Abrams 155). However, according to Abrams, I. A. Richards, in the first half of the twentieth century, had a different perspective. To him, the “metaphor cannot be viewed simply as a rhetorical or poetic departure from ordinary usage, in that it permeates all language and affects the ways we perceive and conceive the world” (Abrams 155). Richards’ idea was further discussed and developed by Max Black in his essay “Metaphor” in the 1950s. Being a member of the Progressive Writers’ Association, Ismat Chughtai, too, employed metaphors in her stories in a manner that corresponds to the twentieth century definition of the word. Her metaphors say more than the plain words in the whole narrative. As a result, sometimes the metaphors become key forces in her stories. Similarly, the regular definition of “metamorphosis” refers to a process of biological development in animals. The concept of metamorphosis, however, has been adopted to denote psychological and social changes in characters in fiction as well. In the coming-of-age novels, such changes are observed in the protagonists. In Chughtai’s art of characterization, the concept of metamorphosis mostly highlights change or transformation in social states of the characters.

“The Homemaker” tells the story of the sexual relationship between the characters Lajo and Mirza. The principal metaphors in the story are Lajo’s lehnga and pyjamas. The metaphors show two phases of metamorphosis in Lajo: the first of her becoming a homemaker from a maid, and the second of her becoming a wife from a maid. While the former is a deliberate choice of Lajo’s, the latter is imposed on her by Mirza, and she ends up retreating to her identity as a homemaker. These phases reveal a pattern of sexual politics between the characters which does not allow the second phase of metamorphosis to complete itself and establishes Lajo as a character who emerges to be superior to Mirza. The pattern is intricately drawn by Chughtai, mocking the notions of honor, decency, and even the institution of marriage. This paper will discuss the two phases of metamorphosis along with tracing out the nature of sexual politics between Lajo and Mirza bringing references from Simone de Beauvoir’s “The Married Woman” in her book *The Second Sex*.

The story begins with the event of Lajo’s being appointed in Mirza’s house as his maid. Mirza, a bachelor who runs his own grocery store, is tired of “kneading dough and flattening rotis” (Chughtai 80). Lajo is an illegitimate child and does not have any family of her own. She does not fulfill the conventional criteria of a decent, respectable woman in the society and has always welcomed sexual advances from men around her. Mirza’s friend, Bakshi, offers to let him keep Lajo who used to work in Bakshi’s house. He suggests not to waste money on prostitutes and keep Lajo instead as she will satisfy both the need of a maid and that of a prostitute. Mirza

is reluctant “to keep a whore in the house” (80). However, Lajo, seeing the scope of securing a house for herself, quickly settles in Mirza’s house and starts working there. Though Mirza has nothing to complain about Lajo’s work, Lajo’s deliberate exposure of her sexuality baffles Mirza who, with great difficulty, stops himself from getting sexually involved with her. Lajo, on the other hand, is both surprised and offended to see him still visiting prostitutes. However, after some days of Lajo’s seduction of Mirza, a relationship – both physical and emotional from both ends – develops. Mirza, however, feels awkward seeing the men in his neighborhood taking an interest in Lajo though she rejects them all with her sharp tongue. On a friend’s suggestion, he takes the risk of “ruining” his family honor and marries Lajo. With this step, Mirza’s process of making a wife out of the “whore” begins. It is at this point of the story that the process of metamorphosis is imposed on Lajo. Mirza’s preference for pyjamas over the lehnga as his wife’s attire places Lajo in great discomfort. Also, he no longer enjoys her coquettish behavior during their sexual intercourse and tells her to act like a shy wife. Now that Mirza has secured her as a wife, his desire and interest wane and he spends less time around the house. Lajo, fuming at Mirza’s indifference to her, instigates an extramarital affair with Mithwa, a neighbor. When Mirza finds out, he divorces Lajo. With a happy heart, Lajo sells the pyjamas and goes back to wearing the lehnga. Lajo’s freewheeling nature in the neighborhood makes Mirza uncomfortable again. The story ends with Lajo’s re-entry to Mirza’s house as his maid when Mirza is told that “Nikah [wedding] with a bastard is haram – strictly forbidden” (93). Both Mirza and Lajo are relieved to know that neither their marriage nor their divorce is valid. Mirza is relieved because he thinks his honor has been saved and Lajo is relieved because she can still be the homemaker in the house without being married or in pyjamas anymore. This way the story ends exactly as it had begun.

Lajo’s lehnga and pyjamas are two powerful metaphors here. Unlike her name which means coy, Lajo plays an active part in her sexual interactions with men. She has grown up with “a very large-hearted concept of the man-woman relationship” and with “no mother or grandmother to teach her what was right and what was wrong” (Chughtai 82, 83). This has led her to be independently oriented with her sexuality. Her lehnga stands for this independence in her in dealing with her sexuality. Quintessential elements of Chughtai’s heroines from the lower class of the society, “sexual attraction and raw sensuality,” as M. Asaduddin puts it in his Introduction to the translation of Chughtai’s short story collection, *Lifting the Veil*, are found in abundance in Lajo (xxii). Chughtai’s words, “Her lehnga was fluttering in the wind,” (86) suggest the fluttering nature of Lajo as well. On the other hand, her pyjamas stand for the restrictions on attires that patriarchy imposes a woman reflected here through Mirza’s attempt to control her sexuality after their marriage.

Chughtai writes: "Mirza put a ban on the lehnga and instructed her to wear tight-fitting churidar pyjamas. Lajo was used to open space between her legs. Two separate legs joined by a strip of cloth were truly bothersome" (88). The "open space between her legs" that Lajo has always been comfortable with represents a void for Mirza that may anytime devour his male ego. His ban on the lehnga is a fine example of the double standards that patriarchy holds regarding women's clothes. Before their marriage, Lajo's bare legs sticking out from under the lehnga had aroused Mirza; but afterwards, these very legs are banned from public view as otherwise he would not be able to make a "decent" woman out of her. They would destroy his honor.

The first phase of the metamorphosis – from a maid to a homemaker – takes a shorter time to complete than the second one. It happens when, despite Mirza's hesitance, Lajo enters Mirza's house as the maid on her own. Chughtai's expression, "Lajo had already invaded Mirza's kitchen," attributes power to her character to take her own decision, and her body language while working with "her lehnga tucked up like a diaper" tells about her overt and comfortable handling of her dress (80). Mirza, on returning home that evening, notices the change in his house with surprise: "As though Bi Amma, his late mother, was back! Every object in the house – the earthen pitcher, the newly scrubbed bowl, the lantern – was sparkling. ... Spinach mixed with potato, moong daal laced with onion and cumin seeds – just the way Amma prepared it!" (81). Lajo's service reminding him of his late mother points to the absence of a woman in his house for so long, and foreshadows her becoming the homemaker in the story. Though Lajo enters his house as his maid and proves to be a perfect housekeeper on the very first day, the comparison between the late mother and the newly appointed maid shows the potential for Lajo to be someone more than just a housekeeper. During dinner Mirza tells her that he "can't afford a servant," but her reply is: "Who wants wages?" (81). This is a clear sign that Lajo has not taken up this work as a job, and that she rejects her position as a paid servant in the house. The note of interrogation in her reply also strengthens the rejection. Chughtai writes: "It was as though the issue was resolved once and for all!" (81). Her decision is more firmly stated the next morning when she tells Mirza, "No, Mian. I'm here to stay" (81). Despite his being the master of the house, he has to comply with all the major decisions that Lajo has taken on her own. Her firmness gives her the freedom to make choices and decisions not only in the kitchen but also in the whole house, and gradually she metamorphoses from a maid to a homemaker. The original Urdu title of the story, "Gharwali" says much in this regard. "Gharwali" means wife and/or homemaker. Had the title been "Naukrani," Lajo's position in the house would have been analyzed as a housekeeper or a paid servant. Her choice to be a homemaker is also reaffirmed when she shows discomfort at being Mirza's wife later in the story.

In the first phase of Lajo's metamorphosis, she is placed in the center of the power nexus in her relationship with Mirza. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* discusses the patriarchal power nexus in the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. Beauvoir, while defining "woman" in the Introduction of *The Second Sex*, emphasizes how a woman's existence is often characterized in relation to that of a man. She says: "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (Beauvoir 16). Though Lajo as Mirza's maid will be identified with reference to him, the more she takes up the position of the homemaker in his house, the more Mirza is decentralized. Her decisions of not taking any wage, of staying there to give him service, and of making sexual advances towards him, empower her gradually to be taken as the Subject, not as the Other in their relationship. This is also evident in these lines where Chughtai writes about Lajo's first impression of Mirza and his house:

For Lajo it was love at first sight. She was in love – not with Mirza but with the house. Without a mistress, it was as good as hers. A house does not belong to a man. He is more like a guest. ... Here at Mirza's house, she was the queen. She knew the moment she set eyes on him that Mirza was a simpleton. He would come quietly, much like a guest, and eat whatever was laid before him. (Chughtai 82)

One may trace a Victorian separate-sphere ideology in Lajo's character, but the daunting capacity of her to control both the man and the home to become the Subject is what Chughtai highlights as a stronger aspect in Lajo as a woman. The use of the word "queen" also establishes her superior position rather than being a mere servant.

Beauvoir clarifies further, in relation to the Hegelian concept of self-consciousness, how the essential Subject is formed only when it is set as opposed to the inessential Object (the Other). She also focuses on the reciprocity between the Subject and the Other under correlative circumstances and questions the absence of such reciprocity between the sexes (Beauvoir 17, 18). Mirza, as an agent of patriarchy, refuses to accept any such reciprocity in their sexual relationship "under the correlative circumstance" where Mirza has been decentralized in the home. It is because Lajo's reciprocal participation during the sexual intercourse threatens Mirza's subjective self. For example, Mirza's reaction to their first experience of coitus, both initiated and dominated by Lajo, presents him as the subordinate: "Lajo turned on her side and grabbed him. Mirza was dumbfounded. He had never encountered anything like this before. He went on pleading as Lajo seduced him thoroughly" (Chughtai 85). Lajo dominating Mirza in copulation allows room for the reciprocity that Beauvoir says to be usually absent between a man and a woman. This apparent reciprocity strengthens Lajo's position as the homemaker in the house.

The second phase of Lajo's metamorphosis – from a maid to a wife – is metaphorically presented through Lajo's journey from lehnga to pyjamas. It also speaks of how Mirza wants her to transform from a sexually dominating "whore" to a submissive, docile wife. No matter how complete the first phase of Lajo's metamorphosis looks, it is presented from Lajo's perspective. From Mirza's perspective, the relationship is sometimes that of master and servant – when he suspects her of stealing money – and sometimes that of husband and wife – when he suspects her of having flings with others behind his back, and when he feels ashamed and afraid to see the men in the neighborhood taking an interest in her. So, Mirza thinks of himself both as a master and as a husband, regarding Lajo as the Other and himself as the Subject in the relationship. Hence comes the need for him to make Lajo metamorphose into a wife and legalize that power nexus between them.

In this second phase, the apparent reciprocity that is found in their sexual relationship changes its course as soon as they get married:

Lajo's coquetry that had seemed enchanting before marriage now seemed objectionable in a wife. Such sluttish ways did not become decent women. She could not become Mirza's dream bride – one whom Mirza would beg for love, one who would blush at his advances, one who would feign anger and one he would coax into submission. (Chughtai 89)

Mirza's dream of a reluctant, blushful, and submissive bride narrates the patriarchal understanding of consent in women – to take reluctance as willingness, to take "no" for a "yes" – which eventually led to the slogan, "No Means No," in the fourth wave feminism in the twenty first century. Willingness gives way to consensual sex. It also means having a voice to assert one's own choice which confronts the non-reciprocal sexual politics between the Subject and the Other. That explains why Mirza has never dreamt of a willing, "sluttish," and dominating bride. In making "a decent woman of her," Lajo becomes, partially though, "tamed and reformed" (89). Lajo's dominating and welcoming sexuality that Mirza has been so threatened with is now "tamed and reformed" which gives him some form of trust. Secure in the knowledge of his superiority in the relationship, he begins to take her for granted. Whether Mirza has become the dream groom for Lajo is a question far from asking.

Mirza's suffocation in a reciprocal sexual relationship clearly indicates a patriarchal insecurity in him as well which is echoed in these lines:

Mirza could glimpse Lajo's lissome, golden legs through the door which was ajar. ... Her legs stretched further. Mirza drained one more glass of water and chanting "la hawla wala quwwat," fell on his bed. ... Then a harmless thought entered his mind: If her legs were not bare, he would not feel such

thirst for water. This thought made him bold. ... Mirza had to do it for his own safety. ... He held the hem of her lehnga and pulled it down. (Chughtai 84)

That Mirza feels “unsafe” under the same roof as Lajo associates her sexuality with evil power and brings in the ironical sense of religiosity in Mirza’s patriarchal mind. His taking refuge in the mosque and chanting “la hawla wala quwwat” [roughly meaning “There is none other than Allah to save me”] is evidence of that. This is exemplified further in this line: “The sound of her bangles would make Mullahji, coming out of the mosque, mutter “ayat-ul-qursi,” to ward off evil” (83). This sense of religiosity is marked here as “ironical” because Mirza neither feels “unsafe” nor chants “la hawla wala quwwat” when he visits the courtesans. Instead, he wears “a starched kurta with great flourish,” puts “a scented cottonwool ball in his ear,” and grabs “his walking stick” on such visitations (84). Also, no matter how frequently he visits the courtesans, keeping one at home makes his home appear to him as a brothel, turning it into a place for immoral acts. Thus, home that brings the idea of marriage – a sacred union between a man and a woman – becomes the devil’s den with Lajo’s sexual “evilness” in it. The juxtaposition of the pompous show in visiting the prostitutes and the stealthy approach in saving himself from the “evil” of Lajo’s sexuality presents the ironical religiosity that runs through the norms of patriarchy in the society from which these characters come. Later, Lajo’s regard of the pyjamas being “long as the devil’s intestines” provides a sharp and humorous contrast to the connection between the devil and herself set by the men in the narrative (89). While, for Mirza, a pair of pyjamas is the necessary tool for the chastisement in their marriage, for Lajo, it is a useless attire which is more of a “contraption” as “one has to tie and untie it each time one goes to the lavatory!” (89).

Lajo’s journey from pyjamas to lehnga speaks of the unsustainability of the second phase of the transformation in her. It would be interesting here to note that the idea of marriage appeals differently to Lajo and Mirza. On one level, both of them take virginity to be the eligibility of a woman to get married. According to Mirza, “after warming the bed of so many,” she has become “unfit to become his bride” (Chughtai 86). A similar notion of this is found in Lajo: “She had no illusion about herself: only virgins got married, and she could not remember when she had lost her virginity. She was not fit to be anyone’s bride” (88). For Mirza, to marry Lajo, who is not a virgin, would be the death of Mirza’s family honor. One cannot miss Chughtai’s intention of subtly mocking the association of honor with virginity here, and cannot but find a prophetic reflection of that, decades after, in Kamla Bhasin’s bold utterance: “My honor is not in my vagina” (Bhasin). Again, on another level, both Lajo and Mirza differ from each other regarding the need of legalizing their relationship. Mirza loves her and panics at the thought of someone

else in the neighborhood taking her away "with a better offer" (86). Given the coquettish nature of Lajo, he also suspects that she may have flings with others if he does not brand her legally as his wife. Later, when the maid is turned into a married woman, Mirza no longer worries about her fidelity. Even the neighborhood acknowledges this metamorphosis: "Now that she was married to a decent person, she became 'mother,' 'sister' and 'daughter'" (90). Lajo, on the other hand, does not understand the need of legalizing her loyalty to him in the name of marriage. She considers Mirza to be "a class apart" compared to the previous men in her life, and has "an entirely different experience of give and take with him" which can ensure her an orgasmic sexual experience (88). When Lajo can provide what Beauvoir calls "the 'service' of the bed and the 'service' of the housekeeping," marriage is just a needless burden for her (Beauvoir 476). Her question, "Where's the need?" clearly objects to the proposed metamorphosis to become a wife and this objection paves the path of her retreat from it in the future (Chughtai 87).

Lajo's retreat is triggered by her suffocation as a wife which can be explained through Beauvoir's take on homemaking in the chapter "The Married Woman" in her book. However, in Beauvoir's discussion, the wife is the homemaker who metamorphoses into the mother later whereas in Chughtai's narrative the homemaker breaks away from the wife's role to assert her solo identity and that process in this paper has been seen as a retreat. Beauvoir opines that a married woman "is to have sex pleasure only in a specified form and not individualized" (454). Mirza's dream bride mold defines that "specified form" for Lajo which is suggested by Chughtai through the metaphors of the pyjamas. Even within that, she declares her territory to be the home so much so that she does not want any maid for help: "... she could not share the house with another woman. If anyone dared to enter her kitchen or touch her sparkling vessels, she would break her legs. She could share Mirza with another woman, but as far as her home was concerned, she was the undisputed mistress" (Chughtai 90). This aspect of Lajo's character finds an expression in Beauvoir's words: "Whereas woman is confined within the conjugal sphere; it is for her to change that prison into a realm" (469). This also shows Lajo's acceptance of her husband's debauchery just as she agrees to the notion of virginity as the qualification for marriage. She has given up her lehnga and somehow manages to fit in the pyjamas but she cannot give up her home which is the only position in which she can assert herself as superior. She has been a maid for so long in other houses; in none of those has she been a homemaker. In Mirza's house, Lajo has wanted to become the homemaker – a metamorphosis that she has envisioned for herself regardless of marriage.

As the power nexus of Mirza as the Subject and Lajo as the Other has been established through the marriage, Lajo's grip over Mirza seems to have loosened a bit. Chughtai shows that in this line: "A man can do anything to please his mistress, but the wife

is altogether a different kettle of fish” (90). Instead of treating her as a mistress by going home early, Mirza now treats her as a wife by spending more time outside with his friends so that he cannot be called “henpecked” (90). Being “henpecked” would be becoming the Other which will imbalance his central position. At this point, Lajo experiences what Beauvoir describes as “no escape from immanence and little affirmation of individuality” (470). With Mirza speaking “in monosyllables,” Lajo indulges in an extra-marital affair with Mithwa as he alone is still attracted to her sexuality (Chughtai 90). This, in Beauvoir’s words, can be called Lajo’s “revenge on the sexual level” (Beauvoir 485). Lajo’s fidelity that Mirza has been concerned about before marriage is now lost due to that very marriage. Chughtai’s sarcasm on marriage as a means of securing love is matched with Beauvoir’s take on it: “It is sheer hypocrisy to hold that a union based on convenience has much chance of inducing love” (464).

While the marriage has made Lajo metamorphose from a maid to a wife, the divorce and its consequences set the tune for her retreat to being the homemaker. The discovery of Lajo’s infidelity leads to a severe beating followed by divorce. Lajo feels relieved with this news. Happily, she returns to her former position marked by her sale of the pyjamas and adoption of the lehnga once again. Here the patriarchal concept of honor is mocked by Chughtai. Sadique makes the following remark on this style of hers: “She [Chughtai] knows the art of mocking at the false pride of the male, of exposing and satirizing his hypocritical and egotistical nature” (225). After the divorce, Mirza is told by Mullahji that their divorce is invalid as their marriage itself was invalid on the grounds that Lajo was a bastard. So, the serious issue of making Lajo a “decent” woman through marriage and putting a ban on her lehnga has been mocked by the very institution that imposed it on her. Lajo emerges here as superior again through Chughtai’s portrayal: “Being a bastard served her in good stead! God forbid, if she had been the legitimate child of her parents, she would have faced the music now!” (94). The legitimacy of the relationship is not a concern for her as much as it is for Mirza. This presents Lajo as a character who is not bound by so-called social values. For Lajo, the divorce was not heartbreaking at all, rather leaving the home was: “Never before in her life had she got the opportunity to become the mistress of a household. She missed the house. Mirza would not get anyone to sweep it for fear of pilferage. The place must be in a mess” (94). So she approaches Mirza to resume her work. Without waiting long for his reply, she re-enters the house by running over the rooftops and jumping down into the house, and starts working by tucking up her lehnga again – her regular body language reaffirming her invading quality that brings her to the center of the power nexus like a queen. On Mirza’s return, he finds the house to be “spic and span” which again reminds him of his late mother and reasserts Lajo as the homemaker (94). Chughtai

writes: "A nagging feeling that he [Mirza] did not value her worth overwhelmed him. ... He got up from his bed abruptly and gathered the homemaker in his arms" (94). Lajo's worth here is in being the homemaker, not the wife. By trying to change Lajo, it is Mirza who has come to a new realization. As M. Asaduddin comments on Chughtai's heroines from the lower class: "They are frivolous village maidens and preach a robust morality that is far more healthy and creative than the attenuating social morals practised by the middle class." Lajo, through her retreat, provides a solution that is more suitable than the one Mirza has prescribed through the marriage (Asaduddin 88). Mirza's patriarchal and subjective self succumbs to Lajo's sexuality which brings back the reciprocity in their sexual relationship. With this, Lajo's retreat to being the homemaker is complete.

Chughtai, while showing the phases of metamorphosis and the sexual politics between the characters, also addresses a larger social milieu of her time. In "Introduction: Theorizing the 'First Wave' Globally," Pamela L. Caughie identifies the period from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s as the first wave of feminism in the non-Western contexts. She explains that, along with demanding and working for gender equity in the fields of education, election, and employment in the public sphere, women in non-Western countries contributed to set "a re-assessment of gender and sexual mores in the private sphere" (Caughie 5). By the time Chughtai wrote this story in the mid-twentieth century India, many women from the middle class Muslim families were deciding to leave purdah. In Gail Minault's essay, "Coming Out: Decisions to Leave Purdah," one can find an extensive account of those progressive women. In her book, *Gender, Language, and Learning*, Minault, again gives an insightful discussion on the women's magazines in Urdu published at the beginning of the twentieth century – *Tahzib un-Niswan*, *Khatun*, and *Ismat* – which reflected how educated Muslim women of that time were progressing. She states: "There were heated discussions of purdah – its necessity or not, various degrees of its observance, and so on..." (Minault 86). These accounts record the questions that were being raised at that time against purdah. Despite such progressive intellectuality spread by these magazines, the general picture in the society remained mostly unchanged as M. Asaduddin says:

they [the Urdu magazines] could not make any impact on the society as a whole. Women were denied any significant social role and the whole *raison d'être* of their lives was limited to child bearing and domestic chores A kind of Victorian hypocrisy vitiated social relations. Ismat was the product of this historical moment and exposed this hypocrisy in all its nakedness. (Asaduddin 78)

Like her intellectual inspiration, Rasheed Jahan – the only woman in *Angare* (the

first collection of stories of the Progressive Writers' Association which was published in 1932) group, Chughtai took the decision of leaving purdah. In the chapter, "Nanhe and Munne" of her memoir *A Life in Words*, an account of her experience with purdah is included: "I had to wear a burqa for the first time, and I cannot put in words the sense of humiliation I had to suffer" (Chughtai 48, 49). Taking cue from Wazir Agha's statement that "Ismat must be somewhat aware of herself to be able to unravel some of her own personality through her characters," it can be said that her humiliation in wearing the burqa is projected through Lajo's suffocation in wearing the pyjamas (Agha 199). Through the nature of the sexual politics between Lajo and Mirza, Chughtai has presented a society that was still not ready to accept the dispute over issues like purdah. Even in such circumstances, a character like Lajo – an uneducated woman from the underprivileged strata of the society – can raise and establish her voice in her own capacity, here in this context by establishing her territory and metamorphosing into what she has wanted to be – a homemaker. However, while doing so, Chughtai has been quite suggestive in choosing the metaphors. This suggestiveness is seen throughout the story.

Summing up, it can be said that, from Bakshi's to Mirza's, Lajo has metamorphosed from a maid to a homemaker – like a fluttering butterfly coming out of its cocoon. Shoving Lajo's sexuality into the pyjamas and forcing her to metamorphose into a wife is like squeezing the butterfly back into the cocoon which is unnatural. Mirza's attempt to cover Lajo uncovers his patriarchal ego that cannot accept her sexuality to be more dominant than his but it is Lajo who proves to be superior and gains her former position back in the end. In portraying these through the metaphors, Chughtai makes a brilliant presentation of a scene from her time which tells much about the time and its taboo, and which many have often looked away from.

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Postcolonial Disillusionment: A Historicist Reading of Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*

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Abstract

The primary purpose of Chinua Achebe's writing was to help the Nigerian people retrieve what they lost due to years of colonial exploitation. To construct a sense of dignity for African communities and nations, that educative purpose inspired him to reexamine social, political, economic, and historical realities of Africa. That concern obviously worked as a stimulus behind the production of *A Man of the People* in which Achebe pictured the failure of postcolonial leadership in a fictional country which in many ways coincided with post-independence Nigeria. The incident of the military coup at the end of the novel due to the failure of political leadership prophetically coincided with a similar incident in Nigeria only six years after its independence. This was mostly because of the politicians' indulgence in euphoria and self-interest. Due to the lack of a vantage political vision, the country experienced a disastrous collapse of economic, moral, and social values. National consciousness went through vulnerability in the face of rival tribal consciousness in a multi-ethnic state. In *A Man of the People* Achebe explores how the so-called man of the people fails to uphold the public interest for his indulgence in sexual motives and private politics. This paper seeks to approach Achebe's *A Man of the People* from a historicist perspective and examines how the author depicts the disillusionment of a postcolonial nation.

Keywords: historicist, disillusionment, historical consciousness, nationalism, national consciousness

Chinua Achebe's creative practice emerges out of the historical realities of his country, and broadly speaking, of the historical realities of Africa. History is one of the major sites in which he invests his wit and wisdom to diagnose the problems of contemporary Nigeria. So, apart from the mythopoeic aura of his literary works, they, of course, serve as a powerful metaphor of the political, cultural, ethnological, and historical realities of Nigeria and the disillusionment of the postcolonial generation. Achebe's little book *The Trouble with Nigeria* sums up the essence of his vision and enterprise as a writer which begins with a very coercive statement, "The Trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (1). Only within a few years of independence, owing to the failure of political leadership, the country fell into the pit of disillusionment. In connection with this historical reality, *A Man of the People* reflects the Nigeria of the 1960s through the metaphor of a fictitious



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country with a hypocritical man of the people whose failure becomes inevitable because of his indulgence in sexual motives and personal interests.

Most African countries attained political freedom after the Second World War but beneath the euphoria of independence, they failed to navigate the hazardous years of nation-building through the implementation of political principles and social visions. It was mostly because “[D]uring the years of anticolonial struggle Africa’s nationalist leaders had a better idea of what they were fighting against than of what they wanted to replace it with” (Irele and Gikandi 797-98). This fatal pitfall plunged post-independence Nigeria, like many other African countries, into civil war, tribal rivalries, genocide, repeated military coups, and a morass of institutionalized corruption. Political independence could not bring social justice, national unity, peace, and economic security for the majority of the Nigerians. Rather, it brought internal segregation, inequality, and pessimism that overpowered the post-independence generation of Nigeria. Achebe’s novel, *A Man of the People*, may be read as a portrayal of the pervasive disillusionment and despair of a post-independence generation struggling for good governance and competent leadership.

In *A Man of the People*, Achebe exhibits how Odili, a young school teacher and protagonist of the novel, resigns himself to social injustice, the duplicity of the politicians, and the impossibility of radical changes when he finds that the “postcolonial administrations stagger to an exhausted standstill, the economic defunct, the state bankrupted by reckless overconsumption and brazen government racketeering, while a power-hungry soldiery waits in the wings” (Wright 797-98). Obviously, low and split up political consciousness and tribal consciousness create vulnerability that lead the masses to cynicism, and in such cases, resistance slides into indulgence in corruption. This mutual failure of both the parties – the masses and the rulers – is delineated in *A Man of the People* which “is about the failure of leadership in postcolonial Nigeria” (Hossain 219).

The postcolonial situation of Nigeria was unexpected to the confounded general mass. The fruition of nationalism was nipped in the bud. As a new nation, the Nigerians were tirelessly wrestling to fortify norms and values to define their national identity. Local politicians manipulated their goal and led the nation to a cavern of disillusionment and pessimism by hosting every possible sort of corruption and nepotism. Though, in terms of natural resources, such as, coal and oil, Nigeria is still a resourceful country and “approximately a third of Africa’s petroleum reserves are believed to rest under Nigerian soil,” it has remained one of the poorest countries of the world (Harmon 107). This is owing to its political leaders’ incapability of leading the nation as they were focused on private interests only. Post-independence Nigeria could not provide its people with food and other necessities. A tiny group

of politicians and military collaborators made a nexus with imperial interest and squandered Nigeria's wealth and opportunities. Unbridled corruption of this so called elite group consumed by unenlightened self-interests turned Nigeria into a "contraption where democracy, integrity and basic human rights were at risk" (Hagher 5). Even the educated Nigerians who should have voiced demands of justice, equality, and citizen rights took the side of the plunderers and empathized with their perversions, and inevitably jointly led postcolonial Nigeria to the margins of a failed state. So critical readers cannot alienate the texts of Chinua Achebe who believes in the "relationship between artist and his community" from the realities of the time in which they are produced (*Hopes and Impediments* 61).

Parallelism can be found between the fictional country of *A Man of the People* and Nigeria in many ways. While the people needed sufficient food, more hospitals, schools, better houses with better sanitation, and reliable communications, Chief Nanga indulged in luxury and extravagance, and in the accumulation of personal wealth. In the face of bribes and threats, Odili forms an opposing political party but is soon also overcome by his personal interests. As Nanga seduces his girlfriend, he pursues Nanga's fiancée for revenge. The fictional country in the novel metaphorically exposes the postcolonial realities of Nigeria. The novel became problematic for Achebe as its publication incurred the grudge of the contemporary rulers who thought that Achebe's words in part prompted the 1966 military coup in Nigeria. Immediately before its publication by Heinemann, Achebe was anxious: "I knew that the book was going to be problematic for me because of its criticism of Nigerian politics- very severe criticism." (*There Was A Country* 54). In postcolonial Nigeria, writing a book like *A Man of the People* was an extremely difficult and challenging undertaking. As a responsible writer, Achebe felt an urge to galvanize a new political consciousness that was required for collective transformative action.

A Man of the People came out of Achebe's commitment to his society because he maintained a belief that creative writers could hardly evade the social and political issues of their nation. It is the novel in which "the story comes to have mimetic and polysemous functions for Achebe dives straight up to the top and into the heart of Government to find out why the nation's hard-earned independence has within seven years become a sham" (Mezu 93). It is evidently an adventure of self-discovery because it exposed the historical realities in the midst of which the country was wrestling to form its ideology and national consciousness. Erupting national reality disillusioned the postcolonial generation of Nigeria. This picture of disillusionment is portrayed in the protagonist, Odili, a school teacher. Though fascinated by the rhetoric of his ex-school teacher, Nanga, now a minister of culture, very soon he loses interest in him when he discovers him to be a bundle of contradictions. Sixteen

years ago in 1948, in pre-independence Nigeria, Nanga was a poor school teacher and Odili was his pupil. Nanga's transformation from a mere school teacher to an influential minister invites us to look upon him "as a typological character, one whose development mirrors different stages in the evolution of the colony into a nation" (Gikandi 108). Nanga's subsequent calamity reminds the readers of the dramatic growth and failure of a bourgeois class of leadership in a typical post-independence country. Due to the lack of a concrete philosophical ground of political visions and indulgence to subjective interests, it failed to formulate a national consciousness and unite the people with the consolidated spirit of nationalism.

As a member of this emerging bourgeois class, Odili's mindset, reflective of Ngugi's idea in his *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, is molded by the growing bourgeois sentiment that Karl Marx describes:

half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core but always ludicrous in its effect, through the total incapacity to comprehend the march of history. (qtd. Thiong'o 86)

Odili wrestles to become a chronicler of the time and space which, if historically viewed, contributes to the formation of the fictional country into a nation. But the events and realities that Odili portrays from his own experience are more subjective than objective. He ironically thinks that he achieves insight during his contact with Nanga. In his words:

sitting at chief Nanga's feet, I received enlightenment; many things began to crystallize of the mist – some of the emergent forms were not nearly as ugly as I had suspected but many seemed much worse. I was not making these judgments at the time, or not strongly anyhow. I was simply too fascinated by the almost ritual lifting of the clouds. (Achebe *A Man* 39-40)

Though he claims that he achieves enlightenment through his contact with Nanga, in his ignorance, he has become a metaphor for the prevalent bourgeois sentiment and youthful rage. His failure to turn his insight into an intellectual discourse to fight back corruption around him proves him to be a failure. Besides, the way he addresses the crises is not intellectual either. Rather, emotionally treating the burning issue of the country leads him to this failure. He knows that he is fighting against Nanga but he does not know who or what needs to replace Nanga. In this regard, he is like the typical postcolonial politicians of Nigeria who lack constructive vision for the nation.

In the face of irrupting kleptocracy, Odili struggles to overcome the problems but fails as he lacks a far-reaching vision and ideology with which he can replace the leaders

like Nanga. Odili plays the dual role of protagonist and narrator, and ventures to depict the realities of the country retrospectively. So, “[T]o explicate and represent the pitfalls of national consciousness in Africa, the narrator wants us to read the rise and fall of Nanga as an allegory of the promise and betrayal of nationalism” (Gikandi 108). The realities that Odili thinks of begin to undergo a paradigm shift, and in the face of this transition, Odili cannot prove himself to be a fit reformer. Rather, he personalizes the realities by emphasizing his vindictive disposition which is wholly subjective. Thus, his political party with which he wants to lead the country to the path of democracy and good governance becomes a failure. Odili fails to become a man of the people and launches a counter-discourse against the hypocritical leader Nanga. He feels enraged by the thought that Nanga has snatched away his fiancée Elsie and deceived him. At one point of his political enterprises, it appears that he is not fighting to strengthen a political discourse; he is rather fighting against Nanga for his personal cause, taking revenge by seducing Edna, Nanga’s concubine, a kind of romanticization of the political ideals. Odili asserts:

The heat and anger had now largely evaporated leaving the cold fact that another man had wrenched my girl-friend from my hand and led her to bed under my very eyes, and I had done nothing about it – could do nothing. And why? Because the man was a minister bloated by the flatulence of ill-gotten wealth, living in a big mansion built with public money, riding in a Cadillac and watched over by a one-eyed, hired thug. (Achebe *A Man* 68)

Thus, Odili’s political discourse gives in to his sexual motive and defines his politics as private, rather than public. A critical inquiry discovers that his politics is problematic and it evokes questions regarding his leadership capability. Nanga, as a man of the people, might win the readers’ interest but his hypocrisy and betrayal of his post and position quickly disillusion them. Odili alienates himself from public politics after losing Elsie to Nanga and fails to unveil the shamelessness of the politicians and though he tries to overcome this subjective motive he cannot. In his words:

I saw that Elsie did not matter in the least. What mattered was that a man had treated me as no man had a right to treat another – not even if he was master and the other slave; and my manhood required that I make him pay for his insult in full measure. In flesh and blood terms I realized that I must go back, seek out Nanga’s intended parlour-wife and give her the works, good and proper. All this flashed through my mind in one brief moment of blinding insight – just like that, without warning! (Achebe *A Man* 69)

Thus, Odili’s vindictiveness emanates from his subjective motive that leads him to abandon public interests in a political issue. In this connection, it is relevant to know Achebe’s attitude towards the politicians of Nigeria as expressed in his *The*

Trouble with Nigeria where he makes a daunting proclamation that the trouble with Nigeria does not lie in its climate or water or soil; its trouble lies in its politicians' failure of leadership (1). Their persuasion concentrates on their personal benefits only and in this race politics serves as a tool for attaining their personal goal. In *A Man of the People* both Nanga and ultimately Odili are failures from the very inception due to their concentration on their self-interest. In this way, the novel serves as a metaphor to depict postcolonial Nigeria with its disillusionment that emanates from the dubious role of its political leaders who exercise all forms of tyrannical and hypocritical actions upon their people while ironically claiming to love and protect them. In this connection, Eze's evaluation of postcolonial African countries is very relevant:

Much of Africa lives in the delusion of racial innocence. It is the kind of innocence that encourages a Manichean oppositionary thinking that, on the one hand, arranges the world into good, us, and evil, our oppressors and those who fail to see how evil they are. On the other hand, the oppositionary thinking erects bogeymen against whose backdrop leaders of most African societies become tyrannical to their own people while claiming to love and protect them. (Eze 1)

Thus, Achebe's portrayal of the collapse of postcolonial leadership in Africa makes readers presume that Africa is not politically, socially, economically, and culturally as advanced as it is capable of being and the mood of disillusionment pervades his *A Man of the People*.

The title of the novel, too, fits into the larger social concerns of the 1960s in which Odili is inevitably involved. So, the readers' attention is fixed on him. Readers expect him to be a watchdog over Nanga, the self-declared man of the people, "who is expected to serve the interest of the people, not his own interest" (Izevbaye 45). His friend Max, with whom Odili tries to form a political party named CPC and compete with Nanga, vainly attempts to build up a socialist concept of a political idea. However, Max also does not hesitate to take a bribe from Chief Koko to finance the party and thus moves away from his political goal. Ultimately he is killed by Chief Koko in the political rivalry. His tragic end leaves the readers in utter hopelessness. His death in the face of all-pervading corruption, kleptocracy, and hooliganism predicts the futility of political discourse, democracy, and good governance in the post-independence country. But, to some extent, "[I]t is through the unfulfilled character of Max that the novel rises above Odili's sexual motives and private politics" (Izevbaye 46). But Max appears to be thoroughly incapable of involving the general mass with the political issues of the country, which leaves an aura of disillusionment regarding the uncertain future of the country.

Again, examining the vicissitudes of the character of Nanga from a teacher of Anata Grammar School to the Minister of Culture, readers can, in many ways, identify the fictional country in the novel with post-independence Nigeria and categorize this novel like other novels of Achebe as a historical novel. Nanga's dramatic change in life metaphorically parallels the formation period of Nigeria as a nation. He has been portrayed as a political opportunist, devoid of political ethics and morality. Bribery, corruption, and intimidation serve as a means of accumulating wealth for him. Nanga does not think that independence is a panacea where Odili, without having the capability to conceptualize sufficient knowledge of the colonial and postcolonial realities of his country, thinks that independence can cure the country of all evils. Nanga, who has a unique compatibility with the people whom he represents, considers it to be a tool for exploiting people. Odili's struggle for constituting a political discourse and reforming the country finally proves futile. His political discourse is based on his idealism that does not work in the country which is on the verge of chaos and confusion. His friend Max shows him the flickering hope at first while deciding to form a common people's convention party. But Odili gets frustrated when he finds that a corrupted young minister of the government is backing Max. Again, Odili gets his personal revenge intermingled with political rivalry by seducing Edna, Nanga's fiancée. Nanga's way of life and the deliberate game in politics can be interpreted as a kind of subjugation to the "thought system of the colonizer," which tends to continue its legacy in the postcolonial nation in the form of neo-colonization (Saaka 14). Odili's criticism of Nanga's ambitious pursuit turns ironically fruitless when he manipulates his political discourse with his subjective emotion to fight back the decadence of political leadership. Even in the scene when Nanga is going on with his political campaign, Odili with a view to exposing his hypocritical role, pushes through the crowd and reaches the stage. Nanga deliberately, with a view to creating a positive impression among the crowd about himself, gives him the microphone. Odili mistakenly thinks that he has got a chance to expose Nanga's corruption in public. As soon as he starts, "I came to tell your people that you are a liar . . .," Nanga slaps him and the crowd joins in (Achebe *A Man* 129). In the hospital bed Odili comes to know that the army staged a coup and Nanga along with other ministers is behind bars. Both the parties fail in their respective enterprises. The cause of the failure of both Nanga and Odili lies in their consciousness about their belonging to, as Fanon describes it, an intermediary class. Thiong'o, with reference to Fanon, defines this class as "[T]he class that took over power after independence was an underdeveloped middle class which was not interested in putting the national economy on a new footing, but in becoming an intermediary between Western interests and the people, a handsomely paid business agent of the Western bourgeoisie" (83). Odili's location in such social

realities hinders him from thinking beyond his material acquisitions and becoming a reliable man of the people.

Odili wrestles to produce a post-independence discourse but it is manipulated by subjective impulses, which contributes to the dysfunction of his post-independence nation. His incapacity to perceive the liminality of his discourse leads him to nowhere. He lacks the intellectual potential to master the surrounding realities to his own interest as well as the interest of the people. He intends to fight against the bourgeois with a bourgeois mindset that cherishes a longing for personal comfort and delight. This dichotomy contrives his resistance against the corrupted politics of his country and leads him to disillusionment. On the other hand, Nanga's wealth and prosperity metaphorically connote the political bankruptcy and narcissistic political behavioral traits of many post-independence African countries with repeated military coups due to the failure of the political governments. Odili's fatal limitation lies in his incapacity to overcome the passivity of the people who are not politically conscious. Throughout the novel people do not show any significant consciousness about the political realities of the country. Odili is incapable of providing the people with a political discourse and convincing them that his politics is dedicated to the interest of his country. A disposition of elitist bourgeoisie has segregated all the political figures of this novel from the people. Thus, Achebe's *A Man of the People* is conspicuously about the African elite who "failed to cultivate African humanity in the face of new dispensation that has effectively neutered all traditional guardians of morality, law and order" (Eze 3). Hence, a close perusal of this novel reveals that if a nation desires to run smoothly towards peace and prosperity it must take proper care while electing its leaders. Otherwise, the people will simply turn into an apparatus that the corrupt politicians use to attain their corrupt goals.

A historicist approach to the text reveals that Odili, in many ways, poses as a representative bourgeois politician of the first Republic of Nigeria and lacks worthwhile political ideas and vision. To lend weight to this view, readers' attention may be drawn to the dichotomy of the enterprises of both Odili and Max who grumble about Nanga whose tactics they ironically end up following in contriving their political enterprises. This fatal pitfall makes space for the Army that appears to be the only hopeless hope of the people for their salvation from political corruption and repression. Yet Achebe sticks to his hope for the time when Africa will rise above all these banal pitfalls and resonate in democracy. His findings of the factors that instigate the military coup in post-independence Nigeria are tinged with philosophic profundity. It is also suggestive in Achebe's narrative that a generation with true historical consciousness may lead the country towards hope, absence of which envelops it with disillusionment.

The fatal pitfall of anticolonial struggle lies in the lack of adequate introspection of tradition and past history, which inevitably compels the postcolonial generation to carry on the legacy of the former colonial masters without interrogating. Lack of introspection of the history and tradition mars the vision about the future and it is true “where there is no clear vision about the future, the people perish especially when they are plagued by an unthinking and pestilential leadership” (Tsaaior xiv). Through the presentation of an intensive diagnosis of the historical realities, Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, thus, offers a seminal critique of the 1960s postcolonial situation of his country and exemplifies how effective dialogues between the artist and his community help produce the political aesthetics of a nation.

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Emily Dickinson: Parental Expectations as Shackles of Existence

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Abstract

No matter how loving parents may be, the demands their expectations lay on their children result in an emotional pressure that goes unnoticed until, in most cases, it is too late and the damage to emotional maturity and the negative effect on personality has already occurred. Such emotional neglect is mostly unintentional. The life of nineteenth century American poet, Emily Dickinson, is an example of how the internalization of parental expectations and childhood emotional neglect can affect emotional maturity and adult behaviour. “Introvert” and “reclusive” are the two words commonly used to refer to her. However, this paper focuses not on what she was, but why she was so. In this paper, I examine a number of Dickinson’s letters to explore her experience of life within a “loving” home full of parental expectations which exerted unintentional pressure on her emotions and made her the socially withdrawn person she ultimately became. For this purpose, I base my discussion on the psychoanalytic feminism of Nancy J. Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin to show how Dickinson’s subjectivity is negatively influenced by patriarchal dominance represented within the family by her father and reinforced by her emotionally absent mother.

Keywords: patriarchy, emotional neglect, internalization, subjectivity, identification

I Came to buy a smile - today –
But just a single smile-
The smallest one upon your face
Will suit me just as well-

(Dickinson “I Came to buy a smile – today –” 1-4)

The fact that the 19th century American poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) confined herself to a life of isolation for most of her adult life is well known. What is not certain about her is why she removed herself from society and why her only interactions were limited to a slightly ajar door, an abundance of correspondence, and a submerged existence in poetry of which all except ten were published posthumously. Developments in psychoanalytic interpretation now allow us to piece together the reality of Dickinson’s psychic and emotional life, but one must be wary of possible misinterpretations if attempting to understand her through such an approach without taking into consideration the times and circumstances



she lived in. Her circumstances and times were a reality she could not escape and those who wish to understand her should not overlook them. Nancy J. Chodorow advances her view in this regard: “[E]ach person’s sense of gender – her gender identity or gendered subjectivity – is an inextricable fusion or melding of personally created (emotionally and through unconscious fantasy) and cultural meaning” (517). What she emphasizes here is that one should acknowledge that “perception and meaning are psychologically created’ and all “cultural meanings and images” are experienced “emotionally and through fantasy, as well as in particular interpersonal contexts” (517). She aligns her theories with that of Patricia Hill Collins who, she states, “emphasizes that consciousness is created and not determined and stresses the importance of feminists of keeping constant attention to both the social-cultural-political and the individual creativities of consciousness” (Chodorow 518). On the usefulness of psychoanalytic theory, Chodorow, in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, contends that “until we have another theory which can tell us about unconscious mental processes, conflict, and relations of gender, sexuality, and self, we had best take psychoanalysis” (qtd. in Gardiner 439).

My discussion, therefore, shall include details not only of the interpersonal context of Dickinson’s social reality, but also interpretations of her emotional and psychic responses grounded in an analysis of her letters. Furthermore, for a complete understanding of the influence of her parents on her subjectivity, I shall analyze her relationship with her father with reference to the works of Jessica Benjamin who sees subjectivity as developed through “the structure of domination” (8), and with her mother with reference to the works of Nancy J. Chodorow who concentrates on the mother-daughter relationship in the development of subjectivity.

As Dickinson was reclusive and homebound for much of her adult life, “letters provided her with a social context that was otherwise lacking” (Pollack and Noble 17). Her much quoted line: “A Letter always feels to me like immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend” (D 196)¹, shows how she overcame the limitations of time and space to establish strong relationships through her letters. She was looking for an escape from her situation in a world beyond her ontological reality, thus she wrote letter after letter in response to all she experienced whilst she gradually isolated herself from her immediate surroundings. Dickinson’s letters clearly reveal a side of her that is deceptively hidden in her poetry. Passionately connecting and reaching out to all who would give her the time of day, her letters bubble with emotion and a sort of childlike liveliness and innocence that is missing in her poetry. Where her poetry seems intentionally restrained, much like her behavior in public, her letters are without restraint, extremely imaginative,

1 Unless otherwise indicated, the source of Emily Dickinson’s letters is *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*, edited by Thomas Johnson. In-text citations use “D” with the page number.

and playful. Yet, what is strongly seen and of special concern is that in her letters, especially those written to friends, there is a strong sense of self-deprecation and dependence. Furthermore, the discontent she expresses about her relationship with her parents speaks volumes about her emotional and psychological state.

Letters have long been read as primary sources of biography and history. As Steven Stowe observes, “Few historical texts seem as familiar – or as compelling to read – as personal letters and diaries. They are plain-spoken, lively, and full of details. Both letters and diaries seem to emerge *directly* from the writer, fresh and intimate, bringing us close to what that person was” (Stowe). The importance of letters in analyzing the perceived reality of an artist within her own social and emotional relationships cannot be denied. The information of “historical changes and continuities in self, social relations, work and values” (Stowe) that personal letters carry, facilitate understanding of the development of personality. “It is impossible,” as William Merrill Decker empathetically observes, “to read extensively in the literature of personal correspondence without becoming aware of the conditions of human isolation that generate such texts, and of the vulnerability, sorrow, folly, and crudity, as well as the invention, eloquence, and lyricism, that such conditions bring out” (6). Thus, in this paper, I use evidence from letters written by Emily Dickinson, analyzed from the theoretical perspectives of psychoanalytic feminism, to understand the relationship she had with her parents, which influenced the development of her personality to such an extent that she came to be commonly known as an “introvert” and a “recluse.”

Dickinson had mixed feelings about both her parents. They were good people but they could not fulfil her intellectual or emotional needs. As she writes in one of her letters to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, her literary mentor and friend, “My Mother does not care for thought– and Father, too busy with his briefs – to notice what we do – He buys me many Books – but begs me not to read them – because he fears they joggle the Mind” (D 173). This statement clearly shows that she felt emotionally neglected by her parents as one was too busy with his official business while the other lacked interest in her intellectual pursuits, so much so that neither was ever there to encourage her.

Parental expectations in the nineteenth century American family of Amherst were strong and binding in more ways than one. As mentioned by Michael E. Lamb,

[a]ccording to Pleck and Pleck (1997), for example, Euro-American fathers were viewed primarily as moral teachers during the colonial phase of American history ... [and] responsible for ensuring that their children grew up with an appropriate sense of values, acquired primarily from a study of the Bible and other scriptural texts. (3)

But Dickinson was not religious in the traditional sense of the word. She writes of this difference between her family and herself to Higginson: “They are religious – except me” (D 173). This made things more complicated for her. The stoicism usually encouraged by religious beliefs was absent in her. As a result, internally she was in constant conflict about the circumstances of her life. Being a woman with acute sensibility and above average intelligence was difficult in the 19th century American environment. Within the constraints of her family, Dickinson was not happy and she could not change her attitude towards the life she had. She felt trapped.

She expresses this feeling of entrapment to her brother Austin, on 8th June 1851 when she writes, “I miss you very much. I put on my bonnet tonight, opened the gate desperately, and for a little while, the suspense was terrible – I think I was held in check by some invisible agent, for I returned to the house without having done any harm!” (D 48). The harm she mentions here is more about harm to the family reputation than her own and fear of adding agitation to the family atmosphere once such a transgression occurs. The thought of the possible rage such an action would incur from her father was the type of psychological barrier that prevented her from stepping outside the boundaries of her home.

The restriction imposed on her movement is affirmed by what she mentions a few paragraphs before in the same letter, “Tutor Holland was here as usual, during the afternoon – after tea I went to see Sue – had a nice little visit with her – then went to see Emily Fowler, and arrived home at 9 – found Father in great agitation at my protracted stay – and mother and Vinnie in tears, for fear that he would kill me” (D 47). This may seem unwarranted at that time in history when democracy and various movements were flourishing and changing society. Surprisingly, the freedom flourishing in the form of the Women’s Rights Movement did not touch the Dickinson household. The atmosphere for expression was not exactly inviting for her within her home. Protective steps were taken to keep the inside in: “Father takes care of the doors, and mother of the windows, and Vinnie and I are secure against all outward attacks” (D 47). Her home was a fortress against outside bodily harm but it seems her parents failed to understand what harm this seclusion caused her both emotionally and psychologically.

Writing of the freedom of girls in the democratic American family in the 1930s, De Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*, states: “Long before an American girl arrives at the marriageable age, her emancipation from maternal control begins: she has scarcely ceased to be a child, when she already thinks for herself, speaks with freedom, and acts on her own impulse” (qtd. in Goodsell 15). But Dickinson was living in the suburbs of Amherst where, in 1845, a religious revival took place. As

a result, parental control was strong and grounded in religious teachings, as such the breaking of family norms would indeed result in angry outbursts especially in a family such as Dickinson's of which the father was considered one of the most prominent men in Amherst, Massachusetts. In 1871, the *Amherst Record* published a note about her father under the title "Pen Portraits of the Prominent Men of Amherst" that reads: "Honorable Edward Dickinson ... The name of Dickinson ... is so identified with everything that belongs to Amherst, that any attempt to speak of town history in which that name should not appear the most prominent would be impossible" (Pollak and Noble 27). One can imagine the pressure of expectation such a reputation would inadvertently place on a child of that family.

Dickinson tries to be the dutiful daughter, in accordance with early 19th century conservative standards. But such responsibility saddened her and though she didn't express discontent in front of anyone she was disillusioned by the circumstances. Jessica Benjamin interprets a girl's attempt to be a good little girl by willingly giving up agency in the hope of recognition from the father as the result of failed identification with her fantasized male ideal (Benjamin 107). In May 1850 Dickinson writes to her friend Abiah Root, "I have always neglected the culinary arts, but attend to them now from necessity, and from a desire to make everything pleasant for father, and Austin ... When I am not at work in the kitchen, I sit by the side of mother, provide for her little wants – and try to cheer, and encourage her" (D 38). Her main concern was "to make everything pleasant for father, and Austin" and to comfort her ailing mother. This letter clearly points out how circumstances had forced her to become a "mother" to her parents, caring for and supporting them in ways that she herself was denied.

The relationship between Dickinson and her father, Edward Dickinson, strongly influenced her subjectivity. Dickinson could sense the sternness that was infused in her father's attitude. In referring to Edward's effect on his daughter, Dickinson's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, informs, he "evidenced his displeasure by taking his hat and cane and passing out the door in silence, leaving an emptiness indicative of reproof, a wordless censure more devastating to her than any judgement day" (qtd. in Martin 12). The extent of fear she had of her father is clear when she writes "I never knew how to tell time by the clock till I was 15. My father thought he had taught me but I did not understand & I was afraid to say I did not & afraid to ask anyone else lest he should know" (D 210). While growing up, the people from whom children expect most support and encouragement are their parents. Unfortunately, Dickinson found that her parents were unapproachable and unable to provide the support she so desperately needed and yearned for. That Dickinson had conflicting feelings about her father is clear from a letter written to Higginson in July 1874, after her father's death, where she states: "His heart was pure and

terrible and I think no other like it exists” (D 223). Here the juxtaposition of the words “pure and terrible” indicates a mixture of respectful awe and terrifying fear present in her thoughts about her father.

Willingly or not, Dickinson’s father was her ideal and, for her, represented “home.” In her words, “Home is so far from Home, since my Father died” (D 230). But that home did not accommodate her feelings nor understand her need for acceptance. Her father would praise her baking and culinary skills but was wary of encouraging her literary pursuits. She did not agree to publish extensively because she knew her father would not approve. As she was a woman, her father expected her to care for domesticity and disregard any intellectual pursuit or expression of emotional excess. Her father’s patriarchal domination forced her to refrain from publishing her poetry yet he valued even his son’s letters and thought them worthy of publication. We know this from Dickinson’s letter to Austin dated 6 July 1851, “Father says your letters are altogether before Shakespeare, and he will have them published to put in our library” (D 53). This bias in favor of Austin’s correspondence over her own poetic and intellectual endeavors is what Dickinson had to suffer at the cost of her emotional balance. The pain of knowing that no matter how much she developed her art, she would never receive the encouragement that her brother got, was enough to frustrate her.

Dickinson could not consciously go beyond her father’s restrictions. Burdened with a sense of shame she felt for her emotional conflict, she became all the more attached to her father and the compliance he demanded of her. This fear of disgruntling him was something she could not overcome in her lifetime and it became a mode of thinking that determined all her future decisions and actions. She never felt good enough to expect her father’s appraisal. By extension, this is also possibly the reason behind the “painful self-abasement present in her ‘Master’ letters” (Martin 87).

Dickinson’s turn towards extreme submissiveness and self-denigration can be understood in Benjamin’s observation about the effect on a girl’s subjectivity when she is not able to establish an “identificatory” bond with the father:

A confirmed recognition from the father – “Yes, you can be like me” – helps the child consolidate the identification and so enhances the sense of being a subject of desire. But the lack of recognition and the denial of the identificatory bond damage the sense of being a sexual subject and lead the woman to look for her desire through a man – and frequently to masochistic fantasies of surrendering to the ideal man’s power. The search for identificatory love is thematic in many relationships of submission. (“Father and Daughter” 289)

Benjamin further speculates that “the more confirmation and the less humiliation a

girl meets with when she tries to fulfil the wish for identificatory love, the more the wish emerges free of self-abnegating or masochistic elements” (292). In accordance with the wishes of her father whose conservative views preferred a woman’s role in domesticity over self-development, Dickinson’s home-centeredness grew as she was “coopted by Edward’s recluse fantasy” (Pollak, Introduction xxxii). She could not go beyond these imposed limits even if she tried because her father’s wishes had become her own guidelines for living a “decent” life. In the first half of the 1860s Dickinson had largely withdrawn from social life. Even after his death in 1874, she did not feel free as his absence made him all the more present in her psyche.

To compensate for the denied recognition she sought from her father, Dickinson turned to men outside her family. Benjamin describes this behavior thus: “the wish for a missed identificatory love with father inspires adult women’s fantasies about loving men who represent their ideal” (288). She desperately requested Higginson for honest critical judgment of her poems. Beginning in 1862, when he was a contributor to *The Atlantic Monthly*, this was a friendship that was to last until Dickinson’s death in 1886. Her sincere appeal was: “Will you tell me my fault, frankly as to yourself, for I had rather wince, than die. Men do not call the surgeon, to commend – the Bone, but to set it, Sir, and fracture within, is more critical. And for this, Preceptor, I shall bring you – Obedience – the Blossom from my Garden, and every gratitude I know” (D 176). Though Higginson has been blamed for ruining her poems by changing punctuation and vocabulary to suit Victorian tastes, one cannot easily cast aside the role of a person whom Dickinson herself considered as the person who saved her life. She emphatically writes him in June 1869, “Of our greatest acts we are ignorant – You were not aware that you saved my Life” (D 197). Even though, like her father, he clearly let her know she should not publish, she still wrote to him and sent him her poems. Eventually, being attentive to her and her creativity, he did for her much of what a psychoanalyst does for his patients, that is, relieve her of the burden of suppressed desires and uncertainties that a person typically hides from others. Though she was sometimes confident of her abilities, mostly she was in doubt and sought acceptance, she “at times asserted herself above the judgments and opinions of her male friends, while at other times she almost grovelled for acceptance” (Martin 71). Dickinson knew she had talent yet having internalized her father’s treatment of her, she is afraid to think that she deserves better treatment and appreciation from others. From that comes the excessive gratitude toward anyone who is willing to spare time for her.

Dickinson is a strong example of how the effects of emotional neglect find expression at an improper level of emotional maturity. In April 1853 she writes, to her brother Austin, “I wish we were children now. I wish we were always children, how to grow up I don’t know” (D xii). This wishful regression to a younger self reflects the desire

to deny responsibility in the face of the traumatic emotional void created by a sense of insignificance and burdened by a feeling of loss.

Dickinson had more than her fair share of trauma when she lost close friends such as Leonard Humphrey in 1850 and Ben Newton in 1853. She had depended on Newton as well as Humphrey, for literary guidance and encouragement. Their deaths strongly added to her melancholy and feeling of loss. She loved her friends so intensely that she could not make sense of their sudden and, in most cases, untimely departures from this world. Being confronted with the reality of death, she wondered what could possibly be good about these incidents. Deprived of emotional support from her family who could not anticipate the extent of her grief she felt all the more helpless and alone. She clearly expresses the resentment and helplessness she feels in her letters to Thomas Wentworth Higginson: “I never had a mother. I suppose a mother is one to whom you hurry when you are troubled” (qtd. in Pollak, Introduction xxv) and “I always ran Home to Awe when a child, if anything befell me. He was an awful Mother, but I liked him better than none” (qtd. in Pollak xxv). Indeed, she felt isolated because she was afraid of her father and felt her mother emotionally absent. She “revered and despised her father’s patriarchal values. Rather, more consistently, she viewed her mother as a negative role model for an empowered woman poet” (xxvi). As mentioned by Pollak, the same is noticed in her poetry: “Her poetry too is haunted by patriarchal emblems; matriarchy functions as an absence, a ‘Missing All’” (Introduction xxvi).

The emotional absence of Dickinson’s mother devastated her. She constantly felt lost. Evidence from Emily Norcross and Edward Dickinson’s courtship letters shows her mother to be overly concerned about her Norcross relations. In one of Edward Dickinson’s final courtship letters he could not refrain from “[t]aunting his future bride about her tenacious attachment to her parents’ home” (xix). Emily Norcross’s extreme attachment eventually caused such grief to her that it distanced her from her own family. According to Pollak and Noble, “[h]er mother’s illness and death, together with the deaths of four of her siblings affected Emily Norcross Dickinson deeply and reinforced her tendency toward anxiety and introversion” (21). This caused her to be emotionally absent from her daughters (Austin was always present in her thoughts) and she also drifted away from Edward. The stress of such despondency created a void in the atmosphere of the Dickinson family which affected Emily Dickinson the most. If the outer social world and engagements had taken her father away, the overburdened inner world of emotions and consciousness had taken away her mother. Understandably, after editing the Norcross-Dickinson correspondence and getting to better understand Dickinson’s parents through them, Pollack comes to acknowledge Richard Sewall’s wisdom “that Dickinson’s final affection for her mother was a major moral and psychological victory” (xxvii).

What is interesting is, how this “final affection” came about. The illness of Dickinson’s mother had caused the roles of mother and child to be reversed. In 1855, her mother was afflicted by a strong bout of depression from which she never fully recovered. Accordingly, Dickinson’s household responsibilities increased as “[t]he twenty-four-year-old Dickinson and her mother reversed roles, with the young woman taking responsibility for housekeeping and caretaking. In fact, the Dickinson daughters would take care of their ailing mother for the next twenty-seven years” (Martin 11). In 1882, of her relationship with her mother, Dickinson wrote, “We were never intimate Mother and children, while she was our Mother – but Mines in the same Ground meet by fulfilment, and when she became our Child, the Affection came” (qtd. in Pollack, Introduction xxvii). But the emotional and psychological pressure she faced as a child caused Dickinson to be caught in a paradoxical situation where the love for the parent, brought about by her mother’s dependence on her sister and her, conflicted internally with a feeling of injustice towards herself.

Chodorow looks into the impact of the mother-daughter relationship on the subjectivity of the daughter. In one of her case studies, she gives an example of how the relationship of a certain Ms. R with her mother affects her needs and wants. Since Ms. R identifies with the mother, she refuses to blame her for “being passive and subservient” and, instead, cries seeing her in such a helpless condition where she is bullied by her (the mother’s) husband. Chodorow analyzes the situation of Ms. R thus: “She is caught in a conflictual personal dilemma: how can she not feel guilty and sad toward her mother, . . . who was the agent (through maternal teaching and modelling) of her daughter-self’s sense of female inferiority?” (“Gender” 535). Similarly, it seems, Dickinson was affected by the helpless situation she was in with her own mother. On the one hand, she felt deprived of affection and love out of which arose a sense of resentment and anger; and on the other, she identified with her mother and the pressure her mother may have felt within the demands of domesticity that caused her to be depressed and ultimately fall ill. What is fatal for Dickinson is that she over-identified with her mother. As a result of such over-identification between mother and daughter, female dependency is perpetuated (Westkott 18). Dickinson was forced to stay close to her mother and to care for her in the capacity of a mother. Chodorow concludes in her discussion of identification and dependence that “social and psychological oppression, then, is perpetuated in personality” (qtd. in Westkott 17). Thus, it seems, the blurring of ego boundaries stopped Dickinson from developing an individuated sense of self. This confusion of self with other ultimately leads to the dependency on others that Dickinson experienced so strongly.

Dickinson suppressed her own needs and adopted a life submissive to patriarchal values, constantly considering the possible shame she might bring upon everyone

concerned if her excessive emotions were let loose. Thus she denies and moves away from her first love interest. Forced to choose between the family and her love for a life where she could roam freely, she breaks down in tears that no one sees. This is clear from her letter to Abiah:

While I washed the dishes at noon in that little “sink-room” of ours, I heard a well-known rap, and a friend I love so dearly came and asked me to ride in the woods, ... and I wanted to exceedingly – I told him I could not go, and he said he was disappointed – he wanted me very much – then the tears came into my eyes, tho’ I tried to choke them back, ... and it seemed to me unjust. Oh I struggled with great temptation, and it cost me much of denial, but I think in the end I conquered, not a glorious victory Abiah, where you hear the rolling drum, but a kind of a helpless victory (D 39)

Such helplessness and surrender to one’s circumstances lay a burden ever so heavy that the relationships that are denied become all the more valuable, all the more fantasized. Every moment of possible connection becomes a highly valuable lost chance of interaction. Just to be able to talk to someone who cares and understands would be a blessing. And the reaction to being deprived of such a blessing is expressed strongly to Abiah in the following:

I went cheerfully round my work, humming a little air till mother had gone to sleep, then cried with all my might, seemed to think I was much abused, that this wicked world was unworthy such devoted, and terrible sufferings, and came to my various senses in great dudgeon at life, and time, and love for affliction, and anguish ... Wouldn’t you love to see me in these bonds of great despair, looking around my kitchen ... *My kitchen* I think I called it, God forbid that it was, or shall be my own – God keep me from what they call households. (D 39-40)

She feels life to be a “dungeon.” Use of words and phrases such as “all my might,” “abused,” “wicked,” “terrible sufferings,” “affliction,” and “anguish,” in such a short paragraph all emphasize the intensity of her plight and, eventually, reveal the reason for not wanting a household to call her own. After saying “*My kitchen*,” she immediately retracts it by saying, “God forbid that it was.” The bitterness and helplessness she associates with her situation grew into a deep fear that the same may be repeated in any marriage she would agree to.

This fear of marriage and commitment, which would further bind her, loomed large in her psyche and she remained a spinster even though there were rumors of a number of passionate intimacies. For example, the strength of her relationship with Judge Otis Lord (who is suspected to be her late-life romance) can be gleaned

from her letter to him stating: “While others go to Church, I go to mine, for are you not my Church, and have we not a Hymn that no one knows but us?” (qtd. in Sewall 652). The strong expression of grief after his death is clear as she writes to Elizabeth Holland, “Forgive the Tears that fell for few, but that few too many, for was not each a World?” (D 302). The amount of emotional investment she had in the relationships with her friends “brought not only joyful and transcendent communion but deep anguish, betrayal, and abandonment” (Martin 70-71). This overdependence on those she considered her friends and dear ones indicates how emotionally deprived she was within her family.

As Chodorow, in “Mothering, Object-Relations, and the Female Oedipal Configuration,” apprises, “A girl’s family setting creates a different intrapsychic situation for her than that same family setting creates for a boy, and contributes to the quality of women’s relational qualities and needs” (154). So, though Dickinson and her brother were brought up by the same parents, the experience of life was quite different for them. For the lack of motherly attention, Dickinson’s subjectivity was affected to the extent that she constantly needed and sought assurance of love and care, especially from her female friends. In one of her poems, she asks “Dollie”: “You love me – you are sure –” (156) – most probably referring to the sisterly love of Sue (Susan H. Dickinson), her childhood friend, and later, her brother, Austin’s wife, who was a lifelong presence in her life, though she too became gradually distant as responsibilities of her own household and children demanded more of her time. Dickinson expected her friends to reciprocate her concerns with equal intensity. In most cases, her over-exuberance was met with what she considered as neglect.

Dickinson lacked emotional maturity and was much like a child in her craving for affection. Due to the lack of emotional maturity, she was extra sensitive to rejection. The slightest delay in responding to her letters has her accusing her friends of not caring enough about her wellbeing. For example, she rebukes Abiah Root strongly with the words, “Hardhearted girl! I don’t believe you care, if you did you would come quickly and help me out of this sea; but if I drown, Abiah, and go down to dwell in the seaweed forever and forever, I will not forget your name, nor all the wrong you did me!” (qtd. in Martin 73). Such anger and feelings of rejection are common where the emotional absence of the mother is looked to be fulfilled by relationships with other women, and Dickinson is angry or sad when there is a breach. Such a high level of dependency needs can be explained as follows: “not having been forced to emotionally separate from their mothers, women continue to long for the emotional intimacy provided by close relationships. This unconscious desire to form attachments to others, lead women to develop greater dependency needs, as their self-identity is tied to their relationships with others” (Appelrouth and Edles 349).

The contradiction apparent within her personality and the pendulum-like movement between her love of socializing and self-imposed isolation created a space of conflict that influenced the development of her subjectivity. All the complications in her relationships, her excessive dependence on friends, her melancholy and feelings of betrayal, feelings of imagined injustice, all come from one source – that of the unintentional emotional neglect of her parents. Unknowingly, they had forced her to suppress her needs. Unwittingly, they had deprived her of the life she desired. Eventually, because of them, she became the self-isolated childlike person who would never truly mature into adulthood. She became a person who was afraid of her own desires.

To conclude, the discussion above shows how, as a daughter within the Dickinson household, Emily Dickinson was expected to hold herself with pride, never give in to her emotions, never bring shame on the family name, never pursue intellectual development through intense reading, and never place her own needs before that of her family members. She did all that was expected of her by internalizing her father's patriarchal demands, by being conflicted because of her mother's emotional absence, and by becoming a recluse so that the risk of transgression should never come up. But, in the process, her subjectivity suffered. This psychoanalytic feminist reading of Dickinson's subjectivity based on evidence from her letters and taking into account her social situation, to analyze both the father-daughter relationship and the mother-daughter relationship, clearly shows that parental expectations became the shackles of her existence, forcing her into self-isolation as she could not cope emotionally or psychologically with the demands placed upon her.

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State Oppression and Adivasi Resistance in Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*

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Abstract

The independence movement in India against the British colonizers was driven by the hopes of freedom of speech, freedom of life, and rights over the land. However, it can be argued that the fruits of independence, which India secured in 1947 after years of struggle, have not reached every corner of its multilayered society especially to the indigenous people. Mahasweta Devi in her Bangla novel *Chotti Munda Ebong Tar Tir* (1980), translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (2003), exposes the hypocrisy of the West Bengal government that allows a systematic alienation of the subaltern tribes and the consequential threat of annihilation to their existence. This paper analyzes how the indigenous Munda community in the novel was forced to remain outside the narrative of national development and repeatedly experienced violence at the hands of the corrupt people in power. The aim of this paper is to discuss the hypocritical grand narrative of a national independence and how a national culture prompts marginalization and exclusion of the minority citizens in policy making in Mahasweta Devi's novel. The paper also explores various forms of struggle and resistance on the part of the adivasi to achieve their freedom in the already independent India and the way Devi's protagonist resists the repressive core by using the powerful cultural identity of the adivasi inhabiting the social periphery.

Keywords: national culture, power politics, marginalized, Munda, adivasi resistance

Mahasweta Devi's novel presents a nation hypocritical in its policy towards the people from the center and those from the peripheries. The narratives of a homogenous national culture and development for everyone turn into a tool of oppression on the minority communities, as they experience the severity of the authoritarian government without being given the fundamental rights as citizens of the state. The novel reveals the treatment of the Munda community as a failure of the independent nation.

To understand the failure of national culture in Mahasweta Devi's novel it is important to understand what a nation is. According to Timothy Brennan, "as a term, it [nation] refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous – the "natio" – a local community, domicile, family, condition



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of belonging” (45). In the case of colonization, the idea of nation provides the formerly colonized subjects an opportunity to understand their position in a newly formed state, to bind them together in a shared sense of nationalism and to form an identity of their own, separate from the colonizer. This ideal of a shared goal, a shared nation, functions as an apparatus to confront the colonizer, politically as well as ideologically. Neil Lazarus believes that, in the developing world, nationalism is vital because “it is only on the terrain of the nation that an articulation between cosmopolitan intellectualism and popular consciousness can be forged; ... it is only on the basis of such a universalistic articulation ... that imperialism can be destabilised” (qtd. in Sivanandan 49). British imperialism came to an end after a long and violent struggle with the Indian people. The moment that cherished freedom was secured, the already existing disconnectedness between two classes – the elite and the masses – started to grow more prominently, because of the “unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people” (Fanon 119).

Mahasweta Devi looks at the “decolonised” Indian nation with suspicion, because of its incapacity to understand and meet the demands and needs of its citizens. Gayatri Spivak writes that the “colonized subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous” (79) and the mainstream culture of the Indian nation cannot reflect the culture of its adivasi community. The illusion of the socio-cultural and economic freedom from the colonizer shatters soon after they leave, and the nation remains with a broken infrastructure requiring the cultivation of a national consciousness. Throughout history it is observed that in the wake of national consciousness the powerful classes subjugate the lower strata of the former European colonies by marginalizing them even further. No matter who is in power, be it the colonizer or the bourgeois nationalist, they deliberately ignore “the politics of the people”:

For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant group of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country – that is, the people. (Guha xiv)

Here, the critique is on the “failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the people” (Guha xiv). Apparently, the newly formed nation is not for the poor, the exploited, and the subaltern. The marginalized groups in many independent nations remained where they were, on the farthest possible periphery of society, forced to accept the truth behind failed promises. These people grapple to find a way to avoid a slow extermination of their way of life and voice a resistance against the oppressive elite classes.

The setting of *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* appears to be a police state even though an elected constitutional government is in power. The Munda tribe in their own villages are oppressed by the landowners and the law enforcement agencies. The upper caste Hindus perpetuate bond slavery, which is a form of signed contract that binds the peasant as a slave to the landlord, ensuring cheap labor and allowing an exercise of power over the tribals generation after generation. In reality, the debts of the tribal subjects never get repaid and their next generations go on working in the landlord's fields without any wages. Villagers of Chotti accept every injustice done to them because they had long ago realized that they have no one to turn to in their alienated adivasi struggle. The landlords handle any adivasi concern or complaints with the only treatment they know – repression. Such a tendency to employ violence had been inculcated in the minds of the people in power from the colonial period. Goons employed by the landlords indiscriminately kill the adivasi, the police beat them up, unjustly imprison them; and to make matters worse, the hunger from famine emaciates the subalterns and eventually ends their lives. The actions of the oppressive upper classes in *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* point to their prejudice against the adivasi peasants who are considered to belong to a realm of superstition and myth outside that of modernity and reason. This form of subalternity of the tribal people is a historical and political condition that needs to be discussed in relation to the discourse of the dominant knowledge system and power structure:

Subalternity erupts within the system of dominance and marks its limits from within, that its externality to dominant systems of knowledge and power surfaces inside the system of dominance, but only as an intimation, as a trace of that which eludes the dominant discourse. It is this partial, incomplete, distorted existence that separates the subaltern from the elite. This means that the subaltern poses counterhegemonic possibilities not as inviolable otherness from the outside but from within the functioning of power, forcing contradictions and dislocations in the dominant discourse and providing sources of an immanent critique. (Prakash 288)

This means the subaltern are not outside the domain of the power politics of the dominant groups but are firmly situated inside it and engaged in a constant clash with the arguably tyrannical discourse of elitism.

Indian nationalist movements against the British and the eventual independence did not touch the lives of the tribes in any substantial way. In other words, “this independence is for the rich only” (Rushdie 104). The rural adivasis struggle all their lives to feed their families doing back-breaking work in the Hindu master's fields while the Hindus or Diku – a term denoting intruder in the Munda language – take advantage of the poor. For these subalterns, the outside world of progress,

development, and modernity remains an illusion. The omniscient narrator in the story paints the reality of the protagonist Chotti Munda's life in this way:

The August movement did not even touch the life of Chotti's community. It was as if that was the Dikus' struggle for liberation. Dikus never thought of the adivasis as Indian. They did not draw them into the liberation struggle. In war and Independence the life of Chotti and his cohorts remained unchanged. They stand at a distance and watch it all. (96)

Chotti's people are just onlookers, never being included in the apparent change in a modern society. This division between the adivasi in the peripheries and the people in the center had only intensified during colonial rule. Mahasweta Devi, in an interview, discussed the history of this class division: "The bonded labor system was introduced by the British. They created a new class, which took away tribal land and converted the tribals into debt-bonded slaves" (Spivak, "Interview" xii). The Indian government introduced the Bonded Labor System Abolition Act in 1976, but the fruits of this law did not reach the "backward, feudally oppressed districts" (Spivak, "Interview" xii) like Chotti's village.

How the nation neglects the predicament of the adivasi and fails to take the necessary steps to improve their condition is represented in the novel. At one point the Munda leader Chotti becomes concerned when he is informed that, "by the Ordinance of 24th October, 1975, the bonded labor system is at an end" (237). But he realizes the façade of this law, "If boss-moneylender accepts t' law, no problem. But will they so?" (240). His fear is actualized when the landowner Tirathnath refuses to set the laborers free. He uses bond slavery as his only means of business and it would be a sign of weakness for him if he stands down and accepts the adivasi claims to freedom. That is why, in front of Chotti, he forcefully proclaims, "The law's there and bonded labour's there" (277). The sham of law and national development is undeniable as the upper classes break the law, ignore human rights, and continue their regime of corruption, while the poor suffer with no scope for justice in the corrupt state. Gradually, the rights of citizens become limited and the state's control multiplies. This notion of sovereign power was apparent during the colonial era and, as can be seen in Devi's narrative, still flourishes at the hands of the postcolonial government.

In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* the police, the landowners, and the Youth League goons hold the power to dictate the lives of the adivasi. To the oppressor, the village is a backward place in need of a cleansing force that comes from state ammunition. Political theorist Achille Mbembe, in his essay "Necropolitics," talks about tactics that are introduced by the colonizers to maintain control over the natives are often passed on to the formerly colonized state, "Colonial occupation itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area – of

writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations” (27). The new social relations of power and oppression turn into the dynamics of the independent state such as India. The British regime strategically planted seeds to continue colonial rule even after independence through the creation of decorative titles, such as Raisaheb, for the elite classes, and people like Tirathnath were at the receiving end of the gift. The elite then became servile to the colonial masters to the extent that they would willingly further the imperial agenda of extracting land revenues by employing stringent measures. The landowners like Tirathnath do not provide fertile lands for shared cultivation to the peasants. Instead, the adivasi “are given stony land, barren land,” but they “nourish even such land with their heart’s blood” (123).

To aggravate the tribal people further, the state government with their colonizer’s mindset unleash its hegemonic power, its “cultural bomb” (Thiongo 3) as a result of which the masses face psychological trauma. N’gugi wa Thiongo writes about the tendency of the colonial power to disregard the native cultural identity and produce a hybrid people to further the colonial rule even after the independence of the states, “The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (3). It can be argued that the primary objective of the European colonizers was to champion “ideological, moral, cultural, and intellectual support for colonialism,” and their manifest targets for “colonial hegemonisation” were the “national or (sometimes) regional elites” (Lazarus 77). Lazarus writes:

[A]lthough the imposition and consolidation of colonial rule obviously had cumulative and long-term effects on the way in which subaltern populations lived, worked, and thought – inherited subaltern cultural forms (language, dance, music, storytelling) were able to retain both their traditionality and their autonomy from most forms of elite culture (colonial and “national”).
(77)

Surprisingly, during the British colonial regime, the minority communities were able to maintain their traditional cultural identities. But in independent India, the struggle of heritage is faced by the indigenous Munda community and Chhota Munda accepts that their identities as adivasi will remain only a spectacle because of the cultural bomb dropped by the outsiders in the name of national development. The encroaching hegemonic culture of the colonial era persisted after independence in 1947 and intensified in the hands of the elite nationalists as the postcolonial nation arguably started imposing its newly acquired notion of culture and development on the repressed classes on the tribal belts in the novel. Devi portrays how the narrative of a homogenous national culture becomes a way of suppressing the ancient

traditions of the minority communities, threatening to annihilate them altogether.

The possibility of museumization of tribal entities troubles Chotti's mind, "The day is coming. Mundas will not be able to live with their identity...Then the 'Munda' identity will live only at festivals – in social exchange" (290). In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* the Christian Missionaries also take advantage of the adivasis' desperation and give them aspirations for a desirable time ahead, with food, shelter, and education. Many tribes are forced to leave their villages, their cultures, their identities, and become Christians to escape the oppression of the upper classes. This subjugation systematically can erase a whole society.

During the Emergency declared by the Indian government from 1975-77 and the subsequent years the country suffered the "criminalisation of politics, letting the lumpen loose on the lower caste and tribal belts" (*Chotti* ix). In the novel, this event marks a crucial time for the Mundas when the Youth League ruffians enter the village. The League comes ready to suppress any tribal resistance against the dominant classes. The League's leader, Romeo, is the one who appears to be able to rape, kill, and destroy property with a sense of immunity and without facing any repercussions. He bluntly asserts, "Keep the untouchable and the tribal under your shoes. They live well that way. Everyone gets cheap labour. ... The glory of the castes remains high" (207). This forceful observance of caste purity is a strategy to dehumanize the subaltern. In the novel, the adivasi are so far below the social strata that their death at the hands of the powerful poses no inconvenience to the central government. Even though the government does not kill the peripheral classes directly, they turn a blind eye when the rights of the adivasi are blatantly violated by many governmental authorities as Chotti repeatedly exposes the hypocrisy of the law enforcers, "As long as Diku has t' power to make t' law work, so long will Diku watch Diku's rights" (240). In the text, the corrupt state apparatuses apparently find ways to crush any and every possibility of peace and prosperity in the village.

Parallel to the history of violence and exploitation in the lives of the Mundas in the novel, there is also a history of resistance. Resistance against the oppressors has long been portrayed and glorified in literature and the term "resistance literature" attests to that. According to Barbara Harlow, "The resistance novels seek different historical endings, and these endings are already implicit, contained within the narrative analysis and construction of the conditions and problematic of the historical situation itself" (79). Resistance literature primarily discusses the fight against colonialism and outside aggression on a nation or culture but additionally includes the resistance of the people of an independent state who face oppression from their own government. Staying true to the form of a resistance novel, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* seeks to create a new identity for the oppressed to write the

disregarded history of the tribals and tell a tale of how the adivasi rise against the homogenous national culture that excludes them. Their history from below had never been written, never been told. But it did not stop the people of Chotti from narrating their own story as they are able to do this through their culture. Their unique identity as tribals is their power. In the novel, Devi provides details of the armed resistance of Birsa Munda, who led the Ulgugan movement or the great tumult in south Ranchi during 1899-1900. This fight was to gain independence from British reign and establish Munda rule. Birsa and his followers fought for years to change the fate of the tribal community, save them from the Dikus. Though this historical revolution did not change the fate of the villagers as they scrape through life in a continuous struggle as subalterns, this revolution inspired Chotti who, in time, becomes the legend the adivasis needed to forge their cultural identities as a people.

Culture is defined by Edward Said as a shared experience, mainly found between the anti-colonial struggles, where the imperial colonizer and the colonized people are involved. He believes that culture is universal but does not only mean “ownership,” “borrowing and lending,” rather it is a culmination of “appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures” (98). But this paper argues that, even though the adivasis live in the country, they are never made a part of the nation itself; instead they are discriminated against because of the differences in their traditions and culture from that of the people from the core. The discourse of national culture does not necessarily apply to the marginalized tribes since their authentic identities are misunderstood and neglected by the mainstream nationalist groups. While analyzing race, ethnicity, and culture, critic Vinita Damodaran discusses culture as “a medium in which power is both constituted and resisted”:

One is thinking here of political separatist movements in a global context which use the notion of a separate ethnic identity to challenge the notion of a homogenous national culture. Instances of dramatic resistance to cultural hegemony and power of a particular class or group or western capitalism show also that culture need not always be on the side of power. Indigenous peoples’ movements strikingly demonstrate this. (2)

The concept of homogeneity or uniformity of culture is therefore a misguided one and national identity in a postcolonial state cannot be forged with this assumption. Power then is not limited to only the elite groups and the ability to oppose injustice but also rests within the people belonging to different social classes and cultures.

The indigenous community of Chotti constructs their cultural identities separate from the outsiders or Dikus, and invariably perceive them as the Other. The Munda

history is based on their culture which provides them with a unique power to resist the outsider's domination. It is significant to note how the omniscient narrator in *Chotti Munda* uses the epic storytelling mode of the Mundas to create a narrative of power and resistance. Instead of using the medium of written literature, Mundas employ oral literature and produce songs as a means of keeping their stories alive for generations: "Munda language has no script. So, they turn significant events into story, and hold them as saying, as song. That's their history as well" (Devi 18). The author sees the tradition of creating songs as a way of resisting cultural and other forms of domination on the adivasi, "[T]hese songs are sung here and there – that it continues to live, this is also resistance. Thus, they are making the thing alive. Chotti here is a symbol or representation of tribal aspiration" (Spivak, "Interview" xi). As Stephen Daniels writes, "Identities are often defined by legends and landscapes, by stories of golden ages, enduring traditions, heroic deeds and dramatic destinies located in ancient or promised homelands with hallowed sites and scenery" (5). These sentiments give shape to the imagined community of the nation (Daniels 5) and in an imagined community, "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members ... yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 124). However, in Devi's novel the nation itself excludes the adivasi in its imagined community. For this reason, the Mundas survive by holding on to their own communal bonds and their conscious resistance against submitting to a different culture.

In Munda lives, "amidst a lot of pain and poverty, some variety enters in the form of half-Hindu festivals such as Karam, Sohrai, or Holi – the colour fest – or at the time of the worship of Haramdeo" (Devi 48). These collective festivals of all the adivasi and untouchables bring the minority population together in a sense of brotherhood. The struggle and the culture are their lifeblood, this "solidarity is resistance" (Spivak, "Interview" xiii). The things that have kept the tribal people alive are their sense of self, responsibility towards community, and love for nature. Leaders like Dhani and Chotti try to keep the legends of adivasi resistance alive while the stories of their everyday life become an epic, a kimbadanti, or legend. It is then true that, "cultural form of resistance is no less valuable than armed resistance itself" (Harlow 11). This statement reflects how Chotti's culture provides a unique authority to its people; their legends steer them through their everyday struggles.

The power of tribal tolerance and their aversion to violence make them more civilized than the people in the core holding all the political and economic power. The humanity of the Munda people is their power. The restraint in taking up the bow and arrow to take a life is a show of resistance in adivasi culture which comes from their ancient culture, their ancestry. The novel enlightens the reader with the breaking point of the tribal people when they turn to violence and how they deal with

the outsider's dominating hands, "They use weapons, but they are not bloodthirsty. They are basically gentle, polite, highly civilised, and this innate blood civilisation runs back thousands of years. A tribal traditionally lives in harmony with the nature around him, with human beings, even intruders. With everyone. So, when he kills, it is a necessary killing" (Spivak, "Interview" xix). The concept of unavoidable violence comes into the discussion when Chotti's people finally decide to take up arms against tyranny. Frantz Fanon discusses the notion of necessary violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* which exposes "the naked truth of decolonization," that there comes a time when violence becomes essential in the struggle for autonomy:

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect. ... Illuminated by violence, the consciousness of the people rebels against any pacification. ... The action which has thrown them into a hand-to-hand struggle confers upon the masses a voracious taste for the concrete. (74)

Fanon sees violence as an inevitable consequence of oppression, albeit in the context of national independence. But in the novel similar emotions can be found as the adivasi reach a tipping point of being oppressed in their own nation. Chotti is a very patient and forgiving man, an epitome of non-violence or ahimsa, which is a core philosophy in Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. With the long adivasi tradition of peaceful coexistence with the outsiders the Munda community struggle to exist in their own land. But the people of Chotti's village are disillusioned at one point that no matter how hard they try to resist the outside oppression by non-violence the intruder will always exploit them. This realization occurs to the villagers when Chotti's economic autonomy gets threatened by the Youth League. The representatives of the Youth League, Romeo and Pahlwan, "are determined to reinstitute the system of compulsory labour. Devi's depiction of the struggle between the adivasis and the Youth League is articulated as a struggle between the subaltern and the representatives of the elite" (Morton 165). This eternal struggle of the subaltern, to live their lives in peace, to protect the honor of their women, and to hold their heads high amidst the oppression from the corrupt power, unites the adivasi in their fight.

Tribal people do not know how to exploit each other, and they have immense respect for their own people. At one point in the novel, when the tyrants are finally gone, dead with arrows in their hearts, it becomes a matter of grave concern for the police, while the narrator expresses the hypocrisy of the state politics, "If Romeo and Pahlwan had killed every adivasi in the area, no one would have found it 'unexpected'. There are adivasis, there are subcastes, the Romeos kill them, it happens like this. ...

Under all regimes” (283). Chotti’s son Somchar and his cohorts – Disha, Upa, and Lal – take part in the killing of these oppressors. They have suffered enough at the hands of these men who wreak havoc on the tribal communities. Silent resistance does not suffice at one stage and violence becomes essential for the survival of the villagers. When there is a rupture in their fabric of the adivasi lives, they take up arms in defense. The notion of heroism that is widely understood, executing the enemies, while “holding one’s own death at a distance” (Mbembe 37), does not quite fit into the actions of Chotti’s group of rebels. They have taken a decisive stance against the oppression by ending the constant threat because it is either to kill or be killed for the Mundas at this point. Making this choice to sacrifice themselves is an act of resistance against the repressive state apparatus.

Heroism and resistance appear in various forms in the story, but Chotti and his arrows are the most significant and powerful symbols of resistance. The final image of Chotti Munda raising his arrow marks a significant incident in the history of subaltern resistance. Traditionally, the arrow has been a symbol of Munda culture, their festivities, and their struggle. But this time, it embodies the whole history of their people. As Chotti invokes the legend of Dhani Munda and shoots the target, the magic of nature and timeless Mundari culture come to life, “[H]e mingles with all time and becomes river, folklore, eternal. What only the human can be. Brings all adivasi struggle into the present, today into the united struggle of the adivasi and the outcaste” (Devi 287). In the narrative, Chotti’s “but that one arrow” turns into “a thousand bows upraised in space” (Devi 288) as the people shake off their inhibitions to fight for their rights. The outsiders stand in awe of a new beginning in the wake of the Munda rebellion. The ending of the story is suspended as the readers are invited by the narrator to feel the magic resonated in the resistance of the neglected people who are rising up as warriors.

The independence of India has failed the adivasi in more than one way. History is witness to how the Indian state never treated the adivasi as valued citizens. The draconian treatment of the adivasi by the state shows the corruption of a developing India. With limited means of survival, the subalterns have never known a decent life in which they were respected by the outsiders. Chotti Munda and his people endure abuse and accept the injustice done to them by the police, the government authorities, and the Diku, and tolerate everything because their ancient culture promotes peace and harmony. Their history and cultural identities have been repeatedly threatened by the powerful outsiders, but the subalterns realize at one point that the time has come for them to stand against the oppressors, and they refuse to remain silent anymore. Now the Mundas take up their arrows in retaliation and seek to write their own history. The novel presents the concern that, from the very beginning of their coexistence with the non-adivasi, the lives and the identities of

these subalterns were always under the threat of extinction; and for as long as leaders like Birsa, Dhani, or Chotti could, they tried to save the adivasi ways. Now all hands join to resist the attempts of the state to bring the adivasi into the corrupt ways of the central authorities and eliminate their uniqueness as indigenous communities. Mahasweta Devi has woven a tale as old as time where the powerful ruthlessly suppress the vulnerable and use the grand narratives of development and progress to justify atrocities committed against their fellow human beings. Yet, what makes the story powerful is the way the subaltern speaks – with their songs, stories, legends, and arrows to resist the encroaching hands of a hypocritical national culture. The readers are provided with a glimpse of hope for a better tomorrow, a just tomorrow, as the curtain falls on the thousand raised hands.

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“The air we breathe, a forgotten colour”: Rajat Neogy and the *Transition* poems, 1961-1963

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Abstract

This essay revisits the years 1961-1963 through a selection of poems written by Rajat Neogy for *Transition* magazine. There is an inherent tension in Neogy's surrealism between its imaginative exposé of symbolic planes of abstract existence, and the distressing reality of post-Independent Uganda for the Asian expatriates. Avant-garde and ambitious, *Transition* was founded by Neogy in 1961 as an intellectually autonomous forum for East African literary culture. The magazine's cosmopolitan contributions reflected the cosmopolitan ambience of Kampala. Born in Kampala in 1938 to East Bengali immigrant parents, Neogy's writings are influenced by and reflect the anxieties of the expatriate communities unsure about their identity and status in the post-Independent scheme of things.

Keywords: Rajat Neogy, Surrealism, poetry, Uganda, Asians

How can anyone hope to order the chaos that
constitutes that infinite, formless variation: man?
(Tristan Tzara, 1918)

Introduction

In the early 1960s in Kampala, the “intellectually provocative” (Appiah et al. n.p.) *Transition* magazine published a number of avant-garde poems by its Bengali-Ugandan editor, Rajat Neogy (1938-1995). These poems have been described as “prose musings” or prose-poetry that offer surrealist insights into everyday happenings of a world gone awry. The overarching image that foregrounds Neogy's poetic vision is of the inexplicable futility of existence in a desensitized world of techno-scientific machinery and strained human relationships. Imbued with eccentric snapshots of hypnotic reveries, space is conceptualized in Neogy's oeuvre as relentless and unstable. Identifiable markers and human actors collide and collapse into one another, intensifying the chaos of this cosmic world order. Neogy's prose poems dismantle generic boundaries in what constitutes poetry and prose; they repudiate textual and semantic categorizations and refuse to be pinned down by neat, coherent narrative strategies. His narrators are otherworldly entities who resort to a kind of story-telling that eschews the conventional indicators that signpost development in plot, character, and setting.

Neogy's storytellers are faceless and nameless. They are often mere voices with no social, cultural, or national moorings. These fragmentary entities persevere



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in extraordinarily tumultuous circumstances. Conversely, there are no nostalgic rootedness in his poems to cartographic locations such as Bengal, Kampala, Africa, or Asia: places have no identifiable human markers. The objective of this paper is to explore these qualities of ambiguity and incongruity in Neogy’s writing.

Rajat Neogy was born in Kampala in 1938 to Bengali Brahmin parents who migrated from Faridpur to Uganda and found work as headmasters at Aga Khan schools in Kampala. There were about six Bengali families in the whole of Uganda in the 1930s (Benson 104). A few of these, such as the Calcutta-born K.D. Gupta, the Indian Education Officer for East Africa, were influential in the education sectors. It was due to the initiation of Gupta that Rajat Neogy was able to pursue higher studies at University College London in England in 1956 (though he did not complete his degree, for unspecified reasons).

Raised in a household that adhered to Brahmin traditions, he attended Catholic and Protestant Sunday schools in Kampala. When not in school, the Penguin translation of the *Quran* and the writings of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart kept him intellectually occupied (Benson 104-105). According to the historian Peter Benson, by the age of seventeen Neogy had decided that, despite being what he called “a well-established atheist,” if he “were to choose a religion it would be Islam and no other,” a crucial proclamation for the Neogy-Bengal connection (105). In London, Neogy led a somewhat bohemian existence, reading profusely anything he could get his hands on according to his first wife, Charlotte Bystrom. It is likely in London during these years that Neogy picked up plans for an East African literary magazine.

As editor of *Transition* magazine, Rajat Neogy played a decisive role in the establishment of a vibrant platform for pan-African writing with an international and cosmopolitan reach in the 1960s (Benson; Kalliney; Desai). Most scholarly accounts of East African literary culture, however, forget that *Transition* facilitated Neogy’s poetic career. Materials published for the magazine were often in dialogue with Neogy’s poems and editorials on the socio-political climate of Uganda. A wide selection of writings by international scholars, artists, poets who published in *Transition* in the interval between 1961 and 1972 state egalitarian and ethical proclamations on individual freedom, development, and liberty. I argue that Neogy’s poems evoke a similar ideology of protest through Surrealist and Dadaist aesthetics.

This paper introduces readers to Rajat Neogy and to his poetry by revisiting the 1960s in Kampala where *Transition* and a whole host of artistic techniques, political ideals, and debates spawned a rich intellectual exchange between scholars from across Africa as well as India, Europe, and North America. This discussion, focused mostly on Neogy’s poems published in *Transition*, contends that the Surrealist bent in his poetry offers a poignant diagnosis of the socio-political climate of post-Independent

Uganda in the mid-twentieth century. The questions that follow are: can we write Neogy into narratives of Dada and Surrealism? Is it not possible to locate the psychic energy of his “prose musings” within Dadaist and Surrealist poetics in its rejection of the semiotic faculties of language to communicate meaning and the desire to bend semiotic capacities and dimensions to accommodate multiple, often conflicting, meanings of words and ideas?

“Why can’t a tree be called Pluplush?”

Dada arose in Zurich in 1916 as an international artistic movement in reaction to the moral, material, and psychical damages in the aftermath of the First World War. Works produced by Dada’s adherents such as Marcel Duchamp, Tristan Tzara, and Raoul Hausmann, are deeply immersed in their opposition to bourgeois values. The peculiar and provocative visualizations of Dadaist collage and photomontage convey the delirium and disorientation of post-World War I. As the “artistic heir” to Dada, Surrealism as an aesthetic and literary movement in the early 1920s powerfully reflected a non-conformist commitment to the “irrational” and “absurd” of the post-War era mired as it was by the Great Depression, economic instability, imperialist-fascist hegemony and a general unease about the impending Second World War.

This paper is not an attempt to conflate Surrealism with Dada, neither is it about isolating the two; both movements share similarities and diverge significantly in their aesthetic choices and artistic proclamations. Surrealism as a school of thought, as “a community of ethical views” (Toyen 18), incorporates the iconoclasm and confrontational spirit of Dada, while being profoundly absorbed in the bizarre, the chaotic, and the fragmentary aspects of modern life. Whereas Surrealist art and poetry are absorbed by the “irrational” and the “absurd,” it is important to distinguish that Surrealism does not imply, in the words of Rosemont and Kelley, “unreality, antireality [and] the nonsensical” (3). What Surrealism signifies, and expands upon, is a heightened knowledge or awareness of reality that features unconventional and unusual elements of the real. Surrealism pertains to a kind of “open realism” where dualistic categories – real/unreal, conscious/unconscious, worldly/otherworldly – coexist (Gascoyne). A collective feature of Surrealist writing is the juxtaposition of outlandish similes that produce new aesthetic sensibilities as in Paul Eluard’s “earth blue as an orange” and in Breton’s “Free Union” that expands our awareness of the mysterious (and often, erotic) elements of everyday reality:

My wife with her figure of an otter between the tiger’s teeth ...
 My wife with temples the slate of a hothouse roof
 With eyebrows the edge of a swallow’s nest. (89)

There is a tendency in Dadaism to play with names and words, to tease out striking

neologisms so that Hugo Ball fittingly asks in his diary: “Why can’t a tree be called Pluplusch or Pluplubasch when it has been raining?” (Hopkins 64). Dadaist experimentations in phonetic and semantic possibilities (or impossibilities!) have produced startling poems, for instance, by Kurt Schwitters, who writes:

Greetings, 260 thousand ccm.
I thine,
thou mine,
we me.
And sun unboundedness stars brighten up.
Sorrow sorrows dew.
O woe you me!
Official notices:
5000 marks reward!’ (Hopkins 64)

Even before the publication of André Breton’s highly influential *First Surrealist Manifesto*, the movement was decidedly anti-bourgeois in spirit and, in certain circles, anti-Eurocentric in its ideological moorings. Prominent European Surrealists such as Antonin Artaud and André Masson decried white supremacist, racist, bourgeois, and imperialist viewpoints. The Greek Surrealist poet Nicolas Calas famously stated that “Surrealism after all is shocking for ... people who are shocked by dreams ... Surrealism looks for a transformation of the world” (391). This passion for transformation and insubordination to conformist narratives attracted international scholars from across the Afro-Caribbean regions such as Aimé Césaire and from across North and sub-Saharan Africa. The movement celebrated the works of French authors of African descent like Alexander Dumas. But the Surrealists’ “first black hero” was the eighteenth-century Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L’Ouverture, the leader of the only successful slave revolt in the history of modern times (Rosemont and Kelley 7). African culture and tribal art influenced the founders of the movement as early as 1919 with the appearance of African-American jazz music in Paris. Tribal artefacts from Africa were seen as “manifestations of visible poetry, objects imbued with spiritual energy” – antidotes to capitalist and imperialist hegemony in a post-War era (Rosemont and Kelley 8).

Although Rajat Neogy is not known to have stated his adherence to these avant-garde movements, his poetic style, especially its rejection of linguistic semiotic codes and exposition of startling imageries, fall within the broad spectrum of Surrealist and Dadaist writings. I argue that Neogy’s outlook on the social and political climate of the 1960s Uganda, his dissatisfaction with the post-Independent world order, together with his exceptional poetic modus operandi qualify him as a disciple of the Dadaist and Surrealist communities.

“Poetry – any good poetry,” writes Neogy in the third issue of *Transition* (1962):

are statements of men who have taken moral or spiritual positions in a world of material chaos. They are statements of facts of personal objectivity. No politician or pamphleteer can reach as near an all-embracing truth as the poet can if he is good. Good poetry is unadorned and unaffected, and is from the mainstream of the poet’s consciousness and experience. Its value ... is for the insight it affords into everyday happenings or for the new areas of experience it opens up. (2)

It is perhaps in his explication of “good” poetry seeking to “open up” – analogous to “open realism” – new areas of experience, that Neogy emerges as a Surrealist. It is in his poems that the full weightage of his borrowings from and contributions to Dada and Surrealism become prominent.

Neogy’s Poetic Vision

Neogy’s first poem for *Transition*, published in 1961, was “7T ONE = 7E TON” (hereon, “7T ONE”). While the title playfully conjures a mathematical equation, the complexity of the poem’s syntax produces an impassioned litany in a seemingly arbitrarily constructed language. A barrage of random images colliding in disarray inform “7T ONE” that begins almost in mid-conversation:

myriad existences forgotten over a tense past a vocabulary future full of new cooked meanings meaning meaning but nothing else. Very where every nothing happens which is the spitten curse of the image shadow of the tired sophisticates – those knowing who wait with knife and exquisite table top manners for the fried egg of love peppered with salt and a shot of tomato. (10)

Replete with double entendre, the poem plays with images that yield multiple, contesting readings. An obvious example is the knife: it belongs to the tableware (with which one eats the “fried egg of love?”), but it also registers as a weapon carried by the “tired sophisticates” who “wait with knife” – for self-defence or to inflict harm in a world already infiltrated by unfounded hostility? We are not exactly certain.

The despondency in the narrative, conveyed through the plaintive repetition of “nothing” and “nowhere,” is reflected in the latter half of “7T ONE” through a sterile autumnal scenery:

There, nowhere were pine tree tops which exhaled and inspired several odours of smelt desires lust-forgotten in dry leaves on an autumn beak of a bird’s hard kiss (10)

These visual aberrations denote something of an emotional wasteland divested of warmth even though disjointed remnants of passionate longings linger in “smelt desires lust-forgotten” (with a double connotation on “smelt,” i.e., “metallic,” conveying the sensation of cold or unfeeling) and in “bird’s hard kiss.” The vista on which this memory unfolds is dominated by acicular symbols: pine trees, birds’ beaks, and jagged knives. Whereas Surrealism and, to some extent, Dada, celebrate the eroticism of the female body (much to the chagrin of female scholars who point out the fetishization and objectification of the female body in such “masculinist” art [Rosalind Krauss; Susan Rubin Suleiman]) Neogy’s eroticism veers on the animalistic and primaeval with wonderfully peculiar descriptions of “armadillos in lost swamps,” “porcupine pleasures,” and “bird’s hard kiss.”

In the latter half of “7T ONE,” the narrative focuses on high-speed transportation by foregrounding the idea that technology enables and extends newer ways of experiencing movement and mobility. Technology enables information to travel quickly as well as for objects to move faster and farther in newer terrains that, in turn, opens newer ways of relating to ideas of space and place. This is best captured in “7T ONE” through a series of pithy imagist snapshots of “[t]ier after tier of fired wheels”; of “railway lines” sending telegraph messages and “silky parachutes” glistening like “serpents”; and the arrival of a “blue bus” hastily “[covering] kilometers,” while peroxide-covered fingers are “designing [a] telephone.” Then we hear snippets of a mundane telephone conversation as one speaker interjects with, “Operat[or] ... OBSERVE! Rate of removal was in itself unnecessary but of course they insisted. They would” (10).

This insipid telephone exchange somehow informs the poem’s outlook on the full-blown power of technology that relegates the role of humans as mere cogs in the machine, functional, fragmentary, and forgettable. The mechanization of man was a crucial leitmotif in Dada art. To that effect, Dadaists in Berlin and in New York developed human-machine hybrids called “mechanomorphs.” Marcel Duchamp famously defined the man-as-machine conjunction in his glass-art piece, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23) where the human body is conceived as an engine that executes mechanistic tasks; romantic love, in Duchamp’s iconography, is concomitant to a set of mechanical errands. In Neogy, there is a discernible unease at the interface where man and machine meet, not as Duchampian “mechanomorphs” per se, but as unequal players with man surrendering to the might of the machine. Fingers and voices that perform operations replace the agency of humans as complete, organic entities. At times, even the fingers and voices disappear into oblivion while buses, parachutes, and railways exercise greater agency than human actors.

Visions of a desensitized world infiltrated by machines is terrifyingly evoked in “7T

ONE” through “singing pythons” strapped to “electric chairs.” There is a semiotic and phonetic conundrum between “singing” and “singeing,” amplifying the absurd enormity that the hissing sound of snakes singed by electricity should appear as a song. The suggestion is grotesque and may have been formulated by the poet as a critique of the cruelty inherent in the death penalty by electric shock therapy – all of which attest to a critique of the culture of human violence in the twentieth century. Machines are an allegory for modernity in “7T ONE” which highlights isolated episodes of technoscientific violence against man and nature as symptomatic of the twentieth-century drive for extreme transformations. With “pink avalanches” (akin to blood?) being “bellied out of the earth with the rumblings of running stones” and “jungles of sleeping-sickness” (10), it is as though nature has given up the will to live. Neogy’s poem offers a critique of technology as a threat to modern life.

The ubiquity of perceiving the world in its atomicity, down to its very molecular particularity, is conveyed later with “atomic pictures of X” (10). Needless to say, the word “atomic” in its twentieth-century context infers the industrialization of nuclear energies and military technology. “X” also has a wide range of references, from the multiplication symbol, the marker of cartographic location, to the Roman numeral ten, and so on. But taking a cue from mathematics, “X” is possibly a representation of the variable that denotes the “unknown” which ties in nicely with the overall nihilism of “7T ONE.”

Notwithstanding the imagistic commotion in “7T ONE,” there is a plot to the storyline. That the poem’s unconventional structure and chaotic reveries illustrate the irrationality of a man-made world may be a simplistic reading. But we can take this elementary reading as a point of departure to suggest that Neogy offers uncharacteristic ways of conceptualizing a world built on radical structures of causal change moored in both scientific and philosophical discourse. The poem’s underlying chaos conforms to the principles of Chaos Theory¹ which proposed, incidentally in the same year that Neogy published “7T ONE,” that seemingly ordinary phenomenon, from weather patterns to social behaviors, are stimulated by forces called “strange attractors” especially sensitive to conditions, however infinitesimal (Kellert). Such phenomenon can occur in either deterministic or arbitrary fashion, thereby questioning the measure of technological and scientific control humans exert over nature.

Neogy’s poem is replete with “strange attractors” colliding into forces that attract and detract turbulently, aptly captured in these lines from “7T ONE”

1 Chaos Theory is significant in the scientific study of predicting the effects of global climate change. According to Scott, “Prediction, or modelling” forms the governing tenet of the Chaos Theory, the aim of which was to contrast epistemologies in order “to imagine, quantify and qualify future courses [and] to calculate the new threats to society and the environment posed by industrial surprises such as global climate change” (6).

Railway lines sent telegraph messages and veils made virgins.
Some like sunlight in closed balls. Others open their eyes and
play with armadillos in lost swamps. Mosquito vibrations move
mountains and ants are licked and children dipped into acid. (10)

Irrespective of the illogical, if not violent, nature of the imagery, the proposition of mosquito vibrations moving mountains appeals to the most well-known model of Chaos Theory called the “butterfly effect.” This aspect of the theory argues that energy emanating from even a miniscule force (of a butterfly flapping its wings, for instance) in one part of the world could gather force to stimulate a bigger energy farther away.

Physical and non-physical forces converge arbitrarily in “7T ONE” where nothing is predictable or knowable, hence the “singing pythons,” serpents in “parachute silk,” and women with “seeing hair.” To perceive a fundamental disharmony between reality and expectation is to discern very little that is meaningful or valuable in human life, hence the futile search and re-search for “new ... meanings meaning meaning but nothing else” (10). Neogy’s language is a rhetoric of emasculation that articulates the nullity and pessimism of a man-made world where “nothing happens,” “nothing means anything,” and where “nothing is.” In “7T ONE”’s gratuitous world of “dead revolutions” and failed relationships, a minute feels like an “h/our” – “In a minute. An Hour. Ours is the same” (10).

The poem’s experimental syntax, grammar, and occasionally, spelling (“unposing,” “spitten,” “furlined”), test the extent to which language can cohere to convey meaning. Neogy seems to have carefully meditated on the extraordinary meaning-making possibilities of linguistic codes through figures of speech, like similes, metaphors, alliterations (“Serpents glisten like parachute silk”), homonyms (“Hour/Our”; “Aim. Am. I am”), playful metonymies and curious circumlocutions often in a single sentence (“Hair-oil is good for the brain and soap is good for the bones”), and so on. The poem is replete with wonderfully peculiar lines, practically impossible to decipher, but are visually and auditorily magnificent:

Also there the juice of a tange beyond O in a bottle with libel ... Aim. am.
I am.
Ham-riders in porcupine pleasure of standing on end, mushroom-grown in
mois.Ture was there too. (10)

The disintegration of literary English usually portends a breakdown of linguistic codes. However, a breakdown in conventional linguistic codes does not necessarily herald a complete loss of meaning because it invites the possibility that an object, idea, or image can have multiple significations and newer, different arrangements as linguistic symbols. The word “mois.Ture” is a case in point: pictographically, it

is unique because the breakage plays with our perceived notions of recognizable linguistic characters. The period between “mois” and “Ture” creates a striking visual effect by way of an ideographic peculiarity: it is difficult to overlook, let alone forget. But the real conundrum is how does or should it sound? The inclination is not to pause after “mois” when read aloud, so that when the pause does take place, it not only alters the (expected) sound-effect, but the meaning of the word/s altogether because “Ture” then hovers about on the page (and on the reader’s mind) as a truncated after thought: “mois.Ture” is and is not “moisture,” so what is it then?

Is this a Dadaist attempt by Neogy, of hacking words and rearranging them, an effort to remove language from our preconceived notions about coherence, order, and normalcy? Surrealists and Dadaists despised coherence and regularity in art and fiction, a proclamation underscored with great emphasis by Breton in the *First Surrealist Manifesto*. Literary and narrative elements used to convey coherence in form and structure were completely eradicated in Dada poetry and art and Surrealist fiction. Such works often produced arbitrary juxtaposition of words and symbols meant to jolt the reader/viewer’s expectations and conformist views. In Dada and Surrealism, the mind is prevented from going through language in the usual way because this meant slipping back into time. Mental comprehensions were regarded as a linear act in time, so that if this could be halted, then words and images become fragmentary and could then convey the fragmentary and shifting nature of human consciousness – itself mysterious, unknowable, and uncanny, the seat of both affirmative and destructive impulses. No wonder then that European Dadaists and Surrealists read a great deal of Nietzsche, Bergson, and Freud.

Fragmentation of senses, of body parts, and words in much twentieth-century avant-garde movements generally convey the fragmentation of human sensibilities and we can assume that Neogy employed similar truncated words and images in his poetry to play with the idea that human perception is volatile and arbitrary, and human nature, even more so. He wants his reader to not merely read the poem (aloud if possible, because sound is crucial for this “meaning-making” venture), but to dwell on the poem’s visual layout, to ponder on the arrangement of words and punctuation, and muse on the deliberate caesuras: he is teasing the reader but also, in a way, setting her/him free from conformist and conventional viewpoints.

Travel, Im/mobility, Exile

Freedom in motion and movement are important leitmotifs in Neogy’s later poems where narrators travel unassisted by machine and technological contraptions. Bodily motion as opposed to rootedness is one way to counter the prevailing chaos of the human cosmos. Movement is restorative; it invites meditation and possible regeneration of the self. While some of his traveller-narrators are quasi-

human entities, others are mere voices or snatches of a memory-laden consciousness that reminisce in a monotone. It is difficult to discern what it is that moves across time and space in these later poems. We do not know who or what travels across the unspecified terrains of a space so vast that one location captures the essence of all locations and all spaces. This type of poetry offers powerful glimpses of the omniscient “I” that moves about in an ur-space that is everywhere and yet seemingly nowhere.

The second issue of *Transition* (1961) published three untitled poems by Neogy, this time less experimental but more prophetic in its revelatory litany. The first poem opens with the preambles of a quasi-human first-person narrator, who circumnavigates water, land, and air:

Many times, too many times ...
I have walked
with tobacco ash in my pocket
and an emptiness in my bare feet.
... with my muscles
Rippling like s stream
And the noiseless sound of brook water
I have glided with flesh and my legs
And I have travelled. (37)

The narrator experiences a primeval integration with the earth:

I have slept
and watched grass growing
and tasted greenness with my teeth
and sweetness with my tongue
and I have kissed the earth.
And I have slept.
.....
I have brewed my liquid
and eaten meat.
I have seen birth
and witnessed death.
Many times, too many times.
But today I have seen men:
And I will beat the earth with my two fists. (37)

The journey ends here on a note of anguish at having “seen men.” Who these “men” are and what “seeing” implies are left ambiguous. Travel is a self-evident metaphor

for a spiritual quest or pilgrimage that enables the finding of a kind of “non-self” (as a primal, non-material life-force) in the everyday self. Movement is a disembodied experience in Neogy. But the question subconsciously gnawing at Neogy’s narrator, a question asked by all Surrealist storytellers is – “who am I?” Both Dadaism and Surrealism have pondered on, in their respective ways, questions of identity, the relationship between the body and mind, and the nature of human consciousness.

The third untitled poem extrapolates on the idea of paralysis, for here, the prophetic narrator is rendered immobile. Having reached an impasse, the narrator’s seeming immobility – an idea that has broader social implications throughout Neogy’s editorials in the 1960s – contends that arrival is difficult to grapple with than departure. Such travelers are:

... paralyzed by the
 rectangular symbol of the door
 A kind of purgatory between
 outside and in. (37)

Neogy complicates implications behind “arrival” by associating it with the Catholic doctrine of expiatory purification. Arrival attests to a state of paralysis rather than emancipation for those who:

travel
 who arrive
 and stand at the entrance
 and cannot move
 anymore. (37)

Neogy and the “Asian Question”

I argue that arcane and surrealist visualizations of movement and im/mobility in Neogy’s poetry reflect much broader and urgent questions on the possible relocation and impending exile for the Asian community in Uganda. The date of publication of these poems is November 1961, exactly eleven months before the formal declaration of the Independence of Uganda. Independence was a historic moment and Milton Obote, the leader of the Uganda People’s Congress, announced plans to “Africanize” Uganda with the support of the expatriate communities in their commercial undertakings. Obote declared that “there is a place in the Uganda of today for all who have her interests at heart, whatever their tribe, race or creed” (Nsubuga 68-69). The country entered a new phase of organizational overhaul wherein administrative control was to be transferred from expatriates to the African sons of the soil. Despite such affirmative words of hope and encouragement on the eve of Independence, the actual identity and status of the many expatriate groups

were deliberately left obscure by the Obote government.

Themes of travel and im/mobility in Neogy’s writings have special connotations when read in light of the escalating tension that was gathering around debates on the place of the Asian population in Independent Uganda. The urgency of the situation was not lost on *Transition’s* Ugandan-Bengali editor whose *bhadrolok* (literally, genteel) *Brahmin* parents had come from Faridpur (then East Bengal) to Kampala in the 1930s as expatriate teachers at the Aga Khan school. Could Asians choose to remain as expatriates in the new nation state or would they be conferred citizenship and indefinite leave to remain in the country which they had begun to call home?

Neither was the urgency of the matter lost on *Transition’s* expatriate subscribers and contributors who furiously debated the government’s ambiguous stance towards these communities. Would “Africanization” in governmental, administrative, and educational divisions completely curtail expatriate participation in these sectors since many Asians, such as Neogy’s parents, were teachers at schools in Kampala? Would Asians be required to hand over their civil positions, business enterprises, and properties to Africans after Independence? How would they then sustain themselves? These questions and many more became a matter of great apprehension in the months following Independence. Whereas Neogy remained discreet about the expatriate situation in his poetry, he saw to it that *Transition* continually published fictional and non-fictional materials on the “Asian Question” and on the political climate of Uganda by himself and other notable contributors, expatriate and African.

Attentive to the expatriate anxiety, legally and affectively, the third issue of *Transition* featured publications on the political climate of post-Independent Uganda, and essays on “race relations” between Africans and Indian expatriates. The issue was prefaced by a poignant editorial by Neogy on “Race Attitudes.” The editorial argued that of all the expatriate groups in Uganda, Indians were the most hated, and that Indians are responsible for “the strong and widespread anti-Indian prejudice which exist among Africans.” Neogy was not alone in this condemnation. The Kenyan novelist and poet, Bahadur Tejani, who spent considerable time in Uganda, was quite moved by the expatriate situation. Born to Gujarati parents and raised all over East Africa, he remarked in an essay called “Farewell Uganda,” published by Neogy, that whereas expatriates born in Uganda had a “birthright” as citizens, Indians’ discrimination of Africans was largely responsible for their fall-out with the Obote and Idi Amin regimes. But both Tejani and Neogy believed that in spite of their many shortcomings, Indian-Ugandans would cooperate under the new regime, and therefore, be accepted as citizens in the new nation. Neogy is among a handful of African intellectuals who believed that Asian expatriates, especially Indians and Bengalis, would contribute positively to Uganda’s nation-building initiatives.

The November 1961 issue of *Transition* tackled the “Asian Question” by printing controversial essays on the future of Uganda by Daudi Ochieng, J. E. Goldthorpe, and Bill Court. The issue also brought out poems by Roland Hindmarsh on the existential ennui of the wearied Asian émigré who “shuffles groceries into cartons” in a “crude African town” (6-7). These poems – with striking thematic parallels to some of Neogy’s poems – probe into the expatriate nightmare of failing to find a home away from home in Africa. Most Asian expatriates in Uganda never “belonged” to the new nation-state in that they did not feel the need to integrate with Africans or treat them as equals; neither did they look forward to exile, having invested time and resources in setting up trade, commerce, and work in Kampala and the neighboring cities. The collective expatriate angst was perhaps tantamount to the feeling of being paralyzed (by fear, anger, uncertainty, hopelessness) that Neogy’s later poems on immobility extrapolate. The implication is that there is no home to be reached and no destination to be sought for one who travels, suggesting that life itself is a protracted and perpetual journey experienced as a collation of movements. For Neogy, im/mobility and movement can result in regeneration, but also purgatory. The tension he builds in the poems around the mysterious notions of im/mobility foreshadow expatriate angst about their place in Uganda which was becoming increasingly untenable and surreal.

In 1962, *Transition* printed a short and startling poem by Neogy called “Definitions.” The poem re-enacts the travel motif through seven brief sections that juxtapose a series of words, from “Dignity” to “Death.” For each word, a “definition” is presented by the narrator that recounts, rather morbidly, the journey of life from the period of conception to bodily death. The poem, in true Dadaist and Surrealist fashion, toys with violence around the person of a pregnant woman – a rarity in Neogy’s oeuvre where definite human figures are uncommon. But the woman is a disconcerting figure for she is knowingly carrying a “wounded child in [her] womb” while a nightmarish scene unfolds around her with “brains [lying] dashed, dribbling on slopes” (14), bleeding eyes and wounded fetuses.

Written four months before the official declaration of the Independence of Uganda, it is perhaps not altogether fortuitous to consider that the image of the “wounded child” and of its enfeebled mother offer a diagnosis of the collective national condition on the eve of Independence. According to Simon Gikandi, the new social order that sprung up in the aftermath of Independence in East Africa heralded a moment of “stillborn postcolonial modernity” (163), perhaps as “stillborn” as Neogy’s “wounded foetus” which ushers in the concept of the nation-as-mother. Neogy does not develop this analogy of the female body as a figurative marker for ideas of nation and national identity to satisfactory conclusions. The female body *is* the nation, but his emphasis is on fetal casualty as an allegory of national casualty

with the implication that Uganda is entering a fragile period of its history. Many questioned whether Uganda would persevere in this new journey to independent nationhood.

Conclusion

The unspoken but consistent referent in Rajat Neogy’s early Surrealist poetry is a loss of meaning in existence as a result of technological machinations, psychological disarray, and spatial displacement and/or homelessness. Images of trains, railroads, and leitmotifs of arrivals and departures offer tropes that would have struck a familiar and eerie chord with *Transition*’s Indian expatriate readers in light of the socio-political changes taking place in post-Independent Uganda. Neogy’s decision to publish essays on the “Asian Question” in his magazine is an indication of his own and the Asian community’s mounting anxiety of having to consider their status as “non-citizens” in a country where many, like Neogy, were born and raised.

In true Surrealist tradition, Neogy’s poems bombard us with a bewildering medley of imagist snapshots of a world in discernible disarray. This world, we discover, is a fearsome labyrinth: infinitely complex, chaotic, and capricious, much like human consciousness and human nature. In the post-Second World War industrial era of Cold-war politics, Neogy perhaps felt that the old certainties – of religion, family, society – were fast disappearing. His poems reveal the disruptive influence of science, technology, military, and political prowess on the individual who is flayed about like a fish out of water by forces beyond her/his control. To give poetic expression to these incomprehensible feelings of loss and amnesia, the poet discards basic elements of rhythm, harmony, and linguistic conventions. The end result is a verbal experiment so bewildering and jarring that it is as though language itself has refused to accommodate conventional meaning and is looking for outlets to generate new meanings. The energy and aesthetics behind “7T ONE” is as breathtaking as it is mystifying. It is alarming to visualize the aggressiveness inherent in Neogy’s graphic narratives that are infiltrated by a riotous disarray of images superimposed against a mad surrealist backdrop of cosmic disintegration where, without visibility and adequate representation as subjects, his narrative personae move about like spectres haunted by their own apparitions. Everything, from language to imageries and sound, is disorientating in this surrealist cosmos, which becomes a reflection of the disorientating human nature so that “meaning-making” in the human realm remains unstable.

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Ecocinema, Slow Violence, and Environmental Ethics: Death by Water

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Abstract

In the Anthropocene epoch, slow violence triggered by human-caused environmental disaster is omnipresent across the globe. By forming an alternative media-spectatorship/readership in a media-saturated, fast-changing world, ecocinema can potentially help create an ecocentric environmental ethics, allowing us to question long-held notions of anthropocentrism, speciesism, and other ecological issues. Analyzing two documentaries, *A Plastic Ocean* and *Silent River*, this paper investigates the efficacy of the narratives of ecocinema as a powerful cultural and political text in making environmental slow violence perceptible to human imagination and in taking us one step further to environmental justice activism. The study will also examine the way in which water answers back to the environmental injustice triggered by humans through retaliation and revenge, appropriating and expanding Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence and Jane Bennett's concept of thing-power. Closely reading the portrayal of water as a dynamic entity in these two visual texts, this paper argues how the intrinsic value and the agency of water can reveal to humans the problems connected with their strong anthropocentric environmental ethics.

Keywords: ecocinema, environmental ethics, water, slow violence, thing-power

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide

(T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land")

TS Eliot's modernist rhetoric "The Waste Land" tells a tale of water that is polluted and exploited, and, eventually, is devoid of any redemptive or regenerative power. An ecocritical reading of the poem reveals a cautionary tale of a deserted civilization in which water retreats itself from a post-industrialized world. The centrality of water is so powerful that it forces us to recognize the supreme agency of water. Section IV of the poem titled "Death by Water" recounts the drowning of Phlebas whose dead body is devoured by the sea water in which "A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers" (315-316). The wrath that the water manifests in



the poem is symptomatic of the rage of the Anthropocene that reminds us of the presence of power and agency in nature. This paper echoes a similar dynamics of water as portrayed in two powerful documentaries, *A Plastic Ocean* and *Silent River*. Though these documentaries foreground extreme injustice to water sources, water is not simply portrayed as a passive entity ready to be exploited. The subtext of these visual texts is rich with a water aesthetic that signals the agency of water and its power to conquer. In the process, the films call for an environmental ethics in which water demands to be respected for its inherent value.

An ecocritical reading of these two documentaries foregrounds the depiction of one crucial elemental matter, i.e., water – recognized as the life force of the planet – as a dynamic and lively entity in contrast to an inert object. Referring to the recent scholarship of elemental ecocriticism, vibrant materialism, and environmental ethics, this paper explores how humanity’s failure to recognize water’s intrinsic value and power has ravaged the earth, damaging the long-term relationship between the sea and the rest of the environment. Exploring the fundamental elements of the planet such as water, air, fire, and earth, and their complex dynamics, the recently published *Elemental Ecocriticism* seeks to explore in fictional and critical texts “a lush archive for thinking ecology anew” (Cohen and Duckert 4). This book’s aim is to develop a material ecocriticism that is “at once estranging, disanthropocentric, and apprehensible, hospitable to new companionships” (6-7). According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert, water, like any other foundational element, is never easy, never still, never straightforward, and never reducible. These eco-documentaries bring forth parallel dynamics of eco materiality of water, which is portrayed as lively, flexible, and irreducible, echoing Jane Bennett’s idea of things as powerful and vibrant. Apart from furthering Bennett’s idea of thing-power, this paper will also appropriate and expand the concept of “slow violence” proposed by Rob Nixon in an attempt to recognize the agency of non-human nature. What these visual narratives document is not only how human actions inflict violence against water but also how water makes humans victim to slow violence in return. In both cases, the resulting violence is slow and silent which makes it difficult to comprehend on the face of it. Finally, this paper attempts to study these eco-documentaries as tales of water that remind us to show respect for nature and renounce extreme human hubris.

A Plastic Ocean and Silent River

A Plastic Ocean is a documentary film that dives into the world of the ocean, investigating what humans have done to the water sources across the globe. Truly transnational in its approach, the documentary takes us to five oceans of the world in an attempt to search the garbage patch and its impact on marine life and on

humans. Director, journalist, filmmaker, and adventurer Craig Leeson sets out to make a documentary about the elusive blue whale which eventually leads to the dreadful discovery of a thick layer of plastic debris – the garbage patch – floating in the Ocean. Released in 2016, it not only received good reviews from critics and viewers as well as fourteen major awards on several prestigious occasions but also was screened in over ninety countries on six continents. This large viewership encourages us to decode the environmental message within the visual text that can eventually offer us an ethical position towards nature. Beautifully shot on the sea and sea beaches, this film juxtaposes the pristine beauty of blue water and the horrifying images of heavily polluted water with plastic debris in an attempt to create a response in the viewers. Throughout the film, apart from using powerful visual images, statistics are presented graphically, and experts are interviewed to offer further insights into some of the problems our water is facing because of pollution.

The second documentary *Silent River* follows the story of a twenty-four-year-old Atawalpa Sofia, born in El Salto, Jalisco, Mexico, who is trying to save one of the most polluted rivers in Mexico, the Santiago River. Directed by Steve Fisher and Jason Jaacks, the film tells the tale of the Santiago River, known locally as “the River of Death,” that has become a garbage dump from the waste coming from one of Mexico’s largest manufacturing corridors since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. Alarming shots of the polluted river, informed narration, and interviews of the victims make it an excruciating film to watch that exposes how the manufacturing industries like IBM, HP, Coca-Cola, Levi’s, Honda, Nestlé, etc., mostly owned by America and Japan, have caused havoc on the river that was once clean and healthy. Released in 2014, this short documentary also garnered positive reviews and received several prestigious awards. Both the documentaries showcase the slow violence caused by the humans and how water talks back to the disaster we have created, reminding us of its agency and vibrant materiality.

Appropriating “slow violence”

The concept of “slow violence” is coined and popularized by Rob Nixon in his critical discussion of the underrepresented and underprivileged class, race, sex, and ethnicity in environmental discourse in his seminal work *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor*. He defines slow violence as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). His discussion of environmental slow violence reveals the fact that it is neither spectacular nor immediate. As slow violence lacks “a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power,” the primary challenge for slow violence to make its presence felt is representational (Nixon 3). Hence, he emphasizes the necessity of devising “arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence

of delayed effects” (3). Though he primarily refers to narrative writing as a powerful tool that can emotively foreground the damage slow violence inflicts, his ideas could be equally, if not more, applicable to the narratives of ecocinema. Joni Adamson in her essay “Environmental Justice, Cosmopolitics, and Climate Change,” in the same spirit, attempts to evaluate and acknowledge both the efforts and accomplishments of the storytellers, writers, and their allies in a more environmentally ethical epoch, arguing how stories can serve as “new tools, or ‘seeing instruments,’ for making abstract, often intangible global patterns associated with climate change accessible to a wider public” (172). What they both assert is the impressive power of narratives, which can be equally applicable to the visual narratives of ecocinema. It is not just because ecocinema, irrespective of its genre, has literally a narrative or plot; it is also because of the powerful audio-visual aesthetics that can engage viewers in a meaningful way. These seeing instruments are no longer less effective as a platform for generating ideas and promoting environmental ethics than any other medium, which can eventually offer us “a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen” (Nixon 15). Hence, studying ecocinema as a visual text for witnessing slow violence and generating a critical discussion is a way forward to the twenty-first century environmental scholarship, especially in a time when audio-books, video-books, e-readers, multimodal pedagogy have become a mundane reality.

This paper, however, attempts to appropriate and expand Nixon’s idea of “slow violence” because of the generic value it contains. Nixon’s emphasis is surely on the slow violence inflicted on the global South, and justifiably so. Nevertheless, human-caused environment slow violence is ubiquitous on a global scale that demands visibility and requires close attention. When we are polluting natural resources like soil, air, water, and more, extracting fossil fuels inappropriately, harming other species insensibly, dumping garbage unreasonably, and creating an imbalance in the ecosystems – in whatever part of the world – we are actually inflicting slow violence on the planet itself, and thus, on humans, in general, as well. Therefore, though there is no denying that poor people are the prime victims of environmental injustice, the non-human nature is damaged as much or more. In this regard, we can turn towards Rachel Carson who warns us against the violence humans selfishly unleash on the environment. Her influential book, *Silent Spring* – one of the founding texts of an ethical approach to nature – informs us of the dangers of the new chemicals we are releasing into the environment. The use of pesticides that risks the well-being of both humans and other biotic and abiotic organisms manifests an expansive form of slow violence inflicted on both human and the non-human world. Hence, apart from an exclusive “slow violence” as proposed by Nixon, we also need to address an inclusive “slow violence” and find apt apparatuses to use to recognize this slow form of violence.

Ecocinema and Slow Violence

Pat Brereton in his book-length study of ecocinema and environmental ethics discusses the social, political, and material impact of ecocinema which is capable of creating strong responses among viewers to the ever-growing environmental challenges facing the earth. Ecocinema, as suggested by Brereton, “an agent for knowledge dissemination, consciousness-raising, public and ethical debate, and even political action” (211), can be considered provocative ethical narratives that require to be deciphered for their embedded environmental messages. Both *A Plastic Ocean* and *Silent River* are rich visual texts that persuasively showcase the violence humans have unleashed against water sources and the human and non-human animals that depend on them. The opening scene of *A Plastic Ocean* starts off with clear blue water, with shots of the glowing sun reflecting on it and the swimming whales. The first seven minutes of the documentary seem to be an adventurous exploration of blue whales. Director Craig Leeson takes us to the Indian Ocean, off the coast of Sri Lanka where there has been no commercial fishing because of the civil war (1983-2009). What he thought would be a relatively pristine environment as the beaches have been closed for up to thirty years turned out to be a nightmarish vision for him, and eventually for the viewers. Underwater cameraman, Doug Allan, transports us into a “horrible, crappy, emulsified mess” of garbage (7:50-7:58). Soon Tanya Streeter, a free diver and environmentalist, joins the team, showing the terrible, painful death of a blue whale which had six square meters of plastic sheeting inside it. It could not eat as its digestive system was blocked, and it died of malnourishment eventually. This troubling scene is soon followed by horrifying images of dolphins and whales trapped in plastic ropes, plastic bags, fishing nets, and so on elsewhere on the planet. Leeson, then, takes us to Tasmania, where he grew up. Once having the cleanest air and pure water, the island has eventually transformed into an industrial area. His investigation finds that the water has heavy amounts of organochlorines and these contain dioxins which are cancer-causing agents.

The next destination was the Med, one of the most polluted bodies of water on the planet, in Marseille, France. The narration informs us: “About eight million tons of plastic is dumped into the world’s ocean every year. More than 50 percent of marine debris, including plastic, sinks to the bottom of the ocean” (20:12-20:23). Expectedly, the camera takes us underwater, showing horrible images of plastic, tires, pieces of metal, junk, fishing line, and what not for almost two minutes that makes one want to escape from the distorted space (22:00-24:00). Next, the documentary takes us to “a huge, floating island of garbage, twice the size of Texas in the North Pacific” and explains the slow accumulating process of the enormous mess (26:25-26:30). The impact of these powerful images is immediate and long-lasting, and they appeal not only to the eyes but also to the minds of the viewers. As film theorist

Berys Gaut suggests, vivid visual images are particularly emotive and have the power to stimulate us that might be otherwise challenging through simple narrations or complex facts. “Our emotional reactions to generalities,” he argues, “such as statistics recording mortality in developing countries, are often muted: but our emotions are triggered, other things equal, much more powerfully by specifics, and the density of the photographic image is thus a powerful elicitor of emotions” (249). Being faithful to this spirit, the whole documentary contains a series of visually appealing and appalling images of slow violence that is happening from the North Pacific gyre to the South Pacific gyre, from Italy to Fiji, from China to Manila.

Silent River proves to be more frightful as it documents not only the so-called death of a river but also the devastating health conditions of humans. The documentary starts off with Sofia, the young woman whose journey it promises to follow, and her dream of a clean river in which she desires to swim with a sense of freedom. Contrastingly, in the following shot, the Santiago River, flowing through the town of El Salto, on the outskirts of Guadalajara, Mexico, is shown as nothing but a river of foam. As Sofia informs, the river has never been just a source of water; it is what her community believes is a way of thinking, a way of life. This thread of life of her community has become “untouchable” since the implementation of NAFTA in 1994, which has transformed the region into one of Mexico’s largest industrial zones (02:47). Sofia’s fear and lamentation are evident in her statement: “The river is so damaged, so contaminated, so full of toxins that what we are breathing, what we are smelling is damaging our respiratory tracts and our vital organs (02:50-03:06). Sofia’s father Enrique Enciso informs that there has been a lot of illness, mostly cancer, in this town. Sofia had been to the cemetery only once when her grandmother died before she turned fifteen. However, since then, she has gone there a hundred times because of the number of deaths of known people in the area. What follows is a heartbreaking account of Maria La Pico, a neighbor of Sofia’s, who lost her boys, daughter-in-law, and cousin from cancer, from damaged kidneys, from heart disease. More mothers join her with their traumatic stories, such as a six-year-old son requiring a kidney transplant, a young daughter suffering from severe spots on her skin, and more.

Unlike *A Plastic Ocean*, this documentary relies more on the testimony of the victims than on images. In her essay, “Emotions of Consequence?: Viewing Eco-documentaries from a Cognitive Perspective,” Weik von Mossner discusses non-fictional films as something which can somehow “document reality” (41). She emphasizes the affective power of personal stories in shaping environmental knowledge through which we may account for our emotional responses to situations which are alien to us. An untrained person or a victim speaking about his/her experiences, memories, hopes, and fears has a more affective impact than an expert

or an actor. Mossner proposes that information about water and air pollution “in the context of transnational environmental injustice take[s] on additional meaning” if it is provided in conjunction with the personal story of victims, which allows viewers “to empathize and sympathize with a specific – and actually existing – human being” (53). This turns out to be more effective in this particular documentary because not only are the primary sufferers humans but the narrative also follows the oral tradition of Mexico. Following the ritual, Raul Munoz, President, Committee for Environmental Defense of El Salto, shares his testimony of the death of a young boy called Miguel Angel Lopez Rocha who suffered an accident on January 25, 2008. His account of the incident manifests how much damage is done to the water over the course of time:

He fell from the banks of the Ahogado Canal, very close to where it meets the Santiago River. He was playing, slipped, and fell into the canal. He kept playing until his clothes dried. Around 11:00 that night, he began to feel ill. His situation was worsening, sent to the general hospital, was in coma. Had a massive arsenic poisoning. After eighteen days he died. (06:25-07:33)

What the documentary showcases is not an anticipated catastrophe, but what has happened in reality over the course of time. According to Mossner, one of the strategies filmmakers use to stop a documentary from being an eco-catastrophic spectacle is “to provide visual evidence of past changes in natural landscapes and to demonstrate how people are already affected by these changes” (47). *Silent River* truly does that by documenting the slow violence done to the river and people living close by. It evidently shows that the Santiago River has truly converted into a sewer; it is nothing but a drain for almost 300 companies. A government study documented over 1000 chemicals in the river, including phosphorus, which causes foam. Government health statistics have also shown that respiratory disease and kidney failure are among the highest causes of death in El Salto (09:50-10:02). Thus, the alarming information and heart-wrenching testimony of the documentary unfold a human-caused violence that has been going on silently and worsening with each passing day.

However, these two powerful visual texts, *A Plastic Ocean* and *Silent River*, should be read not only as a simple documentation of “slow violence” against water, and eventually against humans and non-human animals, but also as a manifestation of how water answers back to human actions, creating an alternative form of slow violence. A broader and inclusive definition of environmental “slow violence” can make us understand that the whole planet is under tremendous risk. As I am primarily interested in elemental ecocriticism, I not only foreground the violence channeled towards water but also explore the repercussion of that slow violence as manifested

in water's response. Here, I suggest that the way certain humans unleash violence on other humans and on nature, nature too can victimize us, inflicting dreadful disasters. What is significant here is that when nature responds back, it treats the rich or the poor, the Global South or the North alike. I argue that estimating "slow violence" as one dimensional, in which humans are only active agents, would be not only deceiving but also robbing water of its massive agency. Thus, this paper expands Nixon's concept of "slow violence" by introducing a counter form of slow violence that nature inflicts on humans as a form of retaliation.

Having said that, I do not think expanding Nixon's idea of slow violence goes against the spirit of his discussion because what he essentially proposes is the recognition, attention, and inclusion of yet-invisible narratives in environmental discourse. This paper, like Nixon who refuses parochial environmentalism, embraces a broad and inclusive approach towards environmentalism by appropriating his concept of "slow violence" in an attempt to not only address the environmental catastrophe triggered by humans but also investigate the agency of nature. I believe that recognizing these dual forms of "slow violence" is crucial to understand the agency of the non-human world. If we consider water as a passive and static entity that bears every human-burden and readily accepts every human-action, we are, certainly, playing our super egoistic, anthropocentric role. Both the documentaries portray water that can react to situation, can transform, can change the course of action. Its supreme agency can be seen in the way it retaliates against human actions. As a dynamic entity, the materiality of water evolves and affects its surroundings in such a drastic way that the life force of the planet metamorphosizes into an active agent of death. This active agency of water brings forth the idea of thing-power that is in full display in both the documentaries.

Here, I borrowed the term thing-power from Bennett's concept of vibrant materiality of things. Bennett in her highly influential book *Vibrant Matter* offers a "vibrant materialism" that essentially subverts the anthropocentric dichotomy between life and matter, beings and things, and organic and inorganic. What she aims at achieving is to foreground "the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite human things" (viii). Exploring the idea of thing-power, she discusses how ordinary items can exceed their status as objects, manifesting traces of individuality or aliveness. Bennett contends that if a plastic bottle, some pollen, and a dead rat can be vibrant, lively, and self-organizing, why not water? Though her idea of thing-power is primarily related to man-made objects/matters/materials, the scope of her discussion is so expansive that one can extend the idea to other natural elements. She might not directly refer to inorganic elements like water as a thing-power, yet, her claim of "a liveliness intrinsic to the materiality of the thing" is inclusive enough to suggest that all matters, organic or inorganic, fall within the discourse of vital

materiality (xvi). The tendency of the two documentaries to echo an ecomaterialism is comprehensible when we witness water not only as dynamic matter but also as a thing-power that has sufficient agency to make a difference, generate effects, and alter the course of events.¹

Bennett's definition of thing-power which is capable of animating and producing "effects dramatic and subtle" answers for what water does to its surroundings in *A Plastic Ocean* and *Silent River* (6). The way water overpowers its surroundings, making everything around helpless, signals its towering agency. The revenge of water is manifested in its withdrawal from its natural course, in its refusal to cooperate, and in its denial to regenerate. *A Plastic Ocean* illustrates how oceans are driven by five major circular currents, or gyres. Each continent is affected by these massive systems. The motion and dynamism of water, which is beyond human control, is evident in the narration: "They [gyres] collect waste flowing from our rivers and coastlines, and over time, anything floating within the gyre will eventually move towards the center of the gyre" (26:04-26:11). The Great Lakes in North America are shown as an example. Eighty percent of the litter along the shorelines of these majestic lakes is plastic, which eventually ends up being in the Atlantic Ocean. As this documentary primarily deals with plastic dumping in the sea, it investigates "plastic smog" all over the ocean world (27:44). The graphic details of plastic breaking down into microplastics and their assimilation with elements that are present in water make us realize that we must not consider water as a simple, static entity. The role of water as elicitor, in its act of both providing a congenial atmosphere to the transforming process and containing the required chemicals in it, is evident in the narration: "The problem is, these plastics absorb chemicals that are free-floating in the ocean. So, when the fish eat the plastics, those toxins then migrate from the plastic into the muscles or the fats, the parts that we like to eat in fish" (32:00-32:15). In other words, human plastics come full circle as we ingest them via the food chain.

Ecocinema and Environmental Ethics

Our failure to understand the complex dynamics of water and its course of action is partly responsible for our treatment of water as a resource for its use value. We must not forget that water has been the pre-condition of the existence of life on the planet. The fluid nature of water allows itself to change forms as convenient, be it vapor, rain, or snow. Here, in the film, water allows and provides a suitable condition for plastics and other debris to turn into poison cells. The violence is so critical that "when sampling blue mussels at six locations along the coastlines of France, Belgium, and Netherlands, microplastics were present in every single organism examined" (*Plastic* 41:43-41:52). The act of taking water simply as a

1 See Mridha's "The Water Ethic: An Elemental-Ecocritical Reading of TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*" for a detailed discussion on how water's response to human actions can be read as the *revenge of the thing* (109-118).

dumping space or a place of exploitation is causing immense toxicological effects not only on the marine animals and organisms such as dolphins, whales, corals, and others but also on humans. According to the documentary, in a recent study published in *Scientific Reports*, UC Davis researchers examined seventy-six fish slated for human consumption in Indonesia and sixty-four in California. They found that, in both groups, roughly one quarter had anthropogenic debris in their guts. The researchers found plastic in the Indonesian population and plastic and textiles fibers in the American one (41:18-41:42). Therefore, the debris we are throwing into the river is eventually coming back into our body system and not only onto the shores through waves and wind. The documentary graphically shows how marine animals eat microplastic and, in the process, they consume the toxins attached to the plastic which eventually pass into the bloodstream. There they bio-accumulate in the fatty tissue and around the vital organs. Humans eventually consume the poison by eating seafood which completes the full circle of slow violence – from humans to water to humans.

Silent River can be considered a more literal manifestation of the thing-power, and eventually the alternative form of “slow violence.” The so-called dead river has not become silent; rather it has made humans silent, causing death by water. The presence of phosphorus has not only made it a river of foam but also affected other water sources that are connected to it. Like *A Plastic Ocean*, here water metamorphosizes into a poisonous entity and responds to human actions, creating havoc. The dynamic changeability of water is so much beyond human cognition that we tend to mistake its existence as simple and linear. The documentary reveals that varieties of studies have found that a series of contaminants are found in the water of the Santiago that include heavy metals such as lead, chrome, cobalt, mercury, arsenic as well as synthetic composites such as benzene, toluene, chloroform, endocrine disruptors, etc. (08:23-08:40). As suggested by Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino, humans’ attempt to pollute water can eventually transform it from *aqua vitae* to *aqua mortis*. Their reference to water falling back as acidic rain in the domestication process can be regarded as water’s response to our efforts to conquer it. “Water turns bad,” they maintain, “though more metaphorically so when hyper-commodified as pure purity, and really bad, if not becoming absent, when engineered, diverted, dammed, and colonized” (312). If humans are responsible for making it one of the most contaminated rivers in Mexico by treating it as a drain for industrial waste, the river inevitably answers our actions. The increase in the number of graveyards in El Salto is a visual index of the revenge of water. Sofia’s mother Graciela Gonzalez refers to a governmental institution called COFEPRIS that maintained an actual register of deaths of the area. They said categorically that this area had nine times the

amount of cancer as before (10:45-11:10). Thus, *Silent River*, through its powerful narration and effective images, is able to portray water as a complex actant which runs its own course, displaying an undeniable dynamism and metamorphosis that is beyond human cognizance.

The portrayal of water in *A Plastic Ocean* and *Silent River*, in the process, echoes a unique form of ecomateriality where water is presented as an agent for the great change of the earth. These two visual texts are not just simplistic representations of human-caused disaster, environmental or otherwise, that result in making everyone and/or everything suffer. Rather, they portray complex dynamics of ecology by making water an active agent of “slow violence” in answering back to human actions. Ecocriticism’s recent tendency towards the elementality of matter is truly significant in the sense that it helps humans understand the commonality of materiality of all biotic and abiotic organisms. Elemental ecocriticism addresses all the four major elements – earth, air, fire, and water – and their “promiscuous combinations,” which function within “a humanly knowable scale while extending an irresistible invitation to inhuman realms” (Cohen and Duckert 7). Studying the vital elementality of matter closely is central in the age of the Anthropocene not only to recognize the non-human materiality inside us but also to acknowledge the complex materiality and flexibility of matters. According to Cohen and Duckert, water, like any other foundational element, is neither static nor simple, rather it is always “material burgeoning” and “lively as language” (8). Both the documentaries can be studied as an effort to document that process of becoming and to decode that language. The awareness that water is lively, dynamic, and responsive is the cornerstone of treating it with value and respect. We have to go beyond our petty self-interest that water is here to serve us as a resource. The simple truth – no water means no life on the planet – does not endorse the fact that it is just a valuable commodity that humans must preserve. Rather, what is required is to develop respect towards the uncanny dynamism and agency of water that makes it what it is, which we constantly need both inside and around us. Cohen and Duckert’s rhetorical question reinforces this idea, destabilizing our long-held understanding of elemental matter like water: “How did we forget that matter is a precarious system and dynamic entity, not a reservoir of tractable commodities?” (5). Until we fix our anthropocentric and petty materialist attitude, no efforts of humans can triumph in the so-called “saving the planet” movement. They rightly argue that the idea of ruining the world and saving the world are two expressions of the same human hubris.

Water performs prominently in the aesthetic design of the documentaries, depicting water not as a mere resource or an inert matter, but as vibrant, fluxing, and active. The ethos of the documentaries suggests that it is humans who are vulnerable, not water. Water, in both the documentaries, is certainly not, thus, reduced to a simple

matter in reductionist or essentialist terms, rather it is presented as a mighty force. The eco-aesthetics of water give it a certain agency that can greatly impact others, changing the course of events. These two visual texts can offer a new understanding of materiality that is not centered around humans, thereby recognizing the agency of the non-human world. Thus, the documentaries seem to offer us to take an environmental ethical position towards elemental matters, towards the non-human world. Weik von Mossner in her discussion of eco-documentary refers to three crucial rhetorical modes of persuasion – logos, ethos, and pathos (46). Both these exploratory narratives seem to offer logos by pleading cases such as water pollution, death of humans, and marine animals with evidence and facts, ethos by persuading the audience by the character (more applicable for *Silent River*) and authority of the speakers (more applicable for *A Plastic Ocean*) and strong images (applicable for both), and pathos by appealing to emotion and shared values. The persuasive rhetoric of eco-documentary, through a combination of logos, ethos, and pathos, makes us think of and acknowledge the significance of water by recognizing its agency, its inherent value. Both *A Plastic Ocean* and *Silent River* can certainly be read as an attempt to recognize the value of non-human entities through their display of agency and *thing-power* of water. They signal the anthropocentric mindset of humans that blinds us about the life-flow of water that surrounds us everywhere. Our nonchalant actions of dumping garbage or toxic industrial waste into water are instances of our understanding of water as a dead, static thing which can only be exploited because of its use value. An environmental-ethical message embedded in the films, on the contrary, calls for acceptance, recognition, and respect for nature that is expected of humans. Both the documentaries enlighten us against the unintentional or opportunistic blindness of humans that stops us from seeing the common materiality present in all organisms on the planet.

Reminding us of the “swirled mess of obligation,” Cohen and Duckert argue how earth, air, fire, water, interstices, and impossible hybridities with which we are coextensive are “intimate aliens” (20). We can study, examine, use, attempt to domesticate, and conquer these elements. But humans must not be egoists in thinking that they can grasp the inner dynamism and agency of elements in a complete sense. Though we are surrounded by these elements intimately, they are still alien to us because of their unique uncanniness. Then what holds everything together? It is our inescapable presence in an undefinable vortex of elements that makes us co-exist, which is equally true of all earthlings. Foregrounding elementality can be a crucial step to understanding the dynamics of co-existence on the planet. Oppermann and Iovino powerfully argue that the fundamental elements such as earth, air, fire, and water bind the destiny and presence of humans and other earthlings in their interlocked voyage of matter and imagination. They remind us

of our common materiality provocatively: “Our blood is saline water, our bones are calcified earth, our breath is volatile air, and our fever is fire – elements that have composed mountains, oceans, and the atmosphere, and have nourished all terrestrial creativities across time and space” (310). According to them, what is true to all the elements is that none can be defined as solitary since all are always in flux, in a stage of metamorphosis. Timothy Morton regards elementality as “givenness.” That is why, he is not surprised why modernity, capitalism, and individualism have had troubles with the idea of elementality. They all seek to banish it from their discourse because “in a society where you are supposed to make yourself, this givenness can get in the way” (277). I think any narrative that has the potential of alluding to elementality has the power to remind us that we humans are not superior. Therefore, the common materiality among all things on earth should bind us together with a common purpose for a mutually respectful co-existence.

The presence of David Attenborough in the concluding section of *A Plastic Ocean* makes this ethical positioning of the documentaries more obvious. He clearly says that we do not have any rights to destroy and disrespect this planet. He persuasively comments: “The whole of the ecosystems of the world are based on a healthy ocean. And if that part of the planet becomes dysfunctional, goes wrong, then the whole of life on this planet will suffer” (1:33:50-1:34:02). His appeal not to disrespect the planet and its ecosystems strikes a similar chord with Carson’s perception of an ecosystem in which all agents are interdependent, and any imbalance in the healthy relation will make the whole system unstable. Carson’s *Silent Spring*, that greatly influenced environmental ethics discourse, offers a vision of a world in which everything contributes to a sequence of well-being of each entity. Reminding us that nature fights back, she warns: “To have risked so much in our efforts to mold nature to our satisfaction and yet to have failed in achieving our goal would indeed be the final irony” (245). The documentary’s end gesture of apologizing for destroying the home of the whales is powerful, reminding us of our selfish exploitation of environment and attempts of molding nature. The narrator appeals to our cognitive sense, telling us what whales, if they could, would have asked us: “What were we thinking? Every other species on the planet works towards the benefit of the ecology and environment that it lives in, but us humans, we just seem like passengers on this earth” (1:35:10-1:35:25). Though the claim that each species apart from humans acts sensibly might not be literally true, the powerful rhetoric at the end of the documentary provocatively reminds us of our moral responsibility towards the planet we call home.

Like the beginning, *Silent River* ends with an image of a polluted river and with Sofia’s dream of a clean river. She says: “It’s not just a crazy dream to see a clean river. It’s wanting to be free. It’s wanting to live in peace” (11:37-11:47). Her dream

comes with a responsibility that gives her the strength to keep fighting for the cause. Her ethical position is, in fact, a reminiscence of her belief in a harmonious existence with a healthy environment. Thus, both the documentaries do an excellent job in initiating an ethical response to environmental questions. Conjoining elemental activity and environmental justice, these two visual texts attain a status of ecomateriality that, according to Cohen and Duckert, is “a powerful aid to activism,” which functions by “attending to matter and writing against the reduction of world to commodity (resource, energy)” (4). Therefore, it is my conviction that sensible environmental documentaries can be effective, pragmatic, and accessible sites for initiating a dialogue in environmental ethical discourse.

This paper concludes on an optimistic note of the pragmatic usefulness of eco-documentary. Both *A Plastic Ocean* and *Silent River* sensibly showcase the “slow violence” done to nature, and, in turn, nature’s response to the inflicted violence. Water, the undisputed protagonist of the narratives, is documented with such agency and power that it appeals our cognitive thinking to rethink the elementality and fluidity of water. With the aid of powerful images, informed narration, and candid interviews, the narratives of water caution us not to be blind in greed and pride, reminding us of our responsibility to act as loyal beings for the well-being of the whole planet. They clearly convey the message that it is our materialist and strong anthropocentric action and worldview that triggers the rage of nature against us. In the process, both the documentaries show a strong potential of being a carrier of environmental ethics which otherwise might appear inaccessible. Affecting our emotions and cognitive thinking, they, truly, stand promising in giving us the message of valuing and respecting nature. These two tales of water gently teach us of the authority of water and invite us to disown human hubris, as is evoked by the final scene of *A Plastic Ocean*: “No matter how you look at it, this planet is governed by the blue part. The world truly is mostly a blue place” (1:34:20-1:34:29).

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The Matrix: A Dialogical Perspective

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Abstract

Film as a visual art form can be understandably perceived as a form of “visual literature” where, under proper scrutiny, literary theories and critical concepts may be found intervening significantly. Stretching the range of “cine-literacy,” an approach to interpret films from a literary/theoretical perspective, suggests simultaneously the pervasive reach and the inter-disciplinary scope of literature. This article aims at addressing the aspects of the 1999 movie *The Matrix* that enable it as a congenial site for Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism to operate. There is hardly any linguistic phenomenon, verbal or non-verbal, that can negate its affiliations with the Bakhtinian theory of dialogism which affords a disentanglement of the dialogic properties operative in the phenomenon and thus attempts to excavate its philosophical roots as well as the diversity of implications. *The Matrix*, as a form of communicative event captured in celluloid that attempts to convey some messages to the audience, corroborates the idea further and the film indeed illustrates the ways dialogism and other Bakhtinian precepts are imbricated in the cinematized fiction. What an enumeration of Bakhtinian concepts in the movie allows is an articulation of the movie’s rich diversity of meaning and implications. The film has been approached from Bakhtin’s theoretical perspective with a view to addressing the adaptability of the filmed fiction with the central tenets of his theory of dialogism. Furthermore, a dialogical perspective of the film unearths its underlying mosaic of philosophical imbrications that ultimately endorses its intrinsic quality of multiplicity of meaning.

Keywords: *The Matrix*, dialogics, polyphony, heteroglossia, carnivalesque

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, a trailblazer in the reformation of the formalist legacy, influenced, particularly with his ground-breaking philosophical concepts, the late 20th century world of creative art and literature so overwhelmingly that the shades of his notions remain traceable in diverse creative endeavors like literature, philosophy, and even films. One good example of his theory’s pervasive influence is the Wachowski brothers’ much celebrated 1999 film *The Matrix*, where Bakhtin’s notions of polyphony, dialogics, heteroglossia, carnivalesque, and chronotope appear to be at work abstrusely but surely. This article comprises a critical identification of the ways these Bakhtinian doctrines are embedded as well as operative in the thought-provoking movie and how effectively they are immersed within the thrilling cyberpunk fiction on the surface. Basically, it is the Wachowski brothers’ allusive amalgamation of myth, religion, philosophy, and literature in the movie that lends



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it with a polyphonic dimension replete with a variety of suggestions, indeterminacy, and multiplicity of meaning which indeed demarcate the sphere for dialogism and allocate a playground for the Bakhtinian precepts to flourish.

To dive straight into the core, polyphony, as propounded by Bakhtin in his path-breaking work, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, refers to the unique feature of linguistic phenomena to articulate and facilitate a liberation of multiple, independent, and original voices, triggered by fully valid, internalized socio-ideological inputs, interactively contesting in any linguistic operation that ranges from oral speech and written text to conscious evolution of inner thoughts and transition of consciousness. Indeed, polyphony provides a realistic novel, as the likes of Dostoevsky's, with a multiplicity of originally valid voices and stances so as to confirm indeterminacy of meaning, diversity of implication, and unfinalizability of the future. And the polyphonic sphere turns into an open site for a rich array of voices and personae (Pearce 225). It moreover sanctions an open world where "characters are liberated to speak 'a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, [they orchestrate] a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices'" (Abrams 63). In the polyphonic periphery, characters are set in an open sphere, with utmost freedom to choose their own ways and propound their own philosophies, and thus pursue their own contingent future. Characters are no more stereotypically confined in an outworn structure, nor bound to submissively adhere to the author's point of view; rather, they turn into free men possessing autonomy, idiosyncrasy, and uncurbed free will that determine their ensuing futurity.

Concordantly, the protagonist Neo, who refuses to remain Mr. Thomas A. Anderson, his computer-generated identity in the virtual world of the Matrix, is a vicar of such autonomous selfhood that makes him rather follow his free will by choosing the red pill, instead of the blue one, which allows him access to the Matrix and to challenge the virtual system of governance emblematic of omnipotent Fate. The villain or, rather, the anti-hero, Agent Smith, being a programmed entity, is also seen pursuing his mechanized free will when he takes off the sunglasses and ear-pieces, symbolizing his denial of the system, while talking to Morpheus about freeing himself from the systemic constraints of the Matrix by destroying the Zion which would allow him thus to solely capture the entire system of the Matrix. His free will fuels his audacity to aspire to control the system that once he was controlled by. Even the computer operator Cypher, being Neo's companion and so knowledgeable of his will of annihilating the Matrix, unreservedly pursues his lust of leading a sumptuous life in the virtual reality of the Matrix, and accordingly betrays his comrades on *Nebuchadnezzar*, the ship carrying the rebels from Zion. Each of the characters mentioned above nonchalantly follows their free will composed out of their peculiar perspectives and ideologies that drive them to the particular

directions they follow. Neo's ideology of freedom through self-knowledge is what makes him venture into the Matrix, while Agent Smith's mechanical resolution to destroy Zion and its dwellers is activated by his programmed but autonomous creed of a sovereign rule. If Neo is a diehard devotee of reality and freedom, Agent Smith becomes the hardcore aficionado of illusion and restriction. This classic encounter between reality and illusion gradually flourishes throughout the movie; and the directors, who can in many ways be called the authors of the film, do not seem to gravitate towards any of the viewpoints, rather cinematize the conflict between them and dramatize their dialogical faceoff, leaving a doubtless implication of openness and indeterminacy. The duel between illusion and reality, more like the 2010 movie *Inception*, where dreams and reality come into a dialogic clash and reciprocally overlap with an internecine effect and allows the characters their disparate philosophical viewpoints and peculiar goals that they pursue as free men. This invests the movie with the multiplicity of original and independent voices that confirms its polyphonic dimension.

Bakhtin's masterpiece, *The Dialogic Imagination*, offers an in-depth perusal of his notion of dialogics or dialogism which unprecedentedly attributes private thoughts and interior monologues with flavor and functionality of dialogues. Bakhtin's formulations corroborate that every utterance is shaped as much by the targeted listener as by the speaker, and the topic of the utterance comes always-already populated with the words previously spoken about it (Morson 220). Bakhtin explains it in plain but powerful words:

his [speaker's] orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social "languages" come to interact with one another. (282)

The concept of dialogics dilates the regular mechanism of dialogues to the point of thought transition and philosophical propounding. Every speech or word uttered by a speaker, either orally or psychologically, is engaged in a constant dialogue either with himself or with the other. This "other" may embody his cultural values, societal norms, religious ideals, or any such entity whom he is continuously involved in a dialogue with and whom his utterances are oriented to, while communicating his thoughts and propagating his ideas. *The Matrix* films such an incessant dialogic faceoff between the Matrix and Zion, between AI (Artificial Intelligence) and human beings. The dialogical confrontations between Morpheus and Agent Smith, between Neo and Agent Smith and, above all, between the rebels from the Zion

and the Agents from the Matrix are but sub-dialogues of a greater dialogue between humans and machines, between fact (reality) and fantasy (illusion).

Furthermore, the movie's imbrications with diverse philosophical issues as well as its incorporation of various mythico-religious allusions allocate the film a wide-enough span for articulating its embedded dialogism, since neither of those stances is the exclusive pivot of the plot, nor is it ostensibly rejected in the movie. Although the film is meant to stand on its own and enunciate its own philosophy, the engaging dialogue between reality and illusion is notably fueled by references to some relevant philosophical influences. Four such philosophical inspirations of *The Matrix* are Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, Plato's allegory of the cave in *The Republic*, Socrates' visit to the Oracle of Delphi, and Rene Descartes' 1641 book *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

In addition, Buddhism and Gnosticism are the two religious influences that intensify the movie's philosophical indeterminacy. From a Gnostic perspective, Neo's role as a liberator, rather than a savior as Jesus Christ, parodies the general Christian conviction that the innocent savior is to suffer for the sins of others. Rather, there pervades a Gnostic spirit that the savior is to suffer for the original sin and humanity must suffer for its ignorance; and so does Neo for his lack of self-knowledge, for it is hinted at with the Oracle's showing him the inscription meaning "Know Thyself." For Neo, knowing himself is to start believing that he is "The One," much like the protagonist Po, in the film *Kung Fu Panda*, who gains self-knowledge through believing that he is the "Dragon Warrior." Besides, several other references are made to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, particularly through the reference to the "white rabbit." Thus all these borrowings from religious-philosophic discourses are deliberately amalgamated and often reversed or modified, to some extent, to evoke some intended effect of uncertainty and indeterminacy. And all these unresolved complexities and unfinalized entanglements lead towards a hidden polemic of openness of meaning that remains dialogically operative throughout the movie. Basically, the ambivalence of reality and illusion as voiced by Neo seems to echo Bakhtin's assertion, that the reality as we have it is only one of many possible realities: "it [reality] is not inevitable, not arbitrary, it bears within itself other possibilities" (*The Dialogics* 37). And Neo, at the very end of the movie, declares, over a pay-phone, that he leaves the world free from all constricting control and dicta, leaves a planet full of unfathomed possibilities, initiating a journey towards indeterminacy and infinity.

The movie's dialogical diversity ranges from dialogues between groups and individuals to dialogues between cryptic utterances of the individual. The dialogical conflict between Neo and A. Smith or A. Smith and Morpheus denotes one of the

several ways the movie emerges as a dialogic process. The operational doctrines of the Matrix, as most often voiced by Agent Smith, constitute a particular entity, though mechanical, that inevitably engages itself in a dialogue with the marginalized humanity and its values represented by Neo and his crew, in order to consolidate a sole authority. Such a dialogic contest resembles another such thematically coherent film titled *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* where sentient apes try an upheaval against conscientious humans. The Matrix, with its rigorous and predetermined rules and tenets, assumes the role of fate that is always set to prevent humanity from pursuing free will. The renegades in the reality are the devotees of free will and they often intrude into the Matrix to precipitate its downfall. Thus a non-stop dialogical polemic between fate and free will is discernible throughout the film. Furthermore, in a dialogical ambience, even the individual words of an utterance can engage in a dialogue with other words of the same utterance. It can be instantiated through Neo's hazy utterances about his being "The One," where his belief is in a constant dialogue with his disbelief, the freewill with fate. Moreover, whether the interlocutor is present or absent, the utterances of the characters in the movie are always oriented towards an entity, either external or internal, real or imagined, concrete or abstract.

The "mixture of tongues" in *The Matrix* crucially suggests the sociolinguistic diversity of varied social sects which echoes Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia that refers to "a perception of language as ideologically saturated and stratified ... 'specific points of view on the world, forms of conceptualizing the world in words'" (Morris 15-16). The ruling voice of Matrix authority, as represented by A. Smith is somber, calculative, reticent, and polished in expression, while the expression of the rebels like Mr. Anderson is rough and rude, crass and crude, an unashamed shower of the "middle finger." The agents' polished and disciplined expression is the resultant insignia of their being the ruling disciplinarians, whereas Anderson's rough outburst is the upshot of suppression and an emblem of mutiny. The typical variety of accent of the Agents and of the mutineers and the very disparateness of their expressions and attitude endorse the heteroglossic dimension of the film. Even the cryptic utterances of the prophetic figures like the Oracle and Morpheus are suggestive of the enigmatic nature of the prophesies. Thus, the variety of language and accent digs up the diversity of cultural contexts, social circumstances, philosophical standpoints, specific patterns of moral-ethical perspectives, etc. in a way that multiplicity of viewpoints earns a direct license to multiplicity of meaning and indeterminacy of the finale.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin demonstrated his concept of carnival or carnivalesque as a decisive moment or circumstance when the world is "temporarily turned upside down" and "carnival time" is special precisely because it allows the prevailing social hierarchies to be reversed (Pearce 230). It denotes a transient,

utopian state where kings become slaves and vice versa, so as to abolish momentarily the social hierarchy and establish an ephemeral equilibrium in the world. Neo's mutiny against the Matrix and Cypher's rebellion against Morpheus bring them all on an equal plane. The rulers and the ruled, the authority and the subjects, the superiors and the subordinates interchange their roles and swap their significance in a way that opens a threshold towards the possible diversity of meaning, disrupting the prevalent social structure. Cypher's assumption of the role of the controller of the previously superior comrades is a vital instance of such norm-shattering carnivalesque state. More importantly, A. Smith's show of human emotions like anger, hatred, disgust, and the human's unwavering, robotic adherence, especially Morpheus' unflinching faith in Neo's being "The One" and Trinity's blind obedience to Morpheus, imply a switch between their roles and blur the line between humans and machines, cognitive intelligence and artificial intelligence, and coalesce them on an equal platform to confirm the inevitability of indeterminacy and unfinalizability of meaning.

The spatio-temporal molding of the characters and its corollary impact on their actions, ideological diversity, and development are what define Chronotope (chronos=time and tope=place) from the Bakhtinian point of reference. The variety in the time-space combination causes a variety in social situations as well as world views. Where and when a character is set determines how he responds to or views the surrounding world. Gary Saul Morson elaborates that adventure stories and romances incorporate naive chronotopes that confine characters to hackneyed stereotypes, whereas realistic novels exploit novelistic chronotopes that allow a subtle probing into the "dark depths" of the characters, into their convictions inculcated by historical transitions and social milieus (221). Correspondingly, all the major characters in *The Matrix* can be said to revolve in a complex novelistic chronotope where they are never stuck to a certain pivot, nor caged in clichéd predictability. Rather, they show their malleability to the continuous change of place and time, with their vicissitude. Neo's shift in realization and attitude as he is said to be existing in 2199, in lieu of 1999 and the remarkable change in the characters and their expression while venturing into the Matrix from reality, along with the gradual but glaring change in expression of A. Smith, speak for the time-space impact in a dialogic domain.

How marvelously *The Matrix* films a sci-fi fantasy can be observed effortlessly through a cursory glance at the surface story of this magical embroidery, but what philosophical imbrications it implies and how it dissolves them into a fantastic fiction offering a multiplicity of meaning are due to a minute dialogical dissection underneath the surface. Average viewers would relish the movie for its brilliant display of a well-knit, compact, and compelling plot, but the critical ones would be simultaneously amazed

with the profundity and far-fetchedness of its philosophical intersections. In short, it will not sound hyperbolic to say that the movie's philosophical affiliations and its variety of implications culminate through its scrutiny under dialogism. *The Matrix* is just one of the innumerable protégés of Bakhtin's cataclysmic theory of dialogism that actually permeates any communicative phenomenon, be it spoken, written, staged or filmed, and brings out its buried treasures of discursive imbrications and avails a wide variety of implications.

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Invasion, Exile, and Resistance: Milan Kundera's Biopolitics in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

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Abstract

In this essay, I explore how Milan Kundera in his novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, delineates the tyrannical biopolitics of a totalitarian state. I argue that the Soviet invasive biopolitics renders the Czech citizens alienated from their life, resources, and independence. Firstly, the obnoxious face of biopolitics manufactures exiles and fugitivity and, secondly, it destroys the dignity of an independent nation and turns it into a community of dissidents. Here, I build on Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, which in turn embarks on Michel Foucault's concept of biopower or biopolitics. Mbembe critiques the racist, fascist, and nationalist forces that institutionalize the resurgence of "othering" a community to exclude it from the nation-state and kill it. Likewise, Foucault's biopolitics interrogates the brutality of the nation-state that exercises the right of life and death over its subjects. This power takes hold of the human life: seizes that life, ends, impoverishes, and enslaves it. Thus, I focus on the all-pervasive impacts of biopolitics on the lives of individuals and argue that Kundera's strategic biopolitics against the historical backdrop of the totalitarian surveillance and exile, at length, works as a subversive tool that stages resistance through his writing.

Keywords: biopolitics, necropolitics, exile, invasion, resistance

Recent scholars, such as Cristina Stan and Kamila Kinyon, among others, have reconsidered how Milan Kundera deals with the totalitarian space and panopticon surveillance of a hegemonic state in his 1984 novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Kinyon situates the novel within Michel Foucault's groundbreaking work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, and theorizes the surveillance mechanism of the omnipresent panoptic gaze under which Tomas and Tereza – the two protagonists – fall and operate. Foucault was specifically interested in the biopolitics of "real subjection" that is "born mechanically from a fictitious relation" (*Discipline* 202). Foucault argues that the surveillance mechanism derives its power from the fictional gaze of the authoritarian law and, thus, controls human life and behavior. Building on this theory of Foucauldian biopolitics and the fictional punitive gaze, Kinyon argues that the "fear of the gaze that the characters [of the novel] experience is connected to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and to the totalitarian regime's invasions of individual privacy" (243). Kinyon's work posits Kundera's authorial politics of creativity, exile, and agency in conversation with Foucault's biopolitics of



state surveillance. Likewise, Stan considers how Kundera's novel is obsessed "with the totalitarian space, seen as a trap for an individual's identity and personal freedom" (148). Though Stan mainly focuses on identity and "identitary separation" that "seek for a refuge in love," she frequently refers to the historical challenges and threats posed by foreign (Soviet) invasion of the geographical, cultural, and personal spaces of Kundera's characters (148). Stan finds that the Czech identity, individuality, and freedom of action and speech undergo a new social and political "struggle to resist and survive in a totalitarian space" (152-53). This line of argument again embarks on Foucault's fiction of surveillance that invades, disciplines, and punishes.

What Kinyon hints at but does not elaborate and Stan somewhat misses is necropolitics of racist, fascist, and nationalist forces, as theorized by Achille Mbembe in his book, *Necropolitics*, that determine and institutionalize the resurgence of othering a community or individuals to exclude them from the nation-state and kill. Mbembe, in his other groundbreaking essay "Necropolitics," argues that the "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death (necropolitics) profoundly reconfigure the relations among resistance, sacrifice, and terror" (39). In doing so, Mbembe, in fact, builds on Foucault's biopolitics i.e., biopower. Foucault, in his essay "Right of Death and Power over Life," theorizes biopower or biopolitics that connects the brutality of the nation-state with its infatuation for racism. Foucault traces how the biopower evolves from the classical sovereign power that had the right of life and death over his subjects and consisted in the power to take away life, products, labor, property, and privileges from its subjects ("Right" 42). This power takes hold of human life: seizes that life, ends, impoverishes, and enslaves it.

To Foucault, the "power of life and death," is, in effect, a theoretical paradox: "the right to take life or let live" ("Right" 41). However, this right, through the phases of evolution, transferred from the right on the individual life onto the social body. Here, Foucault situates the origin of holocausts, wars, or genocide amid this transformation, where mass killing or wholesale slaughter takes place in the name of securing a better way of life for a group of people, excluding another. In Kundera's novel, we see how such Czech characters as Tomas, Tereza, Sabina, or Franz, in particular, and doctors, housewives, photographers, teachers, in general, are confined within the totalitarian space. They are stripped of their vocations, integrity, and freedom by a hegemonic state that decides the worth of a particular life and sets the measure of qualifications to obtain that fitness. The Czechs under the Soviet invasion are nothing short of manikins when the invasive state incessantly exercises its "right to take life or let live" on its citizens.

Following these scholarly leads, in my essay, I explore the world of the novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and show how the author, Kundera delineates the tyrannical biopolitics of a totalitarian state. I argue that the Soviet invasive biopolitics renders the Czech characters alienated from their life, resources, and independence, and then extends its clutches to the field of politics. On the one hand, the obnoxious face of biopolitics manufactures exiles and fugitivity of such characters as Tomas, Tereza, and Sabina, among others. On the other hand, it destroys the dignity of an independent nation and turns it into a community of dissidents. Thus, my essay aligns more with Kinyon's argument than with Stan's assessment. However, my argument differs from Kinyon's in some significant ways. Firstly, I focus on the all-pervasive impacts of the force and brutality of biopolitics on the lives of individuals instead of merely emphasizing the effects of the panoptic gaze of the state. Secondly, I argue that Kundera's own strategic biopolitics against the historical backdrop of the totalitarian surveillance and exile, at length, works as a subversive tool that stages resistance through his writing. In doing so, I explore how the author, Kundera, as the omnipotent creator of the narrative, exercises his sovereign power over his characters.

In the following sections, first, I will summarize Mbembe's necropolitics that hinges on Foucauldian biopolitics for the theoretical framework of my essay. Second, I will examine the deployment of necropolitics by the totalitarian state, its impact on the lives of individual characters, and their reciprocal reactions to this power fulcrum. In so doing, I will also interrogate the authorial politics of Kundera in his novelistic world that does not fall short of invasive biopolitics. I will show that Kundera, hegemonically, operates like a resilient agent of biopolitics that decides the fate of his characters similar to a hegemonic state that takes hold of the individual life: vanquishes that life, exiles, exhausts, and subjugates it. However, I maintain that Kundera's authorial hegemony does not become complicit in Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia because his biopolitics was a tool to stage writerly resistance, and that he used it to subvert the domination and control of the invading forces.

Biopolitics/Necropolitics and Exile

Kundera publishes his novel under consideration in 1984, the George Orwellian prophetic year, when "Big Brother is watching" everything and controls, corrects, and disciplines every aspect of the sociopolitical life of the citizens. In the novel, Kundera, in effect, translates the metaphysics of biopolitics that Orwell prophesied in 1949. Kundera's narrative resonates with what Nikolas Rose, in his seminal essay, "The Politics of Life Itself," referring to Foucault, identifies in the modern human beings whose very natural existence as being is checked and framed by his or her politics (1). Such primary status of politics over the natural existence of life operates through the various processes of human life: birth, death, exile, and political

engagement, among others. Biopolitics is, therefore, not a politics of biology but rather a condition of being that itself becomes one with politics. The fundamental step of such biopolitics is to pull away the state from its responsibility for the whole population and the notion of national body and identity for the sake of one particular group. Thus, this biopolitics of privileging one of the groups within the nation-state is hinged on the agencies of late capitalism, consumerism, and politics that play crucial roles in manufacturing “a single, if heterogeneous, domain with a national culture, a national population, a national identity, co-extensive with a national territory and the powers of national political government” (Rose, “Politics” 5; *Politics* 62). However, under this biopower, individuals do not enjoy more control over their own lives but rather have themselves merged into a much more perplexing network of biopolitics.

This argument truly echoes what Foucault explains, in his essay, “Right of Death and Power over Life,” about how the totalitarian state, in the era of biopower, is less interested in punishing subjects with death (law) and more interested in managing and regulating life through norms, which are overseen and enforced through myriad apparatuses (social institutions). Foucault traces out the origin of this aspect of existence in the state-power of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and terms this new power over life as “bio-power” (“Right” 44). Foucault divides biopower into two categories: (i) disciplines, which govern the anatomo-politics of the individual (such as schools, which socialize people on how to behave) and (ii) regulatory controls, which govern the species-being or the overall population (such as demography, which measures and sets standards for population statistics), “imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes” (“Right” 44). The biological processes include propagation, births and mortality, health, and life expectancy, among others. Thus, the social and individual body went through the processes of rigorous control: disciplining, optimization, extortion, and integration into economic systems.

Foucault argues that the biopower opens up the strategy of the nineteenth-century states concerning the biological existence of life, species, and race. He sees the deployment of biopolitics as “a society’s ‘threshold of modernity’ ... when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies” (“Right” 47). Foucault’s sociological analysis critiques the deterministic political power of the state in administering public life. This biopolitics sets up bipolar technology to subjugate and control human life that inevitably contributed to the development of capitalism, racism, and imperialist infatuation. This development stems from continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms in the domain of value and utility. Against the backdrop of this stultifyingly repressive state-policy, Foucault situates his theory of biopolitics – the mechanism of disciplining the citizens and political accession

into the life of the individuals and their community. This biopolitics of the economy makes racist groupings possible. Thus, biopolitics justifies racism and the death of others.

In “Necropolitics,” Mbembe, building on Hegel’s theory of the relation between death and the “becoming subject” in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, complicates Foucault’s biopower by questioning if biopower is sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the biopolitical war, resistance, and fight against terror makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective (14). Mbembe offers the notion of necropolitics as inscribed within a negative goal of control over death, compared to biopower’s goal of control over life. Biopower is concerned with managing populations and necropower controls large populations through the management of death. In necropolitics, individuals, who have been disloyal to the sovereign and are branded as traitors or corrupt, are deemed detrimental to the whole population and their death is seen as beneficial to the state.

Mbembe identifies the imperial projects, such as plantations, colonies, and invasions as “manifestations of the state of exception” over which the state wields its right to kill to dominate communities through terror formation and necropower (“Necropolitics” 16). Mbembe, thus, by following Hannah Arendt’s and Giorgio Agamben’s examinations of concentration camps that reduce subjects down to the state of “bare life,” critiques biopower vis-à-vis “the state of exception and the state of siege” as a means to kill (“Necropolitics” 12, 16). Mbembe argues that these two states have become “the normative basis of the right to kill” that corresponds to the historical colonial power and contemporary imperialism (“Necropolitics” 16). Historically, the goal of biopolitics is to gain domination over the lives of invaded people through various modes of subjugation. Mbembe outlines several forms through which the power over invaded space manifests itself, including enacting genocide and settler colonialism in an occupied state, such as the occupation of Palestine (and Czechoslovakia in Kundera’s novel). Notably, these modes include fear and fantastical or mythological ideas around terror as a concept – both of which can be mediated by “war machines,” a term coined by Deleuze and Guattari in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (qtd. in “Necropolitics” 32).

Necropolitics, then, can overall be best described through methods and systems of the subjugation of life to the power of death – determining if and when death can or should occur. Following this lead, I argue that the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 replicates the structure of the imperial system. I extend on Mbembe’s layered conceptualizations of colonial projects to show that Kundera in his novel confirms how individual privacy and security are constantly invaded. This invasion creates a state of exception and forces the dissenters, such as Tomas to exile. Exile,

like Mbembe's theorization of slavery, is the triple loss of humanity: a loss of home, a loss of rights to a body, and a loss of political status. An exile is, though alive, in a state of injury, a state of horror, terror, cruelty, and profanity.

However, I argue that exile also provides an individual with opportunities for the recuperation of his self and freedom which, in Mbembe's terms, are "irrevocably interwoven" ("Necropolitics" 38). For those oppressed under the brutality of biopolitics, exile is "the mediator of redemption. Far from being an encounter with a limit, boundary, or barrier, it is experienced as a release from terror and bondage" (Mbembe, "Necropolitics" 39). As per individual or mass exile, I suggest that exile can be read as an agency because exile can also be subversive to the hegemonic, totalitarian biopolitics as in the case of such authors as Kundera and Vladimir Nabokov, among others. In these instances, the authorship itself functions as a subversive tool against exile. Kundera writes his novel while he is in exile in France in the 1980s. Here, I might sound like Edward Said, who, in "Reflections on Exile," argues that though "true exile is a condition of terminal loss," it has been "transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture" (173). However, I extend on Said and argue that the preference for exile over continued servitude is a commentary on the nature of freedom itself (or the lack thereof). Thus, there is always a paradox within such contemporary biopolitics. Rose reminds us of the biopolitics that should not be conceived as only manipulating life. It is also a viable agency to claim rights – it allows a perspective of being political beings, having "a universal human right" without being bound to institutional politics (Rose, "Politics" 21). Yet, this universal right is also a risk of being life, whose realm never reaches beyond politics.

Unbearable Lightness of Invasion and Exile

Said maintains that "our age – with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers – is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration" (173). Kundera's novel affirms Said's proposition in its engagement with the totalitarian biopolitics and history of Soviet invasion. Kundera as an avant-garde writer in exile moves back and forth in his novel among various European cities as "a dissident" and the strength of and resistance through his creativity comes from, in the words of Harold Bloom, his "having experienced the actuality of concentration camps, prison, and exile, he was driven by the need to find a new voice for old horrors" (10). Thus, Kundera captures the true horror of Cold War-era Europe, and he revolts against the totalitarian state because he is, as Robert C. Porter theorizes, an "author of life," not the "puppet of life" (4). Kundera, from the paradox of his virtuosity and frustration, creates novelistic lives and characters from the real lives he lived.

Kundera's life is interwoven with the history of European biopolitics, in general, and Czechoslovakia, in particular, in the post-World War II era. Here, following Gregory Kimbrell's hint, I summarize the relationship between Cold War biopolitics and Kundera's novel by considering his attitude towards totalitarian surveillance and the various ways in which it has influenced his novel. Kundera explains in his non-fiction work, *The Art of the Novel*:

Having experienced life under Soviet totalitarianism, I believe that there can be no rational explanation for what I found to be the absurdities and cruelties of the regime. Why did Germany, why does Russia today want to dominate the world? To be richer? Happier? Not at all. The aggressivity of force is thoroughly disinterested; unmotivated; it wills only its own will; it is pure irrationality. (10)

Tomas, as the protagonist of the novel, shares the same agony of Kundera and revolts against fate, determined not by an individual him/herself but by a demigod dictator or a corrupt politician. The novel is written within this historical backdrop of 1968 where the plot of individual strength and weakness, love affairs and sexuality, and struggles for identity intertwines with the subplot of Cold War politics of surveillance, invasion, totalitarianism, and mass exile. Here, the state decides the vocation, religion, affection, life, and death of the individuals. The state enjoys the monopoly of the right to kill or let live. It starts with the Soviet military occupation of the city of Prague in 1968 as an aftermath of the Prague Spring.

The novel is set in Prague, in the spring of 1968, when Alexander Dubček, the First Secretary of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSCĚ) from January 1968 to April 1969, was trying to make the Czech Communist government more humane under the catchphrase "Socialism with a human face." This is called the Prague Spring of 1968. The Prague Spring, a period of political liberalization in Czechoslovakia during the era of its domination by the Soviet Union after World War II, began on January 5, 1968, when reformist Dubček was elected the First Secretary. The reforms were a liberal attempt by Dubček to endow supplementary privileges to the citizens. He tried to partially decentralize the administrative issues related to the economy and, thus, moved further to the democratization of the state. His administration aimed at fewer restrictions on media, speech, and international travel. However, the more conservative factions of his party, backed by the then Soviet leadership, disliked these westernizing reformations, especially the decentralization of administrative authority. The Soviet Union and members of the Warsaw Pact sent troops to occupy the country on August 21 to halt reforms.

As an aftermath of the invasion, the writers, artists, professionals, and political activists became the target of the communist junta. Progressive writers and liberal thinkers were put under constant surveillance – many of them were forced to sign articles declaring their obedience to and admiration for the totalitarian regime. A lot of freethinkers were killed by secret agents and those who were not killed found their life permanently maimed by the state mechanism. A large number of people became emigrants. After the invasion, epitomized by the proliferation of barracks, police boxes, and other sites of violence, Dubček resigned in April 1969. The subsequent politicians turned the political wheel of the country backward by restoring the political and economic policies that prevailed before Dubček's reformation attempts. The liberal members of the Communist Party, other moderate professionals, civil servants, and liberal intellectuals were hunted down and deactivated. The government and non-government employees, who were in open disagreement with the political transformation, were stripped of public offices. The country became a police-state and the citizens turned into a community of spies, voluntarily reporting on each other for political and financial privileges. Criticism, commentary, and unfavorable analysis of politics were forbidden in media.

Kundera has had a very complicated relationship with his motherland and the Czech Communist Party. He became finally disillusioned with the communist system after being expelled several times from the party on various accusations even before the invasion. Kundera, along with other reformist communist writers, were somewhat involved in the 1968 Prague Spring. After the Soviet invasion, Kundera was dismissed from his teaching post at the Prague Film Academy and his books were banned. Interestingly, after this political separation, he experienced a sense of freedom, though temporary, in writing. In 1975, he emigrated to France and became a teacher at the University of Rennes. In 1978, he moved to Paris, where he completed *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in 1982 and published it in 1984. In 1979, his Czechoslovakian citizenship was revoked by the government as a reaction to his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. He became a naturalized French citizen in 1981. Czechoslovakia remained occupied until 1990.

Kundera's Biopolitics

The Unbearable Lightness of Being, arguably Kundera's most poignant social critique, exemplifies the ironic nature of the fate of individuals under the totalitarian biopolitics of the Soviet occupation. Occupation does not mean merely control over physical geographical space, rather it inserts and institutes "seizing, delimiting, and asserting" a new set of social, political, and spatial relations into the psyche of the colonized (Mbembe, "Necropolitics" 25; *Necropolitics* 79). Kundera's portrayal of the lack of values in the characters of his fiction and their malpractices in everyday life is intertwined with the dictatorial, corrupt ideology of the state. The offensive

political government finds its apt expression in Kundera's formulation of "lightness" through everyday activities and "heaviness" through bare necessities, where only "heavy" has a value. Kundera's double-edged critique of human to human and citizen to state relationships is intertwined with his critique of the communist system of government. This novel, as I have pointed out in the previous section, is largely influenced by Kundera's surroundings and experiences in Prague in the 1960s and 70s. It hinges on amplified Soviet presence and the tyrannical police control of the Czech population. Kundera portrays the Soviet occupation of Prague as atrocious and appalling as the deployment of necropolitics by the Nazis. The regime deploys its mechanism of controlling the cultural life of citizens with its tanks and soldiers. This dreadful policy of dominating the lives of others by force and chicanery compels the intellectuals and freethinkers to go on exile or to be permanently silent. The free speech of Czech citizens has been perpetually revoked.

Kundera's novel is replete with scenes of political subjugation, suspicion, and invasion of private space. It is a beleaguered time when a former ambassador is relegated to the reception desk at a hotel and citizens are exposed to the rigorous violation of individual privacy: conversations and, even, the funerals are recorded to study the mourners and their expressions, and incriminating chats are broadcast on state radio (Kundera, *Unbearable* 131). The story revolves around Tomas, torn between love and lust, rebellious Sabina, and emotional Tereza. The protagonist, Tomas, a Prague surgeon who, in the past, wrote an article condemning the Czech Communists, is under constant surveillance. Once married, Tomas is now a perpetual bachelor and a womanizer – never to be married again – with no intention of maintaining any relationship with his ex-wife or young son. Tereza, a café waitress, comes within the periscope of his sexual pursuits. Interestingly, Tereza considers Tomas as an intelligent but romantic dreamer and falls in love with him. The complicity arises when they start living together and Tomas is unable, rather unwilling, to give up his erotic adventures. Tereza, traumatized by her status as no better than a concubine, suffers ceaselessly from nightmares and suicidal intent. Like the repressive relationship between the hegemonic state and dissident citizens, the relationship between Tomas and Tereza functions on reciprocal suspicion and the inspecting gaze that relegates these two characters into automatons. At one point, to console Tereza, Tomas marries her but continues his sexual exploits. In the wake of the communist invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet, Tomas and Tereza flee to Switzerland, following Sabina, one of Tomas's mistresses.

Exile brings further dissatisfaction and suffering for Tereza. Tereza, earlier in Prague, found some fulfillment in her job as a photographer but now in her fugitive status in Zurich, she becomes unemployed. This situation is exacerbated by both her losing motivation for life and Tomas's continuous sexual affairs even in exile. She loses her

capacity for understanding, consciousness, and dignity. At a climactic point of the narrative, she returns to Prague allowing Tomas his utmost freedom of sexuality. Desperate Tereza becomes a bartender, enjoys a brisk affair with an engineer, and grows more miserable. She suspects that the man she was dating was a police agent, hired by the Communists to gather information for potential blackmailing. Tereza understands that totalitarian biopolitics is anti-individualistic and hence feels insecure about her privacy. Even in a peripheral life, Tereza is submerged in the vicious impacts of totalitarian surveillance. Tereza's sexual trauma and disbelief in a system of government – under which she lives – invoke Kundera's political nightmares.

Kundera's experiment in authorial biopolitics puts Tereza in a vicious circle. Tereza is well-aware of Tomas's transgressions, and she cannot put up with the situation, which manifests itself in numerous nightmares illustrating the realities of her life. Tereza differs deeply from Tomas's philosophy regarding relationship, love, sex, and marriage. For example, sex without love is impossible for her whereas Tomas believes that having "sex" without "love" is possible (Kundera, *Unbearable* 14-15). The female protagonist, therefore, suffers under the "heaviness" of subjugation while her male counterpart enjoys the "lightness" of authority. This relationship makes us understand that the ways of dominance are very relative. Kundera argues: "the only relationship that can make both partners happy is one in which sentimentality has no place and neither partner makes any claim on the life and freedom of the other" (*Unbearable* 11). Dominance – either by a patriarchal state or an overbearing domestic partner – exposes individuals to situations that we would otherwise find detestable if not consumed with the sensations. Thus, the Tomas-Tereza relationship poignantly invokes the Czech-Soviet relationship – the political concubinage of Czechoslovakia, economically and politically depending on the then Soviet. Czechoslovakia, with its complicity and conviviality, like Tereza, tried its best to woo the mighty Soviet but the Soviet state, like Tomas, only responded with its harsh biopolitics of control, command, and corruption.

However, Tomas's temporary freedom from Tereza's critical surveillance equates to Kundera's freedom from the communist bondage when he was stripped of his Communist Party membership in Prague before the invasion. This temporary freedom is not seamless because it exposes the dissident to further threats from the ruthless nation-state. This is specifically the case of a government under foreign influence because it restrains the exercise of reason – the sublime truth in democratic politics. In another melodramatic twist of the novel, Tomas gives up his pursuits and returns to Prague to Tereza. As readers can assume, coming back to Prague proves fatal for the couple. Tomas's political predicaments deteriorate. He refused the demand by the government to sign a denunciation of his anti-Communist article –

a political essay he once wrote deploying the metaphors of Oedipus and the guilt of unknowing crimes. In the essay, he condemns the Communist establishment that employs the pretext of ignorance to cover up its transgressions and crimes (Kundera, *Unbearable* 217-18, 271). Consequently, he loses his position as a surgeon. In the meantime, groups of underground dissidents against communism mushroom in the country. Tomas's young son becomes a dissident and pursues him. Tomas finds himself on the island of two-way political traffic as he hates the idea of being manipulated politically at a time when both the Communist regime and the underground rebels attempt to induce him to their side. Tomas realizes both the Soviet-backed Czech government and the dissident groups pursuing him are the two sides of the same totalitarian coin as Terry Eagleton claims: "Once the political state extends its empire over the whole of civil society, social reality becomes so densely systemized and rigorously coded that one is always being caught out in a kind of pathological 'over reading,' a compulsive semiosis, which eradicates all contingency" (47-48). Tomas tries to flee from the bleak reality – the pathological annihilation of contingency through feigned obscurity as a window-washer. Thus, like the author himself, characters in the novel undergo surveillance, espionage, and threats from the diehard political or ideological agencies. Both parties deploy similar bullying techniques in asserting their political ideologies. These agencies show identical domineering, a hegemonic attitude in their treatment of people, right to the freedom of speech, and public life as a whole.

The oppressive lived experience paves the way for Kundera's authorial biopolitics. His politics hinges on the sovereign power of the author – in his right to decide the fate of his characters: who may live and who must die, who thrives and who is to be maimed and silenced. It is an authorial control over the life, relationship, and mortality of his fictional personae. It is identical to the Communist biopolitics of control, administration, and exhortation that entirely changed the psychological milieu of Kundera as an author. This change makes it easier for Kundera to explore the strategy of authorial sovereignty in the novel: the right to create, to make suffer, and to kill. The strategy imparts deep implementation and demonstration of authorial politics. In the case of the Tereza-Tomas-Sabina triangle, politics of control and corruption is so closely attached to sex and love that it is very difficult to differentiate among them. Tereza stays with Tomas with a tormented psyche. This acceptance by Tereza is Kundera's point of departure in exploring the weakness of people, who remain rooted in a totalitarian space and pessimistically remain hopeful to gain liberty through persistence and fidelity. The very fact that they continue with their marriage and apparently find some degree of happiness illustrates that relationships, which fall well short of satisfactory standard, are possible under the threat of annihilating biopolitics. Kundera argues:

Their [Tomas and Tereza] acquaintance had been based on an error from the start ... In spite of their love, they had made each other's life a hell. The fact that they loved each other was merely proof that the fault lay not in themselves, in their behavior or inconstancy of feeling, but rather in their incompatibility: he was strong and she was weak. She was like Dubček, who made a thirty-second pause in the middle of a sentence; she was like her country, which stuttered, gasped for breath, could not speak. (*Unbearable* 73-74)

Tomas and Tereza's acceptance of their imperfect relationship epitomizes the political relationship between the Soviet and Czechoslovakia. It simply manifests the incompatibility – the fact that the weaker party in a relationship is doomed to the politics and oppression of the stronger one.

In the affair between Sabina and Franz, we see the same power fulcrum in action – the strong party enjoys an advantage in decision making or lovemaking and the weak one loses its capacity of self-representation and autonomy. This uneven relationship is Kundera's other biopolitical lab to explore the dimensions of power, autonomy, and instrumentalized human existence. Sabina, a beautiful, heedless, and gifted painter, is Tomas's closest friend and long-term lover. In Geneva, Sabina, in contrast to Tereza's trauma, enjoys a love affair with Franz, a married university professor and an idealistic intellectual. Franz is in love with Sabina's apparent romanticism and courage as a Czech dissident. He, like Tereza, suffers from psychological trauma as he must betray his wife to date Sabina. However, Sabina operates herself in a light-hearted manner: she loves physically with no psychological strings attached. She differs from Franz in her views on betrayal and politics so drastically that John O'Brien clarifies fittingly: "the time Sabina and Franz share together is the frequency of their inability to understand each other" (8). Kundera, in fact, prepares an ironically lengthy "Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words" to compare and contrast the mismatched systems – political, individual, or otherwise that can bring disasters. At the behest of her whim, Sabina abruptly leaves Switzerland for Paris and then Paris for America, leaving love-sick Franz behind.

The ploy of biopolitics does not merely split the populations based on the political, racist, and imperial assumption about killing and letting live, it conflates reason of responsibility and terror of violence. In this connection, we can contrast Sabina and Tereza. Sabina lives by betrayal, abandoning family, lovers, and, even, country – a life lacking in commitment or fidelity or moral responsibility to anyone. In contrast, Tereza is the exact opposite of Sabina in commitment, fidelity, and fixity to reality that brings her downfall. It is her unwillingness to live in exile that brings Tomas back to his fate in Czechoslovakia after he has set himself up nicely in a Swiss

hospital. The contrast between Sabina and Tereza brings to mind the similarities between Tereza and Franz. Kundera's parallelism between Franz and Tereza can be transferred to the political realm of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovakian communist government, like Franz and Tereza, enters an affair with the communist Soviet, which it cannot handle properly. Tereza, Franz, or Czechoslovakia in this political affair dedicates all resources and seeks to please the mighty partner in every possible way. By contrast, we see Tomas, Sabina, or the Soviet is the least concerned about this sacrifice or the so-called "ideal of truth" (Kundera, *Unbearable* 73). However, a totalitarian agency and its strategy of biopolitics can only see the relationships from the top and fail to grasp them bottom-up. These relationships might be beneficial for the stronger side in the bargain but bring long term harassment and political bewilderment for the weaker side.

The power fulcrum among the relationships of the various characters of the novel lays bare the biopolitics of Kundera. He explores the scopes of biopolitics – a controlling mechanism usually deployed by a totalitarian state to govern its citizens – by subjugating a set of characters under the whim and political ideology of another set. Hana Pichova argues that the novel "features a narrator whose presence in the text is no less important than that of any other character. The narrator creates his own self when he tells the story" (217). Thus, Kundera's self-creation in the narrative stages his obsession with his role as a creator of his characters and a director of their fate. Here, Kundera's "God-like" authority does not fall short of the omniscient and omnipresent roles of the communist regime or modern police-state (Pichova 219). He controls his fictional personae and their world with utmost dexterity and uncompromising severity. He manipulates the lives of his characters and their choices in a dictatorial way, rendering the characters as mere puppets in his hands. Kundera himself comments on the genesis of his character, Tomas, who is portrayed standing at a window and staring across a courtyard at a blank wall:

This is the image from which he was born ... Characters are not born, like people of woman; they are born of a situation, a sentence, a metaphor, containing in a nutshell a basic human possibility ... the characters in my novels are my own unrealized possibilities. That is why I am equally fond of them and equally horrified by them. (Kundera, *Unbearable* 218)

Hence, Tomas, for his birth and his character-type, is solely dependent on, as Maria Nemcova Banerjee asserts, the "Pendulum swing" of Kundera's mind that moves through "various hypotheses ... at work in the opening meditation on the genesis of characters and the idea of eternal return" (95). The characters in the novel signify a frustrated and exhausted community and they know that nothing is going to change and there is no future different from the present. There is no space for individual

accomplishment, free-thinking, and deviations from the set course of life. Life is fixed and controlled, and its outcomes are the return to the same starting point.

Characters survive at the mercy of the author. Yet, they survive because they contribute to the politics of the author like the slaves, who are lashed and tortured but are kept alive since their labor is necessary. Kundera's despair and tyrannical attitude toward his characters get full expression when he asserts: "True human goodness, in all its purity and freedom, can come to force only when its recipient has no power. Mankind's true moral test, its fundamental test (which lies deeply buried from view), consists in its attitude towards those who are at its mercy" (*Unbearable* 285). Kundera demonstrates that human relationships are hinged on the questions of power and the manifestations of that power. The strategy of Kundera's interference is the basic exhibition of human existence and relationships in a hegemonic system. For example, consider Tomas's writing a letter to a newspaper to add his voice to fuel a public debate. Thereafter, a series of disastrous events take place as phenomena of destiny, including the Russian invasion of Prague and we see Tomas gradually turning into political oblivion. He leaves his profession, his writing, and his sexual pursuits. Finally, he is forgotten by all. He no longer matters to anyone. He has relegated himself to insignificance for maintaining his integrity and, hence, becomes untouchable.

However, Kundera's biopolitics is also his agency as it proposes some form of resistance to the ugly totalitarian control of individual lives. Kundera creates complex characters. They are either thinking puppets or willful sinners. Kundera's characters, in Jacques Derrida's words, play "a double game or double agent, serving two sides or feigning obedience to a system of the rule while simultaneously trying to undermine its rule by posing unsolvable problems" (qtd. in Adams 140). For example, we see Tomas's acts of gymnastic between weightiness and lightness. He marries Tereza but chooses to maintain his lightness of being through sexual adventures. What I argue is that, with all his pursuits – good or bad, he attains a sort of mobility in contrast to the stagnancy of the communist policy. Tomas exemplifies Kundera's post-1969 citizens in occupied Czechoslovakia. No doubt, they are a defeated community but they, as Michael Carroll points out, "pretend to speak of master's language" only to discredit the master as Caliban does in *The Tempest* (105). They do not have autonomy, but they are self-conscious about the political formations of the community and the subjection by the invaders. This self-understanding is the primary step in attaining political freedom.

Moreover, Kundera's novelistic critiquing of communist biopolitics and surveillance gets an uncanny expression in the Tereza-Sabina relationship. Before fleeing from Prague, the two women meet. Tereza is charmed by Sabina's ingenuity and

nonchalance though the friendship with Sabina does not relieve Tereza either of her jealousy or of her nightmarish trauma. As the two women grow friendly, Sabina finds Tereza a job as a photographer in Prague. Thus, the character of Tereza is weaponized with a camera and Sabina with her painting. Kundera, here, handles binaries, in Adams' terms, "the most urgent poles" of his contemporary biopolitics (133). When the totalitarian state's panoptical lens is watching and regulating every aspect of civic life, Tereza looks back to "Big brother" and the communist unrest through the lens of her camera. Likewise, Sabina subverts the necropolitics of deaths around her with her colors and sketches. Sabina as an artist recognizes that Communists, like Fascists and religious fanatics, employ sentimentalist kitsch and propaganda as their means of tyrannical control—the extremist biopolitics (Kundera, *Unbearable* 99, 250). Sabina needs freedom to pursue her experiments in painting and she feels the absence of that liberty in the hands of invaders.

In the end, Kundera sings the winning song of life against the controlled rendition of biopolitics. We see Tomas and Tereza die in a driving accident in the countryside they choose to live in, neither in concentration camps nor by the bullets of the secret police. They choose to live away from both the din and bustle of urban fame and the brutal communist political violence, and, later, are forgotten by the players of biopolitics. Sabina lives in America and Franz remains separated from his wife and finds consolation in a relationship with a young female student at his university and, later, dies in paralysis after being mugged in Bangkok in a political rally. The characters of Kundera find a way to live outside the bindings of the invasive political system. However, this comes with a heavy price of exile, relegation to oblivion, and death in a foreign land. Therefore, I maintain that the characters survive the totalitarian biopolitics but not the authorial one though Kundera's exile and authorial biopolitics, in effect, is his resistance to the communist biopolitics of surveillance, restriction, and maiming.

Conclusion

Biopolitics relegates the unwanted citizens – political dissidents, religious others, and racialized subalterns – into abjection, between subjecthood and objecthood. This relegation spatializes, territorializes, and compartmentalizes the unwanted individuals. However, Kundera exercises the spatialization of his characters to rescue them from the communist necropolitics of mortality. He spreads his characters among continents. Like himself, many of them are immigrants or in permanent exile. The thing to notice about Kundera's characters is the lack of meaningful choices in their lives. Individuals in this frustrating, invaded, and colonized space enact the paradoxes of actions that are indistinguishable in consequences from their opposites. In this brutal space and time, writing a letter or an article is as dangerous as not writing any of them. The state is always watching and reprimanding. Once

the inspectors of biopolitics appear, no matter how the characters respond, their lives are maimed, resources are ruined – the outcome of the tyrannical biopolitics of the author or the state. This situation exemplifies the paradox that is fundamental in an inflexible world in which human beings are deprived of an appropriate milieu for their choices. The context has disappeared because of the tyranny of the power on relatively weaker ones: one powerful state over the weaker one (e.g., Soviet Russia invading Czechoslovakia), one stronger human character over relatively weaker ones (e.g., Tomas's tyranny over Tereza or Sabina's leaving Franz), politicians over civilians, and the author over his characters.

The author, Kundera, pretentiously intrudes into the lives of his characters and dictates their choices and actions. In effect, the writer, then, mimics the government that interferes callously in the lives of its citizens and hegemonically exercises its right to preserve, kill, or maim. Therefore, Tomas-Tereza and Sabina-Franz relationships are invented to experiment with the various shades of biopolitics and to respond to the pressure under the double-edged tyrannies – the tyranny of communist invasion and the tyranny of the author. The biopolitical split works beneath all relationships in the novel. And the “well short of satisfying” kind of relationship is exemplified in this novel through the relationship of Czechoslovakia and Russia. We can see how Dubček and Czechoslovakian authority had to accept the tyranny of strong Soviet Russia. One may hate it, as Tereza hates Tomas's infidelity or the citizens of Czechoslovakia hated the Russian invasion, but he/she has to accept it and move on.

In the end, I maintain that the novel is an attempt to understand the relationships between the conflicting agenda that totalitarian biopolitics poses and acts upon. Kundera's own system of biopolitics deals with these conflicting desires that compel the strong to turn upon the weak. I show that Kundera interferes with the lives of his fictional characters to prove his own thesis on agency and resistance in the face of the stultifying rigor of biopolitics. He shows that this discriminatory biopolitics makes individuals blind to their responsibilities, compels an individual to abandon the loving partner, and coerces another character to seek something intangible in the arms of a bullying mistress. This same biopolitics makes a country stretch its imperialist clutch on a weaker one. The absence of any responsibility – social, political, or familial – in life is the lightness of biopolitics. This absolute biopolitics exposes the absolute emptiness of a totalitarian state. Kundera, ultimately, leaving his characters on their own, stages his novelistic resistance to the totalitarian biopolitics though he makes them suffer endlessly. He resists the invasive “pure irrationality” of biopower that aims at the material annihilation of humans and communities (Kundera, *Art* 10). Kundera, with a satirical sleight of hand, constructs his fictional world with his vibrant, erring, and humane characters, who suffer but do not yield.

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Distress, Duress, and Dichotomy: Sociological Perspectives on the Scroll Painters of Naya

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Abstract

The sociology of everyday life is a paradigm of theoretical orientation. The complexities of the everyday life of the social actors exhibit more than what is there in the framework of the apparent reality and help in constructing a fulfilling and applicable idea about the social actors. This essay aims to examine such complexities in the fabric of the everyday lives of the scroll painters of Naya, a village in West Midnapore district of West Bengal which are exhibited and expressed in various forms and ways. Through examining the social space of Naya that constitutes the lifeworld of the scroll painters and their spatial identity, this essay aims to understand the transformative lifeworld of the scroll painters to argue that the social space of the village acts as an invisible force of the institutionalization of innovation, ingenuity, and integrity.

Keywords: patua, patachitra, Naya, social space, lifeworld, spatial identity

Introduction

A question that has plagued the field of social sciences for several decades is whether a universal theory of social space is possible or not and, if so, how it may be defined. Although Foucault, Lefebvre, and Soja have provided a conceptual framework of social space (Lefebvre 46-49; Foucault 22-27), its phenomenological elements and operational dynamics have not been examined in detail. It is Alfred Schutz's philosophical concept of the "lifeworld" that he defines "as an amalgamation of her or his everyday dynamics, cultural bindings and relational assertions," which explores the "embedded reality of social space" and provides an idea of what constitutes a person's lifeworld (cited in Lippai 15-34). As Schutz demonstrates, the constitution of a person's lifeworld is important in analyzing and understanding their objective, subjective, and inter-subjective alignments¹. Through exploring the social space of Naya, a village in the West Medinipur district of West Bengal and the lifeworld of hereditary scroll painters known as patuas or patachitrakars and their



spatial identity, this essay aims to understand the scroll painters' transformative lifeworld to explore how the social space of the village acts as an invisible force in the institutionalization of innovation, ingenuity, and integrity. It draws on interviews with twenty patachitrakars conducted between May and December 2020 as part of the project "Folk Artists in the Time of Coronavirus" funded by the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur.

The Scroll Painters of Naya

Pata or *Patachitra* (Ghosh 835-871) has been a key component in the cultural diversity of both Bengals, Bihar, and Orissa. Pata is a scroll painting of varying length and width, which narrates incidents from Hindu epics like the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, the Bengali Mangalkavyas, folktales, local legends, and tribal Santhal myths as well as contemporary events (Hauser 105-122). Patuas or patachitrakars were semi-nomadic entertainers who would roam about villages unfurling their paintings to which they sang along (Ghosh 835-871) and received alms if they succeeded in pleasing their patrons (Hauser 107). As patachitrakars would wander from one village to another singing the representations in their patas, they would need a place where they could rest for a while or put up for the night before moving to their next halt. Encouraged by a wealthy patron in the region named Gunadhar who gifted them a piece of land, three patachitrakars (Pulin, Rampada, and Jyoti Chitrakar) settled down in Naya more than sixty years ago, encouraging other scroll painters to migrate from various parts of West Bengal. This is how Naya (new), labelled "the village of painters," (Ponte 22) came into existence.

The village of Naya is now home to several generations of patachitrakars or scroll painters belonging to about eighty-five families with approximately 139 scroll painters involved in the art of "patachitra." Notwithstanding the socio-economic deprivation and religious discrimination they have faced over the centuries, the scroll painters of Naya continue to practice their art as a means of earning a livelihood and to transmit it to their succeeding generation so as to enable them to carry forward their ancestral tradition (Korom 181-195).

The two biggest challenges to their survival have been their religious affiliation and market dynamics. Although most scroll painters, by their own admission, opted for Islam as their formal religion, their persistence in painting Hindu gods and goddesses initially struck a disapproving note in their co-religionists (Bhowmick 39-46). Additionally, they were relegated to the periphery of the mainstream societal framework since the Hindu majority found sacred performance by Muslims unacceptable. The complexity of such a nexus of incomprehensible un-acceptance seems to have been intensified by the patachitra ceasing to be a form of ritual entertainment and losing its rural patrons. Even so, their continuing practice of

scroll painting has been an empowering journey, which has given the scroll painters innumerable opportunities not only to improve their economic situation but also to challenge the mainstream discourse of approval and (dis)approval. In addition to the new system of market patronage combined with the patachitrakars' will, determination, and zeal to carry forward their tradition, the social space of the village of Naya has acted as a powerful force in helping them preserve their art through offering them an atmosphere of hope and belief.

Tracing the Social Space of Naya

The social space that envelopes the scroll painters of Naya is characterized by socio-economic privation and insecurity. The scroll painters' position in society has been historically ordained by their changing lifeworld, which was marked with abject penury and destitution before the community found its way into settlement, security, and success. However, despite the growing demand for and increased recognition of patachitra art and artists, an undefinable *angst* and anxiety appears to underpin the scroll painters' lives and scroll paintings (Ponte 24).

Various kinds of socio-economic problems have historically plagued the scroll painters of Naya. As Dukhushyam Chitrakar, one of the few elder scroll painters, conferred the title of Guru (Master), explains, the scroll painters' existence has always been bereft of certainty or stability,

Scroll painters have undergone all sorts of oppression, be it social or economic. And yet they have rather achieved their existence to this day, overcoming all types of complexities, no matter how difficult that might have been. In the past, we used to go to the villages and act as entertainers, showing our paintings and narrating the depictions which were set to tune by us. There was no guarantee as to whether we would be getting anything in exchange from the households we visited in the village. Some days were worse than the others when we returned empty-handed and had nothing to eat. Today we, as a community, have been able to put food on our plates for quite a long time now. Our children have the opportunity to attend schools and colleges and we are done away with the fear of going hungry for a day. With this recent rage of the pandemic, however, things have changed again. I hear it from my sons that they are not getting the amount of work they used to. Exhibitions and displays have come to a standstill is what I gather from most of those living in the villages.

Dukhushyam Chitrakar's words reverberate with the issues of socio-economic privation and insecurity that lurk behind the social space of Naya. The socio-economic privation has two dimensions, instability and subordination².

Even though instability in the lifeworld of the painters partially arises from the irregular nature of patronage³, its prime cause can be suas, a three-fold instrument – the stigmatization of scroll painters by the *brihottoro shomaj* or the larger society, religious purity and inflexibility and market dynamics.

In addition to instability, subordination emerged as another important and analytically binding factor in the scroll painters' social space. Although subordination is primarily imposed through subjugating practices, which unleash a certain degree of dominance into the schema of everyday life on an operative scale, it assumed a different meaning when viewed through the lens of the scroll painters on whom it was enforced through the discourse of denial and disapproval. Subordination can also be explored as a constructive force that compelled patachitrakars to submit to market economics, making them conform to what the "larger society" considered desirable and resulted in the loss of the authentic in *patachitra*.

In order to explore the concept of subordination under such circumstances, it becomes pertinent to understand how the elements of denial and disapproval have been assimilated by the marginalized performers. The scroll painters, isolated from the "larger society" or "mainstream society" were denied a constructive platform for the expression of their art. Their uniqueness, reflected in their works, seemed to have been countered by what the "larger society" deemed appropriate and what the market deemed to be profitable. In the past, scroll painters faced several obstacles in engaging in their hereditary profession and practicing their art due to their being discriminated against by religious conservatives. For example, scroll painter Montu Chitrakar recalls, "We had to change our names from the ones which were given to us at birth so that we could work at Hindu households, especially when we were required to build idols of goddesses like Kali and Durga for the festive seasons." While Montu Chitrakar adds that difficulties have been an integral part of their lives, partly because of their stigmatization by the larger society, other scroll painters are unable to elucidate the problem in clear terms.

In the process of their being disparaged by mildly oppressive forces, the locus of subordination in the social space of Naya can, therefore, be located in the threat of extinction felt by the scroll painters. It is, however, supplemented with their being forced to adjust to market economics. Even though the scroll painters of Naya express their commitment to preserving their rich heritage, they are not averse to adjusting to market requirements and tailoring their "patachitras" to the need-dispositions of the "larger society" in order to ensure their financial well-being. This decontextualizes the performance art from its ritual origins and isolates the visual, thereby eliding songs or tunes.

Shyamsundar Chitrakar, a veteran scroll painter, states,

Scroll painting has been made into a business and you cannot blame the scroll painters for it. The dynamic nature of the demand does not require us to compose songs anymore. Neither do we need to sing out the depictions. Pats are not as long as they used to be, we now have different kinds [sizes] of pats. People don't have the space to keep the long pats and hence resort to the square ones. But above all of this, as a community we have always felt our existence being threatened. That is why we keep on adjusting to the way of the world. Protecting the art is our duty, but you also need to conserve the artists, right? Without the artist, how will the art survive? For long we have stood the test of time. The larger society has always tried to distance us away, denying us constantly the avenues for long term growth.

Rahim Chitrakar, Dukhushyam Chitrakar's son, agrees with Shyamsundar,

... our experiences in being scroll painters have been enlightening but nevertheless tormenting too. While growing up we used to hear that our father was going to the village to *beg* for food. We are lucky now that none of us have to *beg* for food. But those memories are always haunting us like a specter from an ignoble past, affecting our present dispositions. We have always felt threatened. The government never made elaborate arrangements for us until it was 2011. I am not saying all the members of the larger society has made us feel separated from the mainstream establishment, but certainly as a whole they have played on our years of insecurity and changed the context of the market, which is why you won't find many of us composing songs anymore but just focusing on making scroll paintings in different shapes and sizes. In a way you can say that we have been subjugated and perhaps even forced to conform to what by view of the majority was considered to be *ideal*.

What is therefore left is what the elderly Dulal Chitrakar termed as “an incomplete exercise of scroll painting which loses its cultural and traditional bindings and becomes subservient to the needs of the modern world.”

Insecurity finds a manifestation in various forms across multiple instruments and institutionalizations. The institutionalization of insecurity in the social space of Naya can be understood through the emotional response of the scroll painters to the different kinds of adversities that threaten to end their cultural legacy and existence as a community. Despite their being able to produce an organic art form, the existential crisis visible among the scroll painters of Naya makes it important to pose the question: why is it that the patachitrakars feel insecure and where

can their insecurity be located? The question that needs to be asked is what their emotional response does to hardship and subordination entails and how exactly it is related to the institutionalization of insecurity in the social space of Naya. The answer to this question lies in the continual apprehension of an imminent threat experienced by the patachitrakars as well as their adaptation to the “larger society.” The scroll painters of Naya believe that their community is relegated to the status of a segregated, separated social collective by dominant groups in the larger society. The larger society has decried the unique characteristic orientation of Naya as incompatible with majoritarian processes in terms of socialization, cultural affirmation, and so on. While the contemporary rubric of the society does not overtly endorse discrimination of any kind, Naya scroll painters’ internalization of its covert humiliating denigration has percolated to their succeeding generations (Palchoudhuri 147-160). In light of this, their emotional response is a reaction of the “ever-tormented” socio-cultural “self(s)” to the changes brought about by any social or natural element that might affect their livelihoods or their rich cultural legacy. It is in such a response that insecurity appears to have been institutionalized in every facet of their everyday lives, beginning with the prevailing public discourse on how the “larger society” views them to imminent changes. The connotations of the social space in Naya might be best described in the words of Jaba Chitrakar, “Over the years from being a small and largely unknown village, Naya has changed into a landscape of culture and creativity. But some things haven’t changed, and perhaps our fear of being washed away is one of them. That I guess will continue no matter how much we develop and progress.”

The Transformative Lifeworld: Mapping Innovation, Ingenuity, and Integrity among the Patachitrakars

In examining the lifeworld of the scroll painters of Naya, understanding the transformation of its subjective, objective, and inter-subjective alignments across space and time is extremely crucial⁴. The rationale behind their adaptation to the changing realities is the constant insecurity and fear of extinction lurking behind the social space of Naya, which might have arisen from a social or financial, institutional crisis, or even an ecological event like the prevailing pandemic.

In addition to alienation, self-reliance, and integrity, market dynamics and economics are equally central to the ingenuity and innovation factors of the subjective aspect of the patachitrakars’ everyday lives. Market dynamics that forced the scroll painters to adapt their creations to the requirements of the “larger society” and its constituents is one of the main reasons behind the continual changes in the subjective, objective, and inter-subjective alignments embedded in their lifeworld. Manimala Chitrakar, a noted scroll painter from the village, provides the following rationale,

You can say we have always had two objectives to scroll painting. One would be our survival and the other would be the survival of the art. You cannot really survive individually or as a community, as an artist if the art is lost. This is the reason we have tried to bring in as much change as possible to the style and narration of our scroll paintings. Initially they were based on the incidences in the epics but gradually with time, social issues became an important subject matter for the paintings. Previously the scrolls were really long, but now they are of different shapes and sizes. As a community we want to be able to reach out to all kinds of people and since not everyone buys the long scrolls which often have a high price. Alongside, you'll also find patachitras on items of everyday use, like cups and mugs and clothes. If one feels this as a commercial endeavor on our part, I'd say that this is only partially correct. Survival is perhaps the primary need for us. To connect with all the needs and minds of all kinds of individuals, we invent and re-invent the ways and forms of the art.

Similarly, Jaba Chitrakar, an accomplished scroll painter, believes that,

... as a community I think our reason for existence is tied to the survival of the art. Initially the art and artist were inseparable from each other. But now, you can say there is a gap between the art and the artist. The art is now more than just a mode of survival. It is a part of our cultural identity as a community and a unique creation which if lost, will be lost forever from the face of world. You might think of including scroll painting on objects like T-shirts and kettles to ways by which we can earn extra income but that is actually not the case. Without doing such things neither we nor our creations will survive. If the future holds to be more inconvenient for us, and if things like this pandemic becomes more common we shall have to devise new ways and means for survival but through the art, not by some other work, unless of course the situation is that bad. But to be honest, even if that happens, there is nothing apart from scroll painting that we know.

Ingenuity and innovation are perhaps the twin planks of the patachitrakars' lifeworld. While ingenuity defines the intersection between their art and the changing times, innovation acts as an expression of their ingenious selves and minds. While the scroll painters believe that their existence as a collective is connected to what they preach and practice, scroll paintings serve both as a means of their survival as well as their perpetuation as a distinct community with a unique cultural identity. In other words, responding to the changes in the market can be viewed as a social action on the patachitrakars' part to ensure three things – the preservation of the community, the preservation of their rich cultural heritage, and the ensuring of a sustainable livelihood.

The complex relationship between innovation and ingenuity is pertinent to the exploration of the deep structures of the lifeworld of the scroll painters of Naya. While these aspects might appear synonymous, ingenuity is deeply embedded in the patachitrakars' mental faculties whereas innovation is channeled in the manner and output of their artistic creations. Although ingenuity is common to all of them, the nature of innovation varies from one artist to the other. For instance, Shyamsundar Chitrakar engaged his creativity in making replicas of large "pats" that are the size of a person's palm apart from drawing standard scrolls and square "pats." According to him, "Often students from colleges and universities come to visit Naya. It is not always possible for them to carry a lot of money. These small 'pats' are best suited for them in such cases. They are neither too large nor too expensive. Students can take such things as a souvenir back home." For Anwar Chitrakar, innovation, however, has a completely different orientation. He believes that

the social issues that are often a subject matter of the scroll paintings should be reflective of the times in which we are living. The scenes from the epics are important and so are things like global warming and environmental degradation. But you cannot just focus on a few things and expect the art to progress. This is the reason why I focus more on things like subjugation of women, fragility of social relationships in today's world and even social evils like eve-teasing and rape. I think in that way scroll paintings become more realistic.

Identifying the routes and modes of innovation is not difficult in view of the fact that ingenuity is inherent in their collective work ethic and is reflected in their creative productions.

An analysis of the contours of their lifeworld would, however, remain incomplete without discussing the integrity of the patachitrakars of Naya. The question of integrity and its consumption is a rather complex arrangement to be dealt with largely because it includes an assortment of particularities absorbed by the scroll painters of Naya over a period of time. One such ethic is the belief in keeping their religious faith and their hereditary vocation separate from each other. In engaging with contemporary society in the present times, patachitrakars seem to have resolved the fine gap between their religious beliefs and their professional choices and commitments. The scroll painters of Naya have cultivated an attitude of plurality and professional and personal sentiments without compromising their personal ethics in the hope that it would ensure the community's as well as their socio-cultural architecture's survival.

Another important characteristic that should not go amiss from the scope of this discussion is the doctrine of self-reliance, intricately laden in the patachitrakars'

transformative lifeworld. With every passing generation, almost every household in the patua village has taken to the profession of scroll painting scrupulously following in its ancestral footsteps. Although there have been intermittent transitions to other occupational avenues largely due to economic constraints, the scroll painters of Naya have stuck to their creative practice. The scroll painters' continuing belief in themselves and their self-creation is almost tantamount to entrepreneurship, which allows them to be independent and utilize their own resources in sustaining their art. Self-reliance, thus, defines a set of attitudinal strengths in the scroll painters of Naya. This is a mindset that includes taking comfort and hope in carrying on with the hereditary occupation, making efforts to orient future generations towards scroll painting, relying exclusively on natural resources and refraining from switching over to other occupational activities.

An intriguing element of the lifeworld of the patachitrakars has been the strand of alienation. While the extent and degree of the alienation between the art and artist is difficult to analyze, the fissure between the creation and the creator is reflected in the patachitrakars' unanimous portrayal of their art as a commodified object rather than an aesthetic pursuit.

As Bapi Chitrakar puts it,

We feel as patuas our responsibility lies in letting the society know about things which are happening around them. Previously it was all about going to the village and singing out the thematic description of the "pats." But times have changed and so has our ways of presentation. Since you are asking whether the artist has separated himself from the art or not, I would say it is true to some extent. After all, as much as we are scroll painters, we also have to keep in mind that people who buy from us are our patrons. That kind of an understanding has certainly brought some changes. For instance, you won't find many of us knowing how to compose songs or sing for that matter. This is because scroll paintings are more about being a product now, than being a way of keeping villagers informed about things of social importance.

Ranjit Chitrakar echoes Bapi Chitrakar's perspective: "Scroll paintings were previously made for being shown. But now they are being sold. I feel once you attach a price tag to the elaborate hard work that is done and try to quantify the creativity of the painter, which results in the art and artist being separated in a way from each other."

The subjective, objective, and inter-subjective alignments of the lifeworld of the scroll painters of Naya can, thus, be understood from the aforesaid elements that give shape to their lifeworld and define and describe its constitution. The objectivity

in the lifeworld of the patachitrakars is signified by their capacity to be ingenious when needed, self-reliant and keep the “personal” separate and distinct from the “professional.” The subjective alignments, however, lie in how each of them embraces his/her respective lifeworld and orients his/her individual social actions to his/her subjective understandings. For instance, while some of them choose to innovate the texture of pat painting by drawing it on objects of everyday use, some try to reduce the size of the pats to that of a person’s palm. In the same way, while their work ethic has no trace of their religious taboos, some believe that the conceptual understanding of religion in society is deeply flawed and there is no need to separate religion from one’s own professional commitment. The inter-subjective matrix, in such a case, therefore, is consistent with the everyday lives of the scroll painters, their shared opinion about the “larger society” and their matters of common cognition. This includes their apprehensions about the threat of the extinction of the community, the gradual erosion of their socio-cultural heritage in light of the continuously changing market and consumer tastes, and their belief in the role of patachitrakars as educators.

With this, what becomes inarguably congruent to the discussion is the transformative nature of the lifeworld, which changed across space and time. The scroll painters of Naya, whose lifeworld was invested in bringing social awareness, were persuaded to adapt to their surroundings and their requirements due to socio-economic contingencies. During the period when they identified with their abject status of “alms-seekers,” a colossal metamorphosis in market economics transformed their self-identified persona, and, ultimately, they opted to professionally engage with scroll painting.

Unpacking the Spatial Identity of the Patachitrakars

Spatial identity is “the identity that has a relational and positional binding to the space and spatial structures of the social actor, often distinguished from general social identity since it is rather assumed through various long term cultural, economic and political processes.” (Baker 314-335) Since religion has not been the sole determining factor in their everyday lives and their individual lifeworld, the scroll painters’ identity cannot be exclusively analyzed through strict religious or social parameters. Since viewing their social identity as preservers of cultural traditions would be equally reductionist, the essence of their identity must be examined in relation to their social space. The role of the village of Naya has been extremely important in defining the spatial identity of scroll painters through its enabling of its inhabitants in realizing their inner potential and acting accordingly.

Identity is sacrosanct to the rich cultural heritage of scroll painters and one of the main reasons behind the channeling of their efforts to survive as a community.

At this juncture, the question that might arise is what is more important for the patachitrakars, their individual existence or their existence as a community? While it is true that the community cannot exist and function without the survival of individual patachitrakars, it is also true that if the patachitrakars were to direct their ingenuity and creativity towards activities precluding scroll painting, it would result in the eventual decline of the community itself. Therefore, it is best to state that the community and the individual are separate and mutually exclusive when it comes to the question of identity since that happens to be an integral element of their “self(s).”

The patachitrakars have self-ascribed their spatial identity as a part of their coherent understanding of the “larger society.” This larger society regards the social space of Naya as an intrusive force bestowed with the power of affecting even those who are not a part of it. For example, their elder, Dulal Chitrakar, believes that the larger society and its additional elements are responsible for whatever has changed in pat painting:

You ask me whether we would have remained stagnant or not and I guess we wouldn't. But certainly, we would not have done anything that might just ruin the process of what we stand for. We have been reduced to businessmen from artists and our roles have changed from being agents of social responsibility to being sellers of a particular art form. It is true we think of our rich heritage and culture, but I think patuas are mostly concerned now with their expressive identity as patachitrakars who are in the business of pat painting, which automatically helps in preserving the art.

The spatial identity of the patachitrakars can be described as a construction of their cultural instrumentalities, which are integrated with their occupational dynamics. As Dulal Chitrakar points out, their identity as a community is preserved only to the extent of their being a part of their individual albeit commercial engagements⁵. Their spatial identity contains the possibilities of their adapting their “self(s),” as microcosmic orientations of the “larger society,” by aligning their creativity to the tastes, standards, and judgment of consumers who control the market economics. These microcosmic orientations of the larger society can be theoretically framed to include the everyday dynamics of those who are the buyers and patrons of patachitras, their ideologies, and the morphologies as well as simple understandings of the society around them.

Conclusion

The social space of Naya, reflective of the everydayness of the patachitrakars, tells the tale of a particular community's battle with uneven social landscapes. While the scroll painters' resistance to submit to the larger society or *bhrihottoro*

shomaj is embedded in market economics, the rationale behind their choices, the particularities of their historical oppression, and their resilience may be attributed to the nature and degree of the ingenuity, innovation, and integrity prevailing in the social space of Naya. Whereas the disjuncture between their religious orientation and their work is separated by their professionalism, the ideological ground that supports this professional separation is rooted in the constitution of their everyday lives. Their lives are constituted through mutual respect towards each other both socially and culturally, tolerance towards dynamic social realities and a strong sense of brotherhood. It is these aspects of their everyday lives that form the inter-subjective matrix of their aggregate understandings and proliferate to the extent of guiding their choices in relation to the meanings that they attach to various social actions. The question of identity, which seems to be an important and an integral part of the individual “self(s)” of the patachitrakars, revolves around the alignments of the social space in Naya for it is the socio-cultural landscape that creates the discourse of the patachitrakars’ identity. It is also important to state that their efforts to survive as an exclusive community of individuals endowed with idiosyncratic capabilities is equally significant thus giving a consolidated background to their “spatial identity.” At large and in essence, it is the ever-transformative nature of the lifeworld of the patachitrakars, with which they interact and associate with their distinct personalities that ultimately leads to the perpetuation of their community across time and space, irrespective of the cultural barriers, social discrimination, religious conservatism, market economics, and haunting memories of the distant past. Although the instrument of alienation creates a sense of separation between the art and artist, it is not strong enough in the present times to the erosion of patachitras and patachitrakars. Instead, it is important to accept it as part and parcel of the everyday lives of the scroll painters, who by their own instinctive rationality, do not allow alienation to affect the qualitative dynamics of patachitras as a whole and resort to improvisation to facilitate the smooth functioning of their community.

Notes

1. While Schutz’s exploration of the lifeworld can be viewed as an expressive process of the interplay of everyday dynamics, it is important to consider that it is only an “extension and developmental construction of what was Edmund Husserl’s philosophical project” (Collins 95-126) aimed at examining the consciousness of individuals through their subjective perceptions of everyday life. The contributions of Jurgen Habermas also cannot go unnoticed in this regard, especially for his unique definition of it as a “culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretative patterns.”
2. Subordination is an expression of a strong authoritative framework that seeks to alter the way in which people attach meanings to things around them.

3. This may be illustrated through the life stories of some scroll painters like Yaqub, Anwar, Sanyubar, who had abandoned painting for other occupations before returning to their hereditary profession.
4. The process of covert demarcation is applicable to the previous situations in which patuas have been invisibly subdued in various ways that have made them feel separated from mainstream society. The contours of such covert demarcation include their being ill-treated by both Hindus and Muslim conservatives in subtle ways, and the absence of a market for their products.
5. This can be defined as painting pats for one's own survival, ignoring the historicity behind it as well as being unknown to the completeness of the art which also includes singing and composing songs.

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Docile Femininity: Repression of Fat Female Body Image in Young Adult Literature

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Abstract

Construction of fat bodies in young adult (YA) literature comes up with the interception of cultural negotiation and empowerment of fat female identity. This paper studies the apparatuses that subdue fat bodies in YA novels, examining the fictions published between 2007 and 2019 where fat teens are the protagonists. The study offers a critical reading on eight such novels – *Holding up the Universe; The Upside of Unrequited; Puddin’; Skinny; If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period; By The Time You Read This, I’ll Be Dead; There’s Something about Sweetie; Fat Angie* – and examines individual and social treatments of fat female bodies in association with sexuality, food, and body surveillance. The analysis highlights normative filters that allocate a separate set of ideas regarding the personal relationships of the large physiques. While their eating habits pass through abusive stereotyped filters, the protagonists fall victims to frequent scrutiny from others and surrender to self-surveillance. The paper reveals that even a surge of fat positive fictions could strengthen weight bias if the texts continue to fill up stories with mere descriptions of the characters’ struggle against existing cultural frameworks.

Keywords: fat studies, body representation, body dysmorphia, size acceptance

Women’s self-worth is tied with their perceptions of attractiveness (Patrick et al. 512); thus, bigger bodies struggle to control their own social and cultural experiences against normative female body perception. Back in the medieval period, fatness was appreciated as, in the time of hardship, fatness meant wealth and prosperity. Even the paintings of the Renaissance period recognize large women’s bodies as strong and beautiful. Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* is a graceful woman with a wide figure and thick neck; also, Titian has idealized *Venus* with a rounded shape. The idea of corseted waists and delicate limbs emerged in the late 19th century; as a result, the changed beauty norm of a slim body put women under severe pressure to dedicate efforts to body modification (Striegel-Morre and Franko 183-191). Social substructures push fat bodies to fit into the prescribed practices where, as Susan Bordo highlights, “bodies are trained, shaped and impressed with the prevailing historical forms” (91). Female physiques receive more attention than males where body image and weight are concerned (Cash et al. 30-37). Consequently, regulations of diet, dress, adult scrutiny, relationship concept, surgery, etc. dictate fat bodies into fitting the thin shape standards. Women bend to these disciplinary activities more



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(Crandall 882-94), not only because they face external pressure but also as they try to extract favorable social meanings concerned with assertive sexual choices, desired social group membership, or to block stigma. With low self-esteem, engendered from negative body image (Berry and Howe 207-218), adolescent women strain to ensure representations of contextually accepted shapes.

Body dissatisfaction, concern over precise part or total shape (Slade 497-502), traps young adults in the rat race for attractive bodies. The discussion of fat disapproval intersects body weight with relationship status, food habits, and surveillance. Instead of absorbing all the sanctions passively, a few characters of the discussed texts in this article stand up for body positivity but no one escapes the lashes of the demanding dominant agenda. In their love and sex lives, the protagonists of the fictions do “not feel empowered to make own emotional and sexual needs known in the context of relationship” (Satinsky et al. 719). People around them have often treated fat bodies as nonsexual or undeserving figures. The eating sessions turn into horror shows with free-flowing inspections from all around as if all fat people devour sandwiches “with Krispy Kreme donuts instead of buns” (West 74). Anxiety over approval makes parents and teens critical of food. Constant surveillance from the self and others torment bigger physical figures and thrash them as unacceptable entities. The cultural body discourse subverts diversity, undermining fat teens as subservient agents in YA literature where the dominant matrix operates varied devices of suppression.

In this article, the word “fat” has been used with the meaning as suggested by Health at Every Size (HAES) and scholars of the field. Wann notes that “O-words” might seem politically accurate, but they simply lay deceptive layers of positivity on belittling interpretations of fatness (xii). Though “fat” appears to be defamatory because of its social use, Lyons assures that the community encourages the use of the word to establish its unbiased social meaning (75-87).

In this study, the texts are selected based on online ratings, comments, recommendations, and selling statistics from popular and reputed websites like Goodreads, Booklist, Library Thing, and Barnes & Noble. The selected novels are Jennifer Niven’s *Holding up the Universe* , Becky Albertalli’s *The Upside of Unrequited* , Julie Murphy’s *Puddin’* , Donna Cooner’s *Skinny* , Gennifer Choldenko’s *If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period* , Julie Anne Peters’ *By The Time You Read This, I’ll Be Dead* , Sandhya Menon’s *There’s Something about Sweetie* , and E.E. Charlton-Trujillo’s *Fat Angie* , all of which have been published between 2007 and 2019 where fat female teens are the central characters.

Relationships and Sexuality

The fat protagonists in the novels under discussion tussle to be in a relationship

of choice with their non-normative body because social biases judge bigger bodies as unattractive and provide inferior exposure to love life. The perception of an unappealing body lowers assertiveness and does not allow the pursuance of a satisfying relationship. Body aesthetics are endowed with potent meaning regarding socially tolerable shapes, which pressurize females into maintaining specific physical characteristics (Stormer et al. 193–202). In Becky Albertalli's *The Upside of Unrequited*, Molly believes fat girls cannot choose a boyfriend as easily as her slim cousin Abby can. Everyone knows that a thin girl can have a “better” boyfriend if she wants. On the other hand, fat girls do not get to choose; they should be happy with whatever they get (Albertalli 129). Daelyn too, without any attachment to any boy in Julie Anne Peters' *By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead*, sounds desperate, feeling as though it is a competition where “every girl in the world had had a boyfriend by then except [her]” (110). As she does not have the opportunity to experience a relationship, asserting her own choice is not an option for her. Cohen and others spot a connection between weight and popularity in school where boys expect thin girls as their peers (69-94). Comparing with her slim twin Cassie, Molly feels she is not fit enough to attract anyone and she needs to “woman up” (Albertalli 12). This feeling certainly puts the definition of a woman within a biased structure, which limits scopes for girls with diverse physical features and thrusts them in the periphery of the “other.” Corresponding to the strict norms pans out as the only path to earn a certificate as a woman. This proposition is a double-edged sword that not only enables the persistence of social coercion but also restricts a teen's love life.

When a boyfriend is a necessary accessory to show off, it becomes a key to smooth social life. Having a boyfriend is a part of the status quo which reveals the worth of a girl in Julie Murphy's *Puddin'*. Millie has heard abundant harsh words for not being able to “manage” a boyfriend. Such weighing makes Ever desperate to get back her ex-boyfriend Jackson's attention in Donna Cooner's *Skinny*. The attention of boys is the recognition of existence for her. It has reached the point when Ever is not concerned whether Jackson thinks well or ill of her; rather, all she cares about is the amount of attention she gets (Cooner 5). When Jackson was thin and unpopular, he was with Ever. His progress towards muscularity has made him a superior option; thus, he has left Ever for another “attractive” girl. Unfortunately, the balance of relationships is attached to the value of body features. As a result, there is a permanent insecurity where fatness wipes out the slightest possibility of relationships entirely. Its effect is not limited to comparisons with slim shapes, but, rather, the extra fat itself is an inadequacy, which dispels other people. This can be seen in Jennifer Niven's *Holding Up the Universe* where Libby believes no boy will touch her, even in a dark room. The number of messages she receives from the eyes around have assured her that she is undesirable. She is convinced that

even the demise of all thin girls in an apocalypse would not bring any boy near her (Niven 56). Libby chooses an imaginary darkness to hide her body, a clear impact of lookism. Without hesitation, she reduces herself to an existence that can only be felt through touches; still, she cannot deem herself worthy of being touched. Hiding her total identity under an imaginary veil does not suffice because her body size stands up as the sole determiner of her essence, which is a barrier to getting a boyfriend.

Even after all the hassle, if a fat girl enters a relationship, it is expected that the boy would be fat too. Harris points out that fatter women are referred to as less attractive, less likely to date, and because of their poorer self-respect, they get fatter, uglier partners (1209-1224). In the fat camp, Millie, from *Puddin'*, dated a few boys and everyone believed that “fat people can only date fat people” (Murphy 308). Even her slim friend Callie admits that she also believes so, as if everyone is meant to be slim (the norm) and those who do not conform to the standard comprise another realm that is separate from the “normal” world. Seeing a fat couple, people heave a sigh of relief thinking, “they’re not contaminating the gene pool with their fatness” (Murphy 308). Cultural hierarchy perceives fat bodies as “the product of their own failed will” and they are understood “as recalcitrant, without conscience or respect for their public duty of controlling their disease” – which is their fatness (Murray *The ‘Fat’ Female Body* 5, 16). A fat couple is a poisonous combination, locked within an imaginary fortified cubicle so that any particle of their anomalous lifestyle does not infiltrate and sabotage the secured standard domain. Willowdean is utterly disgusted in *Puddin'* as she often faces scrutiny regarding her relationship with Bo who is a slim boy. It disturbs people’s judgmental eyes and forces them to figure out “what kind of favor does he owe her to pretend he’s her boyfriend?” (Murphy 308). A large body is an unmatchable insufficiency that must be compensated with something to deserve a thin boy – it cannot be justified in any other way. As will be noticed, Molly’s boyfriend Reid is fat like her. Libby’s boyfriend Jack suffers from prosopagnosia and Daelyn develops a relationship with Santana who is waiting to die from Hodgkin lymphoma. The pattern is repeated through several texts that fat girls cannot have “normal” boyfriends like slim girls.

In the world of constant gazing and judgements, it feels quite challenging to retain a boyfriend when everyone has subscribed to the idea that fat girls having a sexual relationship is unlikely: “Chubby girls don’t get boyfriends, and they definitely don’t have sex. Not in movies – not really – unless it’s supposed to be a joke” (Albertalli 156). Agony stretches to a broader dimension when the sexuality of fat girls is treated as a topic of mockery. In day-to-day discussions, they are dehumanized and their intimacy is dug up as a supply of funny conversation. When Molly goes past boys in school, a few of them make a weird “womp womp” (Albertalli 198) sound implying that Molly’s fat body kills their sexual urge. It drives her to a realm of

anxiety because she can “never get to just be” (Machado). The tension of being a point of gossip and embarrassment deprives her of sexuality. Several theorists have pointed to the tradition in which fat girls have been desexualized (Braziel 292-328; Murray, “Locating Aesthetics”). On the other hand, Molly’s contemplation of having sex with Reid is unimaginable to her relatives and friends because two fat bodies mating does not seem to be an act of normal human beings to them. Instead, it produces an image where two large piles of flesh are just struggling to reach each other properly because of their size. They can strive to carry out usual sexual acts but will end up being a subject of mockery. Similarly in *Puddin’*, Willowdean’s sexual experience is disturbed by the awareness of fatness. Her boyfriend’s intimate touches produce torment instead of pleasure. The most shocking fact is that she does not find anyone else to blame because she is repressed by the burden of self-accusation – “it’s because of me and not him” (Murphy 236). Merrell points out that if society refuses to certify a person’s identity; those feelings of unworthiness affect how they interact with others and conceive other bodies (11). Willowdean admits that she craves the touches but restricts him to block the surge of disturbing feelings. Her body has been alienated from her emotion and it is horrible to discover that she is unable to nurture desirable senses within her own body.

The protagonists of the fictions are often victims of distorted sexual imagination. Fatness is used overwhelmingly to imply corruption of inner character, fragility, silliness, and faults which must be fixed (Rabinowitz 2). There are instances when fat bodies are perceived to have perverse sexual desire. People imagine fat girls as promiscuous characters who have a vulgar sex life. Libby faces a random boy who labels her as a “fat whore” which leads her to think maybe she “should have had sex a thousand times by now” (Niven 45). She is shocked thinking, “Why am I automatically a whore?” (Niven 98). Out of this mess, the rudest irony is that she lives a virgin’s life. Younger notes “in stories, a pattern emerges connecting female sexuality and body image. Promiscuous sexual activity is often linked to a character’s weight and signals the character’s lack of sexual restraint” (4). Even with zero sexual experience, Libby is automatically part of a notoriety based on her large body. In addition, conceiving fat girls as less qualified lures people to target them as easy options. Findings reveal that fat women lack confidence in refusing sex and lower levels of sexual boldness (Wiederman 60-68; Yamamiya et al. 421-27). During Molly’s visit to a bar, a half-drunk boy throws sexually vulgar words to her and claims that to be a compliment for her fat body. He expects Molly to fall for his approach because a girl with a large body must find this effort more than enough. In Michael Flood’s research, participants indicated that they consider fat women as “easy” because of their hopelessness, desire for attention, and insecurity (339-359). These approaches extend to forceful physical abuse sometimes. Toomey and his

gang fantasize about the sexuality of fat girls and assault Daelyn. After satiating their curiosity about “what a fatty paddy looks like naked” (Peters 111), they get away with no consequences. Even Daelyn’s mother suggests that she ignore the incident instead of standing up against it. Fat bodies are such a cheap heap of flesh that their sexuality is often distorted and they are expected to get used to it.

Food Filtering and Adults

The stigma of insatiable hunger is another tool of constant repression that forces the teen characters of the fictions not to eat. Fat people are considered disorderly, wicked, and insatiable; also, their weight is their liability and they are “condemned by the world for being greedy and fat” (Sheppard 26). Their food intake is always under inspection as adults often encourage them to eat less to shed weight. Molly’s grandma explodes with free advice about cutting her food consumption in half, which she believes will help to get a boyfriend. She considers the advice to be a great favor and it will help Molly to release herself from the gulf of unwanted flesh, which has prevented her from being noticed by boys. In Gennifer Choldenko’s *If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period*, Kirsten’s mother is so anxious that she consults a psychiatrist to prescribe a proper diet. Kirsten is encouraged to “play the game” (Choldenko 97) to live a privileged life where she will belong to the elite girl group by conforming to the expected body ideal. Her mother imposes certain food choices on Kirsten to control her weight gain and believes she is playing the role of a savior.

The obsession with body structure can contaminate bonds with adults where diet policing becomes the base of the relationships. Millie’s mother is so obsessed with diet that their bond is built upon discussions of the topic. Millie labels it as their “love language” (Murphy 108) that constructs their connection. From an early age, her eating habit is monitored. She has not grown up with the liberty of exploring foods based on taste and desire. Food is not an item to treat the tongue anymore; rather, it is an indicator of “points systems and calorie charts” (Murphy 108). The desperate persuasion of an appealing body shape has killed the attraction, essence, and taste of food. Practices of the parents and children’s bonding with them correlate to the perception of diet and body maintenance (Hill et al. 346-8; Offer et al. 281-91). Like Millie, Ever has a dieting nexus with her mother as well. Though she was nine by then and did not have a fat body, her mother had imagined her future and joined Weight Watchers together. In Charlton-Trujillo’s *Fat Angie*, Angie’s mother also directly prohibits her from eating. Her mother forces her to stay hungry and reminds her that “no one is ever going to love you if you stay fat” (Charlton-Trujillo 36). The mother’s concern is not limited to Angie’s love life; moreover, she feels embarrassed about her daughter’s body size in front of her relatives. In public functions, she is afraid to be judged as an irresponsible mother when Angie tries to eat a full plate. She almost pleads to Angie to skip dinner as “people have been

staring” (Charlton-Trujillo 69). Surveillance and pressure extend from family and relatives to the public sphere when Sweetie’s mother forbids her to talk about food in Sandhya Menon’s *There’s Something about Sweetie*. To avoid public humiliation, her mother encourages Sweetie to pretend to dislike food so “people will assume ‘Sweetie has’ thyroid problems” (Menon 50). As it stands, the disease is much more acceptable and justifiable than fatness because adults can welcome a disease but the “disgrace” of a hungry fat body punctures their bond in the relationship.

Forced diet is the external pressure that contradicts voluntary choices of life and drives a person to binge eating which causes eating disorders. Kirsten does not bother about her fat body; all she cares about is having the foods of her taste. She affirms that it is “every girl’s dream” (Cholodenko 79) to choose favorite food amounts and items. A woman who likes to eat “spends most of her time thinking about food, anticipating eating, planning her next meal or snack, and, more often than not, worrying about what effect the food she eats has on her weight” (McQuillan15). Unless there are forces to restrict their choices, they are not eager to fall into that cage. Kirsten has to steal food from her own house to fight hunger. Her mother acts as a constant curator who guards Kirsten’s body against unwanted food items. Food restrictions at home forces her to breach codes at the office when she has to sneak out for snacks. Ever’s stepsister believes she is not desperate enough to shape her body. She points out that Ever is not “in a wheelchair or something like that,” so she has the opportunity to exercise and not “have to be fat” (Murphy 156). Ever has to hide food as well to avoid the stain that “fat girl is going to devour the big chocolate sundae with the sprinkles on top” (Cooner 23). The problem with food restrictions is that it causes binge eating disorders, and the person ends up consuming more food within a short period to compensate. Both Kirsten and Ever face restraints from family and they indulge in practices that are akin to symptoms of binge eating. Hudson and others point out that 3%-5% of American men and women are affected by this eating disorder, which is much higher than anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (348-58). This is responsible for various physical issues along with psychological problems like intense social isolation, depression, and sadness.

Body Image and Surveillance

People consider weight as a fundamentally wicked feature and it is widely believed that denouncing fat bodies is a way to save them from downfall. Along with that, the role of gender identity in a social framework also pulls strings to impose certain meanings on body image (Wertheim et al 345-355). Millie’s mother, having spent one year in Daisy Ranch and shed forty pounds, believes that her life has changed. Consequently, though Millie is quite positive about fatness, her mother keeps pushing her to join a fat camp. In aerobic classes at church, Millie faces people who believe keeping the body slim is a part of serving God. As the body is a temple

and gift from God, He likes to see the devotees treat the gift properly. Millie's fat body represents her as a "bad Christian" (Murphy 384) who has failed to serve God because she has neglected her own body because "fatness 'means' excess of desire, of bodily urges not controlled, of immoral, lazy, sinful habits" (Farrell 10). Religious practice combines with communal belief in knocking fat bodies off the edge. Besides, Angie's mother pressurizes her with the threat that if she does not shed twenty-nine pounds, she would not buy her any new pants. She even refuses to hang up Angie's class picture because of her obvious double chin. The woman finds it hard to recognize Angie as her daughter publicly because the picture, "makes [her] look so wide" (Charlton-Trujillo 18). Cecilia Hartley argues that western cultural morals believe "beautiful equals thin" (64) for a woman's body. Briella encourages Ever to have surgery to get rid of the fat body though she is well aware of the risk of the blood clot and other threats. Ever feels humiliated by the comment on her body when her stepsister suggests that taking a death risk in surgery would be better than living with fatness (Cooner 33). As Weinstein puts it, "The pressure to be thin is overwhelming. The devastation that is happening to kids because of weight is ever-growing" (11). Sweetie's mother, on the other hand, promptly turns down Sweetie's dating offer saying, "Sweetie is simply not at Ashish's level right now" (Menon 56) because her daughter is fat and the boy is slim. The cultural paradigm concerning which bodies are to be appreciated and which are to be criticized is strongly rooted in mass conscience. Thus, the fat characters are constantly hammered with the prescriptions of "better" life in their familial and social sphere.

Dress is a powerful expression in communication and the lack of desired dress options engender low self-esteem and self-surveillance in the selected fictions. Molly rates herself ill-suited because she is not appropriate to the dress trial of "single-digit sizes" (Albertalli 69) like Cassie or Mina. She invests plenty of time sorting out how to camouflage her size with the layers of clothes. Kirsten also detects restrictions in dress choice because fat bodies possess nothing much to show. She envies Rory, who is in a tight dress "with a lot more skin showing – the kind of clothes fat girls can't wear" (Choldenko 123). Aunt Tina also certifies, "one has to have the body for" revealing dresses (Menon 48). All bodies are not worthy of attractive dresses; therefore, ineligible for a similar amount of attention in the public eye. Virgie Tovar recognizes that "fashion has so much to do with freedom and visibility" – the freedom to "feel good" and to be visible (177-78). Thus, large bodies are treated as a minority group that is stereotyped to have similar costume choices, and the production system does not care to meet the customized requirements of these physiques.

Thin bias influences people to maintain surveillance of their own bodies. Bouson debates that women adopt fat-phobia where to feel fat is to feel embarrassed (106).

In the bar, Molly panics after taking off the jacket because, with its removal, she unravels all of her insecurities in front of Will. The thought of fat visibility drowns her in the pond of fear that Will might reject her. The domination does not start from “physical restraint and coercion ... but through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms” (Bordo 27). Kirsten finds her “giggle and the extra forty pounds” (Choldenko 21) as barriers to be the most attractive girl in her class. She even avoids mirrors, refusing to look at her own body so that it becomes easier to believe that her fat version has never existed. From the tension of fatness, Ever has grown a secondary personality named Skinny that whispers in her brain “the world doesn’t care if you’re kind and good. It only cares that you’re fat. Nothing else matters” (Cooner 12). The anxiety over her body image has given birth to a distorted alternative consciousness that continually surveils her physical structure.

Self-surveilled docile bodies often indulge in constant comparison with other slim figures and are locked in permanent unhappiness. On the very first encounter with Mina, Molly notices only the physical details of her body. When she describes her twin sister Cassie, again she focuses only on her bodily features. She strongly believes that her own “body is secretly all wrong” (Albertalli 48). Molly becomes unsatisfied with her cleavage when she compares herself with a model from a magazine and concludes that it makes her body unattractive to the boys. Similarly, Ever is enthralled seeing the “confidence of beauty” (Cooner 12) of the senior cheerleaders when they walk past her with their slim waists. The flamboyant shoulder and backs of the girls almost immobilize her. Her craving to have a similar body for “a day ... an hour ... a minute” (Cooner 12) shows how deeply she adores those shapes. Though she has similar boots, she ditches them because they would not fit in the same way as they fit Briella’s small calves. The uneasiness from the comparisons activates fountains of low self-esteem that choke these characters’ confidence.

The protagonists often surrender to the pressures and take desperate measures to shape their bodies according to norms. They often “come to understand that their happiness must be addressed by action on their part” which drives them to “the exercise of strength and determination” (Glessner et al. 120). Millie has spent two months of the last eight summers in a fat camp meeting her family’s demand. In her account to the psychiatrist, Ever reveals that she has been with Weight Watchers and fat camp since middle childhood. She intentionally skips details of “the cabbage diet or the lemon water diet or the cayenne pepper diet, because that’s just crazy” (Cooner 50). Though the doctor warns of all the life-threatening risks including “infection, suture leaks, and blood clots, changes to the digestive tract which may cause ulcers, bowel obstruction, or reflux” (Cooner 53), Ever decides to endanger her life through obesity surgery because she is desperate to shed body fat, which has taken over her life, making her permanently wary. Body dissatisfaction outweighs

the risks of perilous surgeries. Internalization of thinness as an ideal puts the protagonists in an antagonistic relationship with their own body which drives them to opt for desperate transformations.

Conclusion

Historically, female bodies have always been a part of the cultural hierarchy in defining feminine identity. As a cultural component, YA novels possess tensions of femininity construction and contribute to the social portrayal of normative and non-normative appearance. In the last few years, fictions, not being afraid to hit weight bias, are addressing the fat positivity issue. In *Puddin'* and *The Upside of Unrequited*, the protagonists do not retire after describing the experiences of attacks and struggles; rather, they push for their desired choices, countering the pre-determined concepts of their family, friends, and classmates. The characters respond in Marilyn Wann's way by changing their attitude instead of their weight (ix). In *Skinny*, after losing 117 pounds in a desperate gastric bypass surgery, Ever understands that the real change happens when she starts to believe in herself – it is in the mind, not in the body. Losing weight does not free a woman from the trap of being seen primarily through their bodies; instead, weight loss removes the stigma from one individual but leaves it in place for others (Couser 34).

Still, there are holes to fill in the plots of the YA fictions. The psychological maps of the characters need more exposure and exploration rather than their physical shapes. Moreover, no character leads their day-to-day life without being concerned about fatness. Either they are under stress about their body or the people around them press heavily for a transformation. Be it fat positive fictions or not, no one comes up with an atmosphere where fatness is not identified as a notable feature. If fictions keep on portraying such an environment where fat stigma is necessary, fat-shaming thoughts will have auto-promotion. The authors need to treat slim boyfriends for the fat girls more casually without making it a gesture of favor. Instead of associating nastiness, social constructions of fat people's sexuality need to possess a charming ambiance. As it undermines other essential identities, authors should check the tendency to focus on body size as the key marker when introducing a character. Authors certainly have the challenge to resolve the automatic expectation of a thin protagonist which Beth Younger has mentioned, if there is no description of weight, the "reader assumes a 'normal' weight" (5) – namely a thin body. The presence of a bigger body in a suppressing cultural matrix is not enough anymore for body positivity; therefore, the characters should get the space and scope to exhibit their achievements and casual daily lives like women of any other size. As an imperative artifact, the fat fictions have a responsibility to challenge collective consciousness instead of filling up the story with the details of an individual's transformation journey. Comprehensive positioning of the characters like Molly, Sweetie, and

Millie at the helm of mainstream YA literature can be the one step forward in fat normalization.

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I am Keats: Kazi Nazrul Islam and the Romantic Poet

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Abstract

In a letter to Qazi Motahar Hossain, Kazi Nazrul Islam described how close he felt to Keats. He even feared that his sore throat was a sign of tuberculosis and he would succumb to it as Keats did. He was also in love, like Keats, with a woman who did not reciprocate his love. However, it was not only in his personal letters that Nazrul talked about Keats, but also in his essays. It is possible that the inspiration for “Amar Sundar” (My Beauty) came from Keats’ oft-quoted line. This paper will examine selected letters and essays by Nazrul to show how he appropriated the youngest English Romantic in his writings.

Keywords: Qazi Motahar Hossain, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Keats, letters, essays, “Amar Sundar”

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) had a disturbed schooling. He was in and out of school, went to different schools at different times, and, in 1917, when he was supposed to sit for his matriculation examination, he dropped out to join the newly recruited 49th Bengal. Surprisingly, for a restless young man who had not had regular schooling, he was widely read in the English Romantics. In a letter to Qazi Motahar Hossain, Kazi Nazrul Islam describes how akin he feels to Keats. He fears his sore throat is a sign of tuberculosis and he will succumb to it like Keats did. He is also hopelessly in love, like Keats, with a woman who does not reciprocate his love. However, it was not only in his personal letters that he talked about Keats, but also in his essays. Nazrul had closely read Keats’ poetry – at least “Endymion,” “To a Grecian Urn,” and “Ode to a Nightingale.” In his essay, “Bartaman Bishwa Sahitya” (World Literature Today), he drew upon Shelley, Keats, and Whitman as poles to talk about contemporary European literature. It is also possible that the inspiration for “Amar Sundar” (My Beauty) came from Keats’ oft-quoted line. Though he has been compared to Byron, selected writings of Nazrul will show how he empathized with and appropriated the youngest English Romantic.

The Nazrul Institute compilation of Nazrul’s letters includes eight written to Qazi Motahar Hossain,¹ who was at that time teaching in the Department of Mathematics at the University of Dhaka (then spelled Dacca). It is possible that Qazi Motahar Hossain got to know Nazrul through his involvement with Muslim Sahitya Samaj, a group of Bengali-Muslim intellectuals, who believed in tolerance and communal



harmony and initiated a movement called *Buddhir Mukti Andolon* (Freedom of Thought Movement). In February 1927 and February 1928, Nazrul attended the first and second annual conference of the Dhaka Muslim Sahitya Samaj. Sometime during his visit to Dhaka, Nazrul met Fazilatunessa² – along with other bright students such as Buddhadev Bose and Ranu Shome, who later married Buddhadev Bose. Fazilatunessa was studying mathematics, something which puzzled Nazrul. Infatuated by this vivacious and brilliant young woman, Nazrul wrote several letters about her to Qazi Motahar Hossain. In a letter dated February 25, 1928, he writes to Qazi Motahar Hossain: “I cannot tolerate that a woman – an epitome of beauty – should fall prey to mathematics. A woman should be a goddess of beauty. Why should she guard the store of mathematics?” (15-16).

In another letter to Qazi Motahar Hossain, dated March 8 1928, Nazrul compares Fazilatunessa’s indifference to him to Fanny Brawne’s indifference to Keats. (We know now that this was not really so, but it was believed at the time that Fanny Brawne did not return Keats’ love). Nazrul says that he thinks about Shelley and Keats all the time. To Motahar Hossain Nazrul writes,

Ar’Ov, Avgvi i t³ tkuj tK wKUm tK GtZv Kti Abyfe Ki wQ tKb? ej tZ cvi? wKUan&Gi wCqy d’wbtK tj Lv Zui KweZv cto gtb nt’Q, thb G KweZv AwgB wj tL tMwQ | wKUan&Gi Otmi -t_0U0 ntqWj N Avi ZtZB gj j I tktl N Aek Zvi tmvm’nvU’wK bv tK ej te! N KE’C0 vn ti vtM AwgI fMwQ XvKv t_ tK Gtm Aewa, i³ I DVtQ gvtS gvtS N Avi gtb nt’Q Awg thb wKUan& tm tKvb d’wbi w’i æY wlogZvq nqtZv ev Avgvi I etKi Pvcav i³ tZgwb Kti tKvbw b tkl Sj tK DtV Avgvq wetaqi eti i gtZv Kti i wOtq w tq hte | (109)

[Why do I feel Shelley and Keats coursing through my blood? Can you tell me why? I was just reading the poem written by Keats to his beloved Fanny. I felt that I myself had written that poem! Keats was diagnosed with a “sore throat”³ and he died from that, but who knows if the source of that was the heart? Ever since I left Dacca, I have also been suffering from a burning throat. Sometimes, I have been coughing blood – and I feel that I am Keats! Just like him, maybe I have been hurt by the cruelty of “some Fanny” causing this blood in my heart to ooze out in a last attempt to make me colourful as a groom.] (18-19)

While we do not know which poem Nazrul was referring to when he says he was reading the poem written by Keats to Fanny, it is quite possible that he was referring to “Bright Star.” Keats’ poem apostrophizes the Pole Star, wishing that he could be as steadfast as it. However, he does not want to be distant, removed, but pillowed upon his “fair love’s ripening breast.” Thus he will live forever or else swoon to death.

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art –
 Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
 And watching, with eternal lids apart,
 Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
 The moving waters at their priestlike task
 Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
 Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
 Of snow upon the mountains and the moors –
 No – yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
 Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
 To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
 Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
 Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
 And so live ever – or else swoon to death.

In his letter to Fanny Brawne, dated July 3, 1819, Keats juxtaposes love and death which contradict each other in the last line of the poem: "I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute." Keats ends his letter by imaging Fanny as Venus, the evening star, the star of the goddess of love, rather than as the Pole Star – which is the "steadfast star": "I will imagine you Venus tonight and pray, pray, pray to your star like a Heathen. Your's ever, fair Star."

In his letter to Qazi Motahar Hossain, however, Nazrul images himself as the star: "Remember to look at the sky and think that the star which is the farthest and shines the brightest is me. Give it my name." Nevertheless, Nazrul's imagined identification with Keats and the juxtaposition of love and death which may be seen in Keats' poem and letter are apparent in Nazrul's letter as well: "gZi#K GZ K#i g#b Kwii #Kb Rvb? I #K AvR Avqvi me#P#q my` i g#b n#`Q etj | g#b n#`Q, R#e#b th Avqviq wdiwi tq w` tj , gi #Y tm Avqviq ei Y K#i tb#e|" (109) [You know why I think of death all the time? It's because it seems most beautiful to me. I keep thinking that the one who has rejected me in life, will be the one to accept me in death. (19)]

Nazrul's letter ends with him saying that he constantly dreams of Keats and Fanny Brawne: "t#Kewj wKU#n#K `c#d` LwQ N Zvi cv#k `w#t#q d#wb e#Db| cv_#i i g#Zv|" (113) [I have been constantly dreaming of Keats, and standing next to him is Fanny Brawne. Like a stone (19)].

There are eighteen letters by Keats to Fanny Brawne dating from July 3, 1819 to sometime in May 1829, but only one extant letter from Nazrul to Fazilatunnessa. The letter is undated, but would approximately have been written around the third week of March. In this letter, he does not talk about his love for her, but wishes her

Eid Mubarak and wants to know if she would allow him to slightly edit a story she had sent to *Saogat*. He praises her as an extraordinary woman while he is an ordinary poet. He tells her that he has chosen his best poems and songs for a collection titled *Sanchita* and would like to dedicate it to her. At the end, though, Nazrul did not dedicate it to her. Apart from this extant letter, Nazrul wrote a long poem for her. Dated March 20, it was initially titled “Rahashyamayi” (The Mysterious Girl) but was published as “Tumi More Bhuliyachho” (You Have Forgotten Me). According to Qazi Motahar Hossain, in “Smripote Nazrul” (Memories of Nazrul), it was sent to him along with a letter.⁴ Later, when she was leaving for England, he wrote “Barsha-Biday.”

Fazilatunnessa did not return Nazrul’s love as far as we know. First of all, he was a married man. It is true that, in Islam, a man may marry more than one wife. However, it is possible that the brilliant young woman did not think much of the poet. She was the first Muslim woman to be awarded the MA degree from Dacca University. The editor of *Saogat* – to which she occasionally sent articles and stories – organized a reception for her. Shortly after completing her MA, she went to England for doctoral studies. However, she had to return for family reasons and could not complete her PhD. She took up a position at Bethune College – where she had studied earlier before getting admission to the University of Dacca. She became Head of the Department of Mathematics and then Vice Principal. When the country was partitioned in 1947, she moved to Dacca where she became Principal of Eden College. Years later when rumors arose of a love affair with Nazrul, she was very upset.

It was not only in his personal letters that Nazrul thought of Keats. Despite his active rebellion against the British Raj, he could relish English poetry – and the American poetry of Walt Whitman. In “Bartaman Bishwa Sahitya” (World Literature Today),⁵ Nazrul brings in Shelley, Keats, and Whitman to discuss early twentieth century literature. The only non-Europeans he includes are Rabindranath Tagore and Yonejiro Noguchi, a Japanese writer. It is unlikely that Nazrul could have read the more than thirty writers from Ireland, Russia, Norway, Sweden, England, Spain, Poland, France, Italy, and Japan he mentions in the essay. In fact, he does make an occasional error. Nevertheless, his comments are apt and it is remarkable because he did not have the resources that we have today. It is true that he could easily have picked up the names of Nobel Prize winners, but how did he know the Japanese Noguchi well enough to quote part of Buson’s haiku which Noguchi quotes?⁶ Many of the writers whom Nazrul names, though they won the Nobel Prize for Literature, are unknown and little read today. Conspicuous by his absence in the list of contemporary writers is T. S. Eliot who had written his masterpiece *The Wasteland* in 1922, but did not receive his Nobel Prize till 1948.

Nazrul begins his essay by talking about two major types of writers: the dreamers and the children of the earth, with their feet on the ground. The dreamers are the ones who soar to the heavens, and Nazrul uses the image of the bird – an image which was common to both Shelley and Keats. However, Nazrul also includes Milton in this group – most possibly because he had not read Milton.

eZgVb wekfmwntZ'i w tK GKUz fVj Kti t`Ltj meM0tPvtL cto Zvi `yU ifc| GK ifc tm tkj xi Skylark-Gi gtZv, wge'tbi Birds of Paradise-Gi gtZv GB awj -gVj b cW_exi E'taV D'tV tM'P mUvb Kti, Zvi PiY KL'tbv ai vi gwU u'kKti bv; tKewj E'taV'N Av'ti v E'taV'D'tV t'cbtj vtKi Mvb tkv'bvq| GBLvtb tm t'cb-wenvi x|(165)

[Any observer who takes a close look at literature in the world today is bound to be struck by the fact that it has two distinct aspects. On the one hand, like Shelley's Skylark or Milton's Birds of Paradise, it is eternally soaring upwards to explore a heaven which has no affinity with the earth's grime and dirt, celebrating a world of fantasy and dreams. (184)]

Milton did not write about birds of paradise. Kazi Nazrul Islam perhaps used the phrase because he understood that the word “paradise” in the title of Milton's epic suggested a world beyond the confines of this earth. Nazrul's contrast was between the ethereal poet and the down-to-earth poet, the dreamer and the doer. Thus, he goes on to say that the other type of poet clings to the earth and cannot leave it behind.

Avi GK ifc tm GB gwUj cW_ex'tK Acvi ggZvq AvK'to at'i v'tK N AUKvi w'bk'tZ, f'tqi i v'tZ wenej w'ki thgb Kti Zvi gv'tK R'wotq v'tK N Zi æj Zv thgb Kti mnm'w'kKo w t'q ai Yx-gvZ'tK at'i v'tK N t'Zgw'v Kti | GBLvtb tm gwUj `j vj |

[On the other hand, it has the semblance of an offspring of Mother Earth herself, clinging to its parents in the way a frightened child seeks the comfort of its mother's bosom in the dark, or the way the myriad roots of a plant or tree appear to hold the soil in a deep, affectionate embrace. (184)]

Nazrul sees Yeats and Tagore along with Noguchi on the side of the dreamers with Gorky,⁷ Johan Bojer,⁸ Bernard Shaw,⁹ Jacinto Benavente y Martínez¹⁰ on the other side. Gorky and Bojer, who wrote principally about the lives of poor farmers and fishermen, did not win the Nobel Prize though both were nominated several times.

The essay goes on to range over writers, most of whom had won the Nobel Prize. Nazrul speaks about several other Russian writers – Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Pushkin – as well as writers from Sweden, Norway, Italy, Spain, France, Poland. He also attempts to bring in the Ramayana, the Upanishads, and the Vedas. He sees the war between the dreamers and the realists as the war between the followers of Rama and the followers of Ravana. He sees some writers as part-dreamers and part-

realists. He suggests that there will be another cataclysm and describes the fascists with Kipling leading them in the vanguard.

Nazrul was perhaps doing too much – sometimes apparently even contradicting himself. He speaks about the rise of the revolutionary spirit in writers, brings in Marx and notes how Marx turned sterile stone into a Taj Mahal. However, before Nazrul attempts to embrace contemporary world literature and ancient Indian writing in one, he brings in two poets, one from England the other from America, and holds one up against the other. Thus he says, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” (166). [Keats spoke for the dreamers when he wrote: “A thing of beauty is a joy ever” (“Endymion”) or when he said: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” (186).] He sees Whitman as a child of the earth and quotes him.

Not Physiognomy alone –

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,
The modern man I sing. (166)

The quotation from Whitman seems quite accurate, but a comparison with the actual lines will reveal that Nazrul was quoting from memory. The actual lines from “Song of Myself” read:

One’s-Self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse, I say the
Form
complete is worthier far,
The Female equally with the Male I sing.

Scholars of Romantic literature debate whether the line “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” is spoken by the poet or the urn. If it is spoken by the urn, beauty and truth might not be synonymous with each other. However, like most persons who quote the line, Nazrul seems to have taken it as if it was the message of the poet.

As Nazrul ends the essay, on an almost prophetic note with another war in the offing, he imagines himself wafted back to a world of dreams, a world where the dreamer awaits “a glorious new day” as he listens in his dream “to the songs of Persian nightingales, the flutes of Arabian camel drivers or the voices of veiled Turkish maidens” (191).

In Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale” too, the speaker wonders whether he is awake or

asleep: “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?” The dreamer in Nazrul’s essay hears the sound of fighting and calls out a line from Keats’ poem. “ZL t̄b̄v P̄vi c̄v̄k̄ K̄v̄ v̄-t̄Q̄w̄Ōp̄i t̄n̄w̄j -t̄L̄j v̄ P̄t̄j | Awḡ -t̄c̄ī t̄N̄v̄i B̄ ēt̄j D̄w̄ - ‘Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!’” (170).

Nazrul in his *Bandhon Hara* and *Kubelika* discussed Rabindranath, suggesting his own shortcomings in comparison to Gurudev. In this essay, Nazrul saw Rabindranath as a dreamer – on the side of Keats – but at the end of the essay, as the sleeper-dreamer, he himself becomes the poet in Keats’s poem.

The line “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” perhaps also adumbrates Nazrul’s editorial “Amar Shundor” (My Beauty) which appeared in *Nabajug* on June 2, 1942. It is a very personal piece, tracing Nazrul’s life, describing its different phases, happy and sad, expressing the deep grief he felt at the death of his son Bulbul and how he turned to religion after it to find solace, his anger at the Creator for having given him this beautiful intelligent child and then taken him away before his fourth birthday. He talks about the illness of his beloved wife Pramila.¹¹ In other words, Nazrul was talking about the beauty and truth of his life – terrible though it might be. There is no reference to Keats here, but the idea expressed in the line that Nazrul had quoted in “Bartaman Bishwa Sahitya” ten years earlier must have been in his mind as he summed up what his life had been. It was one of the last pieces that Nazrul wrote, for later that year he grew so ill that he had to be admitted to a mental hospital for treatment.

Notes

1. Qazi Motahar Hossain (1897-1981) joined the newly established University of Dacca when it was founded in 1921 as demonstrator of physics. He was at the time still studying MA at Dacca College. In 1923, he was promoted to Assistant Lecturer.
2. Fazilatunessa, later Fazilatunessa Zoha (1905-1976), was the first Muslim woman student of the University of Dacca.
3. Nazrul transliterated the English phrase in Bangla.
4. “Smripote Nazrul” was published in Nazrul Academy Patrika in 1976. See Rafiqul Islam, *Biography of Kazi Nazrul Islam*. Translated by Nashid Kamal. Kabi Nazrul Institute, 2014, p. 336.
5. The essay appeared in the journal *Pratika* in 1932 and again the next year in *Bulbul*. See Nazruler Prabandha Samagra. Kabi Nazrul Institute, 2019, p. 265.
6. In this piece from “The Spirit of Japanese Poetry,” Noguchi was quoting a haiku by Buson which reads in full “Oh, how cool – / The sound of the bell/ That leaves the bell itself.” *Selected English Writings: An East-West Literary Assimilation Vol. 2*, edited by Yoshinobu Hakutani. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992, p. 75.
7. Alexei Maximovich Peshkov (March 28, 1868 - June 18, 1936), primarily known as Maxim Gorky, was a Russian writer and political activist. Though he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature five times, he did not receive the prize.

8. Johan Bojer (March 6, 1872 - July 3, 1959) was a Norwegian novelist and dramatist, who wrote principally about the lives of poor farmers and fishermen. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature five times.
9. George Bernard Shaw (July 26, 1856 - November 2, 1950), with his more than sixty plays, was the leading dramatist of his generation. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925.
10. Jacinto Benavente y Martínez (August 12, 1866 - July 14, 1954) was a Spanish dramatist. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1922.
11. Pramila fell ill in 1939, and died in 1962.

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Language and Applied Linguistics

Modes of Media: A Socio-Semiotic Analysis of Bangladeshi Television News Reports

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to discuss the features and functions of the semiotic resources used in Bangladeshi television reports. Although the verbal mode is usually considered one of the primary modes of communication, all communication is essentially multimodal in nature. Television news reports are a combination of such multiple styles, for they deliver a meaning by integrating various linguistic and non-linguistic modes. Linguistic modes such as words, sounds, sentences, and so on are used in the speech of the report. On the other hand, non-linguistic modes such as moving images, background music, colors, and elements alike are chosen to complement the linguistic modes. Therefore, it is important to investigate how these modes are combined and the role they play in the process of meaning-making. This research analyzes three Bangladeshi television news reports using Michael Halliday's theoretical framework of metafunctions to understand how these multiple modes are combined to make complete meaning. From this research, it is evident that the linguistic and non-linguistic modes used in television reports require a careful selection to be aligned with the professional variety of broadcast journalism.

Keywords: multimodality, television, news, socio-semiotic, Bengali

1. Introduction

Television news is a multimodal presentation. Different semiotic resources such as moving images/video clips, background music, speech, reporter's voice/intonation, still images, written text, and other modes of communication are integrated professionally by the news reporting teams to deliver a news report. Although speech mode and written text modes receive much attention, a complete meaning of a presentation is created by combining both linguistic and nonlinguistic modes. Norris (2004) argues in support of a similar idea saying, "While language certainly is a very important mode, it is not always the case that it plays the primary communicative role" (p. 17). Hence, the meaning of the news report is created by assembling different semiotic resources that convey the intended meaning in a particular social context. All these modes have their own unique functions and cannot be replaced by another mode of communication. "Primacy of the mode of language – just like any other mode – may fluctuate at any given moment in any given interaction" (Norris, 2004, p. 17). Therefore, this paper discusses both linguistic and nonlinguistic resources used in composing television news reports.



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News is published by print media such as newspapers, magazines and also by electronic media such as television, radio, and so on, otherwise known as modes of 'Broadcast Journalism'. Print media and broadcast media have their own ways of presenting news and language plays a crucial role in those news presentations. In other words, "Broadcast journalism offers us a peculiar set of practices and opportunities for thinking about the relationship between language and journalism" (Smith and Higgins, 2013, p. 25). Bangladeshi television channels regularly telecast news and apparently the television news reporters have a similar way of using Bengali language to present their news reports. Language use can vary in different professions as the professionals belong to a certain profession and thus, may choose to use a certain variety of the language. Some professions require people associated with it to know the jargon used in that particular profession.

Professional languages are known as social dialects. Wardhaugh (2010) defines, "a social dialect would be a variety associated with a specific social class or group which marks off that class or group from other classes or groups" (p. 137). In journalism, language use is considered a vital component because along with the careful selection of the content of a news report, a major skill all journalists should possess involves how they deliver a certain news report. "Language is, after all, the most essential tool of the journalist, and it is one of the marks of the exceptional journalist that they are able to use language with creativity and style" (Smith and Higgins, 2013, p. 1). Bangladeshi journalists both in print and broadcast media use the standard variety of Bengali language to deliver the news. Cotter (2010) defines standard variety as "A standard language means that one form or a variety of usage is preferred, privileged, and expected to be used in particular social contexts and discourse situations, and is considered the norm to aspire to" (p. 188). It means that concepts like prestige and acceptance are associated with the standard variety of a language. "Print and broadcast media are concerned with maintaining their own style rules as well as upholding the mainstream language-use standards of society; copy editors (or sub-editors) actively aim to "preserve" the language" (Cotter, 2010, p. 187).

Although the standard variety is widely used in the profession of journalism, some other variations are equally noticeable in the language use. Bengali language has a standard variety that is predominantly used in academic, official, and other formal contexts. There are nonstandard colloquial varieties of Bengali as well which are accepted in different informal settings but mainstream/national level journalism tends to avoid regional accents (Smith and Higgins, 2013). Wardhaugh (2010) says, "All languages exhibit internal variation, that is, each language exists in a number of varieties and is in one sense the sum of those varieties" (p. 23). In relation to that, it can be stated that the language of the Bangladeshi television news reports sounds distinctive due to lexical choice, phonological features, sentence structures and

other linguistic qualities. As Ferguson (1994) pointed out, “People participating in recurrent communication situations tend to develop similar vocabularies, similar features of intonation, and characteristic bits of syntax and phonology that they use in these situations” (p. 20). Similarly, a rhythm in the delivery of the news reports is quite prominent which makes them sound distinctive from regular spoken varieties. Therefore, the minimal units of speech mode such as sounds, words, sentence structures are carefully selected for the speech of a news report. Here, the speech mode itself is a combination of multiple modes and reporters apply these modes to add a rhythmic attribute to the language of the reports. Consequently, the socio-semiotic analysis of the dataset aims at describing the semiotic resources used by the reporters to create and deliver messages to the Bangladeshi audience. This paper will use Michael Halliday’s (1978) theoretical framework of metafunctions to analyze the functions of the semiotic resources used in news reports including an in-depth analysis of the lexical choices, phonological and syntactic features of the language of the television news reports.

2. Method

For the socio-semiotic analysis of television news reports, three news reports have been chosen based on their lengths and availability in public domain. These three reports are on the same topic, *Pahela Baishakh* (the first day of Bengali New Year) which had been aired on three different Bangladeshi television channels. A qualitative method has been used to conduct this research. The three channels are Bangladeshi private television channels namely: Channel I, Channel 24 and ATN Bangla News. Data 1, 2 and 3 were aired on April 14, 2018 on Channel I, Channel 24, and ATN Bangla News respectively. The news reports are available on YouTube. The data is in Bengali and available in public domain. The links to data and data transcription can be found in the appendix.

3. Socio-semiotic Analysis

The theory of metafunctions by Michael Halliday (1978) was originated to unveil the functions of language. Halliday (1978) discussed three metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunction in his book *Language as Social Semiotic*. He also said that when linguistic varieties are analyzed using these three metafunctions, it explains humans’ varied linguistic behaviour in different contexts. *Ideational metafunction* refers to the subject matter/topic of the semiotic resources. *Interpersonal metafunction* points to the relationship between the people involved in encoding or decoding the semiotic resource. And *Textual metafunction* denotes the modalities used to communicate the subject matter. In the preceding section, it has already been mentioned that the data will be analyzed using Halliday’s theoretical framework of metafunction.

This theory was also adopted by Kress and Leeuwen (2006) in analyzing multimodal representations. In this paper, the dataset will be analyzed using the theory of metafunctions to understand how multiple semiotic resources are combined together to convey a particular message in a particular social context.

3.1 Ideational metafunction

As the three data are on the same topic *Pahela Baishakh*, the ideational metafunction or the subject matter of the news reports is *Pahela Baishakh*. The reporters are narrating different events that take place on the first day of Bengali New Year. Although this topic does not seem technical/professional, for the news reporting teams it is a professional task. In order to portray the complete picture of the Bengali New Year celebration, they had to collect relevant information, stock images, moving images, interviews with people, and finally prepare the speech to deliver it to the audience.

3.2 Interpersonal metafunction

These reports are produced by the reporters and their teams for the Bangladeshi audience. The interpersonal metafunction is about the relationship between the reporter (producer) and the audience (receiver). This is a professional communication where the audience is the client, and it is only understandable that reporters prepare their reports with a wider range of audiences in mind. Thus, the relationship between the reporter and the audience here is formal. It is also visible in the language use of the reports. The use of the second-person deictic expression *apni* (you) usually refers to a formal relation. Deixis here refers to “pointing via language. Any linguistic form used to accomplish this ‘pointing’ is called a deictic expression” (Yule, 1996, p. 9). It is a linguistic device that is used to point at location (spatial deixis), people (person deixis), and time (temporal deixis). In some languages, person deixis also points at social status, the relationship between participants and so on which is known as social deixis, which refers to “honorification and any indicators of social identity or status relations among participants and contexts” (Fanks, 2011, p. 315). The use of honorifics is noticed in the dataset. In Data 2, the reporter uses *hajir hon hajaro manush* (thousands of people attended the celebration). *Hon* is an honorific.

In Data 3, it is noted that the reporter has used *shamil hon* (joined the celebration), *nechechchen*, *geyechchen* (people enjoyed the celebration by dancing and singing), *matiye rakhen* (entertained). *Hon*, *nechechchen*, *geyechchen* and *rakhen* here are honorifics. As it is mentioned earlier that honorifics mark relationships between participants; in Bengali, honorifics use of *apni* generally alludes to formal relationships.

3.3 Textual metafunction

Television news reports are multimodal in nature and are a combination of linguistic and non-linguistic modes. Therefore, the textual metafunction analysis will discuss

the linguistic and non-linguistic modes used in television reports. Lexical choices, phonological features, and syntactic structures have also been discussed as an integral part of the linguistic mode analysis.

3.3.1. *Lexical choices*

3.3.1.1. Adjectives. The lexical choice for television news reporting is distinctive. Formal words from the standard variety of Bengali are used in news reports. The lexicon of the variety has a use of an extensive amount of adjectives or modifiers in it. The use of formal words and adjectives indicates that it has been written first and then presented through speech. Speech is meant for the ears whereas written text is meant for the eyes but writing for the broadcast means writing in a way that is suitable for reading out loud. Writing for a newspaper article is different from writing for a television news report. Sometimes literary conventions including grammatical rules are being compromised (Boyd, 2001). As Boyd (2001) suggests, “Simplicity and conciseness are the watchwords, yet that does not mean that writing for the voice should be devoid of style, energy or colour” (p. 59). The style in the broadcast language is created through words that belong to each other, also known as collocation. Collocation is the horizontal relationship between words. Palmer (1968) quotes Firth’s theory of collocation (1957) where he suggested that the meaning of a word essentially depends on “the company it keeps” (p. 179). Therefore, collocation is an important aspect of the meaning of lexical items. The adjectives influence the meaning of the words they have been used with to modify their meaning. It is because of their collocation behavior that sheds light on the sense of the word. A few of the collocations from my dataset have been given in the box below.

From Data 1:

1. *Purbo akash* (in the east sky)
2. *Notun shurjo* (new sun)
3. *Kangkhito lokkhe* (desired goal)
4. *Oshamprodayik* (non-communal)
5. *Shrestho orjon* (best achievement)
6. *Shommilito* (united)
7. *Shanskritik agrashoner juge* (in the era of cultural imperialism)

From Data 2:

1. *Dirgho oitijjer* (long tradition)
2. *Prothom shurjo* (first sun)
3. *Prothom shokal* (first morning)
4. *Notun uchchash* (new enthusiasm)

5. *Notun prottayasha* (new hope)
6. *Ekrash shopno* (full of dreams)
7. *Shurela Baishakh* (musical Baishakh)
8. *Shukhi shomriddho oshamprodayik* Bangladesh (happy, prosperous and non-communal Bangladesh)

From Data 3

1. *Prothom din* (first day)
2. *Utshobmukhor* (festive/celebrating)
3. *Kora pahara* (heavy security)
4. *Utshobmukhor* (festive/celebrating)
5. *Shoshostro nirosto kothor pahara* (armed relentless heavy security)
6. *Utshobmukhor* (celebrating/festive)
7. *Shadharon manush* (common people)
8. *Shotosfurto ongshogrohon* (enthusiastic spontaneous participation)
9. *Nirbhigno nirapod* (peaceful and safe)
10. *Shafollo shonkote* (through thick and thin)

The word *manush* (people) has accompanied either *utshobmukhor* (celebrating/festive) or the numerical words such as *hajar hajar* (thousands), *hajaro* (thousands), *lakho* (millions) to modify the sense of the word. Since *Pahela Baishakh* is a public holiday and celebrated across the country, the above mentioned words *utshobmukhor/hajar/hajar-hajar/lakho* have been used with the word *manush*.

Pahela Baishakh refers to the first day of the Bengali year which also marks the beginning of a new year. Therefore, the word *shurjo* (the sun) accompanies words such as *notun* (new), *prothom* (first). Words such as *din* (day) and *shokal* (morning) accompany the same modifiers.

From the dataset, it is evident that adjectives are widely used in the language of news reporting to highlight the meaning of their adjacent words.

3.3.1.2. Borrowed words or foreign words. One important observation is that the reporters did not use any English words in their reports unless it is a proper noun. It is a distinguishable feature of the language of the news reports as Bengali speakers frequently use borrowed English words in their daily conversations. There were some interviews/responses taken from the public by the reporters. One of the interviewees used an English word 'culture'. The reporters also interviewed some foreigners celebrating *Pahela Baishakh* in Dhaka. The interview questions have not been included in the reports; so there was no code-switching from the reporters' end. Orwell (1946), for instance, discouraged the use of foreign words or phrases, scientific words or jargons if there is an equivalent word in the language of the news

report. “As far as ‘language’ is concerned, we know, on the one hand, that ‘languages differ’ in the way they name the world - in ‘words’ as in syntactic and grammatical forms; we know that lexical fields are close mappings of social practices” (Kress, 2010, p. 9). Bangladeshi news represents Bangladeshi society and social practices and it is meant for a wider range of Bangladeshi audiences. In addition to that, there are culture-specific concepts too. Kress (2010) writes, “Each may struggle to find ways of bringing the other’s meanings into their culture (p. 9). It is not possible to find equivalent foreign words for all concepts and word-to-word translations might lose the value of meaning in the process as well. “Culture is too complex to tolerate difficult transplants readily” (Kress, 2010, p. 9). Hence, the news reporters consciously avoid the use of foreign words. However, Bengali has many borrowed words which have become a part of the Bengali language and Bangladeshi people use them in their daily conversations. As it has been mentioned earlier that the news reports are maintained exclusively in the standard variety of Bengali, only Bengali words seem to have been used to compose them.

3.3.1.3. Metaphor. Metaphor is a linguistic device which refers to perceiving one concept in terms of another which shares similar characteristics. Stockwell (2005) argues that, “It is important, first of all, to make a fundamental distinction between linguistic expressions of metaphor and their underlying conceptual content” (p. 105). According to Boyd (2001), metaphors and examples assist in communicating an idea effectively. “You have to relate that to things people are already familiar with, and that means using illustrations” (Boyd, 2001, p. 64). The current study, too found the use of metaphors in the news reports it chose. Bengali words such as *shurer mayajal* (musical illusion), *shekor* (roots), *shurjo* (sun) have been used as metaphors in the data.

Music is an integral part of the celebration of *Pahela Baishakh*. Therefore, words such as *gaan* (songs), *shur* (tune/music), *shurela* (musical) and other related words have been noticed in the news reports. *Mayajal* (musical illusion) has been used as a metaphor to explain the impact of music on people as the music has created a dreamlike situation/illusion.

The Bengali word *shekor* (roots) has been used as a metaphor as well. It refers to the traditional cultural practices when compared with the roots of a tree. A tree has a strong root that holds it onto the ground. The stronger the roots are, the better the growth of the tree is. Young generations can be compared with the green leaves or fruits of a tree. Here the metaphor provides an in-depth meaning of a situation which suggests that the upbringing of a person or a human being requires a connection to his/her own culture. One has to stay connected to one’s culture, tradition, and practices in order to be a complete human being.

The referring expression *shurjo* or ‘sun’ implies the star of our solar system. In the dataset, it has been used quite a few times, either as the “first sun” or as the “new sun.” *Prothom shurjo* means the beginning of a new year whereas *notun shurjo* refers to the beginning of a new day. Since the day begins with the sun shining, a new beginning is compared to the source of the sun.

3.3.2. Phonological features

The inclusion of adjective collocations, metaphors and careful exclusion of foreign words suggest that the reports are planned. Planned languages are different sorts of spontaneous languages. Since it is a spoken and planned language, there are some distinguishing phonological features. The second part of the linguistic analysis is the analysis of phonological features and the findings were unanticipated to some extent. The reporters use clear and standard pronunciations of the words. The segmental features of the words play a crucial role in the creation of the rhythm. As it has already been mentioned that the speech is planned, it is also apparent in their word choices. Since they write the report first and then put their voice to it, the words with certain consonants and vowels are chosen carefully to create a rhythm in the language.

3.3.2.1. Rhythm. The dataset demonstrates that words with similar sounds have been chosen for the reports. The topics of the reports are *Pahela Baishakh*, *Shubho Noboborsho*, and *Mongol Shobhajatra*. It is evident that the stress is on the sound /ʃ/ in the words *Baishakh*, *Shubho Noboborsho* and *shobhajatra*. Consequently, a substantial number of words with /ʃ/ sound have been used in the reports to continue the same rhythmic pattern. One example is: the word *shamil* (Data 3). It means ‘to participate’. There are other synonyms available for the same word, for example *jog deya*, *milito ho* and so on but *shamil* adds a rhythm to the report. Rhythm is a unique quality of spoken language. Boyd (2001) suggests, “Sometimes sentences which look fine in print sound unfinished when read aloud because they stray from the conventional rhythms of speech” (p. 66). It is an interesting finding that in order to create a rhythm in the language of the news reports; the sound /ʃ/ has been pronounced 30 times in the first data. In the second data the number is 43 and in the third, it has been used 67 times in total.

Table 1

Words with /ʃ/ sound from Data 1	<i>akash</i> , <i>shurjo</i> , <i>shuru</i> , <i>ordhoshotocho</i> , <i>proyash</i> , <i>shilpider</i> , <i>shanskritik</i> , <i>oshamprodayik</i> , <i>bisshayon</i> , <i>shonskriti</i> , <i>sreshtho</i> , <i>shommilito poribeshon</i> , <i>agrashon</i> , <i>nijossho shekorer</i> , <i>shondhane</i> , <i>onussthane shure shure</i> .
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Words with /ʃ/ sound from Data 2- 43 times	<i>shure shure, shure, choddosho pochish, shurjoke, shekhane, manush, shurer, choddosho pochisher, shokal, shurer, shagoto, shotabdi, shomoy, shuruta, borshoboroner, manush, uchchash, prottasha, ekrash, shopno, shurela, shob, Baishakh, shouhardo ar shompritir, sbanti, manusher, Bangladesb, prottasha, shunalen. borshoboron, konthoshshor, shurer, shukhi shomriddho, oshamprodayik, Bangladesb, prottasha, Baishakh.</i>
Words with /ʃ/ sound- 67 times	<i>shubho, noboborsho, Baishakh, choddosho pochish, utshob, bissho, shikriti, shobhajatra, shaj, poshake, shamil, rajdhani-bashi, shaj, shamil, utshobmukhor, manush, borshoboron, shobhajatra, Baishakher, bashir, shokal, shobhajatra, shekhane, utshobmukhor, shokal, shoa, shuru, shobhajatra, shaaje, shobhajatray, jeshob, manusher, shoshostro, shobhajatra, pashapashi, Shahbag, shobajatra, Sheraton, shekhan, utshobmukhor, manusher, shobhajatra, shafollo shonkote, deshbashi, shobhajatra, shamne, shilpi, shikkharthi, shikkha protishthan, shamajik shonggothon, sheba, protishthan, desb, bidesh, manush, shobhajatra, shobcheye, utshober, shadharon, manusher, shotosfurto, ongshogrohon, shobhajatra.</i>

3.3.2.2 Alliteration. It is apparent from the dataset that quite a number of words here started with the same sound. Alliteration is a linguistic device which refers to the phenomenon of the same letter or sound occurring at the beginning of the neighbouring words. A rhythm to the speech can be brought with the assistance of alliteration. In the dataset, the presence of alliteration is noticed in the language of the news reports. Not only the words that begin with the sound /ʃ/ but also the words that start with other sounds manifest the feature of alliteration. Some examples from the dataset are given in the box below. For instance, the collocation *gaane gaane* (with music) both start with the Bengali sound /g/, which is an example of alliteration. *Manobota ar manusher* (humanity and people's), in these two words, the first letter is the nasal sound /m/. Similarly, from Data 3, *nirbighno* and *nirapod* start with the nasal sound /n/. Therefore, alliteration has been devised here to create a rhythm in the speech of the news reports.

Table 2

Data No.	Words represent Alliteration
Data 1	<i>gaane gaane, shekorer shondhane, shure shure</i>
Data 2	<i>shure shure, bochorke boron, shurjoke shagoto, shouhardo ar shompriti, shukhi shomriddho, manobota ar manusher</i>

Data 3	<i>Bangla bochor; shaaje shobha; bibhinno bahini; shokal shondha; pashapashi; shafollo shonkote; shilpi shikkharthi, shikka-protishthan shamajik shongothon</i> <i>sheba-prothishthan; nirbighno nirapod.</i>
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3.3.2.3. Rhyming. Another phonological feature that composes rhythm in the speech of the news reports is *rhyme*. When adjacent words end with the same sound, it is called a rhyme. From Data 1, *shondhane gaane gaane* these three words end with the same vowel sound /e/. The repetition of the /e/ sounds is creating a rhythm in the speech. From Data 2, *sriti glani* is an example of rhyming. A rhythm in the language of news reports has been constructed through the use of rhyming. More examples of rhymes are provided in the box below.

Table 3

Data No.	Words
Data 1	<i>Borshoboroner ayojon, Shekorer shondhane gaane gaane</i>
Data 2	<i>Romna botomule shure shure notun bochorke, gaane shure, Chokhe mukhe, sriti glani, projonmo theke projonme</i>
Data 3	<i>nechekhhen geyekhhen, shoshostro nirosto, ahoban janan, neche geye matiye, ei ayojon e shadharon manusher shotosfurto ongshogrohon.</i>

3.3.2.4. Reduplicative structures. In addition to alliteration and rhyming, the presence of reduplicative structures has also been noticed in the data. Reduplication is defined as a process of word-formation in which new meaning is created by reiterating all or part(s) of a word. According to Abbi (1985), “Reduplicative structures (henceforth RS) of various kinds have been known to exist in almost all the Indian languages regardless of their family affiliations” (p. 159). The dataset has reduplicative structures such as:

- Desh-bidesh* (home and abroad)
- Pashapashi* (side by side)
- shure shure* (with music)
- gaane gaane* (singing)
- borabor* (always)

There can be different types of reduplicative structures. Based on their formations, they are broadly divided into two types: full or complete reduplication and partial reduplication (Abbi 1992, Apte 1968, Bhaskara Rao 1977, Ananthanarayana 1976, Goswami 1982). “Although each individual word carries a certain meaning of its own, while they are repeated they generate a kind of meaning, which is not

exactly the meaning of each individual word but something different from the total meaning of individual members” (Dash, 2014, p. 233). On the basis of their semantic functionalities, Abbi (1992) classifies reduplication broadly into two types: morphological and lexical. Morphological reduplications refer to expressive reduplication. On the other hand, lexical reduplication has been divided into three types: echo formations, compounds, and word reduplications.

As mentioned before, there are reduplicative structures which are called complete or full reduplications because they are constructed by repeating a lexical item without any phonological change in the form. According to this classification of reduplicative structures of words, *shure shure*, *gaane gaane* are examples of complete reduplication. Partial reduplication, on the other hand, refers to the structures which go through some phonological changes and the repeated part sounds slightly different. *Pashapashi*, *desh bidesh*, *borabor* are examples of such partial reduplications. *Desh bidesh*, too can be identified as a compound reduplication if the meaning is considered. “The compounds refer to the paired construction in which the second word is not an exact repetition of the first but has some similarity or relationship to the first word either on the semantic or on the phonetic level” (Abbi, 1992, p. 24). *Desh* means native country whereas *bidesh* means foreign country. This is a compound reduplication as they share some similarities on a phonetic level and also there is an antonymous relationship that can be identified between the words on a semantic level.

3.3.3. Syntactic features

Bengali is quite flexible when it comes to sentence structures. There is no fixed order for the elements of a sentence (subject, verb, and object) in Bengali.

Ami bhaat khabo (I eat rice)

I rice eat

Thompson (2012) points out, “Word order flexibility refers to the mobility of sentence components such as subjects, verbs, adverbial phrases and objects within a sentence” (p. 189). There are six possible ways of grouping them in Bengali. Bengali native speakers usually follow SOV or subject-object-verb structure (*ami bhaat khabo*) but if one uses a different one, it will still make sense in Bengali (*bhaat khabo ami*, *bhaat ami khabo*, *ami khabo bhaat*, *khabo ami bhaat*, *khabo bhaat ami*, *ami bhaat khabo*). Thompson (2012) adds, “Due to case marking and unambiguous verb endings in Bangla, word order is not an essential factor in determining the meaning of sentences” (p. 189). However, the meaning of a sentence will vary if the stress on parts of the speech changes. Different sentence structures not only change the meaning but also can be used to create a dramatic tone. Thompson (2012) agrees with that by saying, “Add to this the fact that Bangla verbs with their same-

sounding endings as the final element in sentences can result in a monotonous style. A common device for getting around this situation is variation in arrangements” (pp 189-190).

3.3.3.1 Sentence structure. My observation on this is that the news reporters mostly use object-verb-subject sentence structure instead of subject-object-verb structure to create a dramatic tone and to avoid a monotonous ending. The stress is put on the object with a rising tone and a falling tone with the subject as it marks the end of a sentence. In Data 1, we find the following statement:

*Purbo akasher notun shurjer udoy ar raag bhoirob er moddho diye **shuru hoy** chhayanoter ordho shotobochorer **borshoboroner ayojon**.*

The line can be translated into: The 50th celebration of welcoming the New Year started with music in the morning. In this sentence the subject is *borshoboroner ayojon* (Bengali New Year celebration), the verb is *shuru hoy* (started) and the rest is the complement. Interestingly, this sentence starts with the complement. This is the opening line of the news and the subject of this sentence is *borshoboroner ayojon*. Instead of starting the sentence with the subject *borshoboroner ayojon*, the reporter chose to start with the object of the sentence in order to sound poetic. He uses the same sentence structure for the following sentences as well:

*Jati ke kankhito lokkhe pouche dite shanskritik oitijjer er oshamprodayik dhara **bojay thakbe** emon prottasha **shobar***

(This line from Data 1 can be roughly translated into: Everyone hopes that the nation will reach its desired goal by practicing non-communalism).

Shobar (everyone’s) is the subject of the sentence and *bojay thakbe* (will continue to practice) is the verb. The sentence ends with the subject.

From Data 2: *Dirgho oitijjer dharabahikotay Romna Botomule gaane shure notun bochor ke boron korlo **chhayanot*** (A translation of this line would be: Chhayanot welcomed the New Year by arranging its traditional musical event at Ramna Botomul). Similarly, another line from Data 2: *Choddosho pochish bongabder prothom shurjoke shagoto janate bhor thekei shekhane hajir hote thake hajaro **manush*** (Thousands of people started joining the program to welcome the first sun of Bengali year 1425).

Another sentence from Data 3: *Bissho oitijjer shikriti pawa mongol shobhajatar moddho diye notun ke **boron kore nilorajdhani bashi*** (English translation: The city-dwellers welcomed the New Year by joining the internationally recognized New Year procession). Another one from Data 3: *Baishakhi shaj poshake ete **shamil hon** utshobmukhor lakho **manush*** (English translation: Millions of people joined the procession wearing New Year clothes).

All the above-mentioned sentences follow the same pattern which complies with

Thompson's (2012) argument that if the reporters follow a regular SOV sentence structure throughout, then due to the similar endings of the verbs the language would sound monotonous.

3.3.3.2. Use of complex and compound sentences. Another observation on the sentence structure is the use of complex and compound sentences. Complex sentences have multiple clauses, some of which are dependent on one another. Compound sentences are when two clauses are joined with conjunctions.

From Data 1, *Purbo akasher notun shurjer udoy ar raag bhoiob er moddho diyeshuru hoy chhayanoter ordho shotobochorer borshoboroner ayojon* (English translation: The 50th celebration of welcoming the New Year started with music in the morning). The first two clauses are joined by the conjunction *ar* (and). These two clauses are dependent on the third clause.

Bissho oitijjer shikriti pawa mongol shobhajatrar moddho diye notun ke boron kore nilo rajdhani bashi (English translation from Data 3: The city-dwellers welcomed the New Year by joining the internationally recognized New Year procession.) The first clause is dependent on the second one, which is the main clause. *Bissho oitijjer shikriti pawa* is modifying the noun *mongol shobhajatra*.

From Data 2, *Choddosho pochish bongabder prothom shurjoke shagoto janate bhor thekei shekhane hajir hote thake hajaro manush* (The city-dwellers welcomed the New Year by joining the internationally recognized New Year procession). In this sentence, the first clause is a dependent clause and the second one is the main clause.

Use of complex and compound sentences is also noticeable in the language use of television reporters. Most of the sentences are long which have multiple subordinate clauses.

These are some syntactic features of the language of the television news reports. Although the language of broadcast journalism uses the standard variety of Bengali, yet it sounds different from the spoken standard variety because of its lexical, phonological, and syntactic features.

3.3.4. Non-linguistic modes

Linguistic mode (speech and written text) is one of the many modes used in the television news reports. The previous sections looked into the elements of that. From the preceding analysis, it is evident that television news reports are spoken and planned. The mode is spoken but unlike other spoken forms of language, it is planned. Spoken forms are naturally spontaneous. The reports are written first and the reporters read them out loud. The phonological, lexical, and syntactic features conform to the features of the planned mode. As two different forms of language- speech and written texts are combined for the news reports, it sounds

different from natural spoken language. As the language of television news reports is a combination of two modes of language, there are some nonlinguistic modes at work. Therefore, television news reports are multimodal presentations that are presented through an integration of multiple linguistic modes. According to the theory of multimodality, language makes complete meaning when we combine different modes of communication together (Kress, 2010). Speech or written text is not enough for complete communication. Speech makes meaning along with facial expressions, gestures, intonation, pitch, volume, and so on. The written text makes meaning along with fonts, size, colors, graphs, layout, framing and others. Television news reports combine speech, written text, music, location, songs, colors, moving images, etc. to construct a complete meaning of the topic presented in the news. All these modes of communication play an integral role in the process of meaning-making. Each mode contributes something exclusive to the meaning of a discourse. What written mode offers cannot be delivered by spoken mode. Neither the characteristics of speech mode can be rendered fully by written mode. Written texts are more organized as we can carefully choose words, sentence structures and so on. The linguistic analysis of the data establishes that. However, speech is different from the written text; though they share a few common aspects. “The material stuff of speech however, sound, is entirely different from the graphic stuff of writing. Sound is received via the physiology of hearing; the graphic stuff of writing is received via the physiology of sight” (Kress, 2010, p. 80). Boyd (2001) mentioned that the average attention span of a person can range from 90 seconds to 180 seconds. Reading news articles and listening to news reports are not the same. Therefore, reporters have to plan the sentences in a way that they do not lose their listeners’ attention. Spoken information should be presented in small chunks so that listeners can process the information they hear. From the syntactic analysis of the dataset, it is evident that the reporters use long sentences but with multiple clauses so that they can give the audience enough time to process the information. It can be achieved through the unique qualities of speech mode. Kress (2010) points out, “Sound offers resources such as variation in energy - loudness or softness - which can be used to produce alterations of stressed and unstressed elements, of rhythm and accent, which produce the rhythmic organization of speech and accentuation of words” (p. 80). Likewise, Boyd (2001) says, “Poetry, which is intended for reading aloud, is often vivid and bursting with life” (p. 59). When written sentences are read aloud by the reporters, they are given life through the use of multiple modes that are linked to speech such as intonation, pitch, volume and so on.

As it has been repeatedly mentioned that television news reports are multimodal presentations, they deliver the meaning through the incorporation of moving images, choice of location, camera movement, music, and components alike. However, these

modes are not selected randomly rather they receive careful consideration from the reporters. As Kress (2010) puts it, “mode is a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning” (p. 79). The meaning of the modes varies from culture to culture. The modes are given meaning through social practices. Since these reports are in Bengali and the target audience is Bangladeshi people, modes that the audience can relate to have been used to make a complete communication with the audience. All three reports start with background music or songs. The songs that are chosen for the news reports are either Bengali folk songs, “*Ailo ailo ailo re ronge bhora Baishakh amar ailo re*” or songs that have relevance to the celebration of *Pahela Baishakh*: “*Esho he Baishakh esho esho.*” The latter is known as the anthem of *Pahela Baishakh*. The background music is played by either classical instruments or folk instruments such as flute or *damaru* or *dugdugi* (local musical instruments) in order to create the meaning of the festivity of *Pahela Baishakh*. The meaning has been developed over years through the social practices of Bangladeshi people. People associate these instruments, songs, and music with Bangladeshi traditions and cultural practices. Therefore, the meaning is created through the association of music and songs in the audience’s mind.

The moving images captured people, places and events of the day. The places are not selected randomly rather carefully so that the setting can also render the meaning of the topic. The selected locations are TSC or Charukola Institute of Dhaka University, Shahbaag or Ramna Botomul. These are the places where people gather for the celebration of *Pahela Baishakh*. The day is celebrated across the country but the main events of it take place in these locations. Such settings for the news reports are chosen to exhibit the celebration of the festival. *Pahela Baishakh* is colourful but the main colours are red and white because it resembles the colours of *Baishakh* as Bengali women wear white sari with red borders on the occasion.

The combination of the relevant modes thus assisted in the creation of the meaning of *Pahela Baishakh* in the audience’s mind as they can associate those with their traditional social practices.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The socio-semiotic analysis of the dataset discusses the features and functions of the linguistic and nonlinguistic modes used in television news reports and how they are making meaning together. The analysis of the linguistic modes looks into the lexical choices, phonological features, and the syntactic features of the language of television news reports. From the analysis, it is evident that reporters use the standard variety of Bengali language but in a way that it sounds different from the spoken standard variety. The analysis discusses the chosen lexical choices, phonological features such as rhythm, alliteration, rhyming, and also additional syntactic features to explain

the reasons as to why the language of television news reports sounds different from natural spoken language. There is a rhythm in the variety of television news reports which is created through words that have similar phonological features. The use of rhyming, alliteration, reduplicative structures is noticeable. These devices have been used to create a rhythm in the speech. Metaphors and adjectives are the main aspects of the lexical choices of the reports. The sentences, too, have multiple clauses so that the sentences are speech-friendly even though the speech is written and planned. Within the speech mode, these features are combined in a way that the audiences have enough time to listen to the information and process it. Another distinguishing feature of this professional variety is the use of nonlinguistic modes. Along with the speech mode, the moving images shown in the reports convey meaning. The songs/music tracks played in the background create an intended meaning for the audiences. A careful selection and integration of the modes deliver that exact meaning.

The language of Bangladeshi television news reports is tailored adhering to language policies and laws set by the government of Bangladesh. Therefore, the standard variety is used in the news reports to comply with the strict language policies of the Bangladeshi government to avoid linguistic pollution. However, the standard variety does not represent the diverse linguistic variants in practice in Bangladesh but the government's approach to maintaining a monolingual nation (Sultana, 2014). Hence, it is important to study the linguistic and nonlinguistic features to revisit and rethink the linguistic practices of this field. Also, future research can be conducted to introduce a more inclusive linguistic variety for broadcast journalism.

Television news is one of the main media for current updates. What is unique to this medium is it telecasts news regularly quite a few times a day and there are dedicated channels for news only. There are more than 40 private channels in Bangladesh now and television news reports have become popular as they ensure prompt presentations of current news and information to the audience. This is an era of advanced technology and print media is also using online platforms to deliver news multimodally. Multimodal representations are increasingly demanding. As a result, the development of broadcast journalism, especially television media, has accelerated remarkably. Still, only a number of universities in the country have media schools. As language is one of the indispensable elements of journalism, research on the said variety should be conducted to understand the key features of the language of journalism. This paper shows how different semiotic resources are combined professionally to deliver a report. Understanding the features and functions of the semiotic resources is crucial, which requires a special skill set. Sultana (2014), for instance, discusses the linguistic practices of Bangladeshi adults which include extensive use of English words in their Bengali. However, the media schools can use

this knowledge to train the newer generations of journalists. Unfortunately, there is not much work done in this particular area. As this paper attempts to outline the characteristics of the linguistic variety used in television media in practice and also the functions of other semiotic resources, it would be useful for relevant sectors such as media communication or broadcast journalism in Bangladesh.

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Appendix

Data Transcription

Data 1 - Channel I

Romna botomule chhayanoter borshoboron.

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQ5xoJRansE>

(Flute, tobla music in the background)

Purbo akasher notun shurjer uday ar raag bhoirob er moddho diye shuru hoy chhayanoter ordho shotobochorer borshoboroner ayojon.

Gaane gaane desh mati ar manush ke jagroto korar proyash chhilo chhayanot er shilpider.

(Music)

Jati ke kankhito lokkhe pouche dite shanskritik oitijjer er oshamprodayik dhara bojay thakbe emon prottasha shobar.

- Shubho noboborsho shobaikhe
- Bhalo lage er jonnie to protibochor asha hoy
- Bangladeshe jeno kono shamprodayikotar shar na thake
- Bhoymukto poribesh, khub bhalo lagche
- Noboborsho shundor hok, shukher hok, anonder hok
- Shubo nababarsha – I am so happy to be here and to get to celebrate Bengali New year.
- Amra prottek ta dibosh e jodi mone korte pari je amra bangali jati, prottek ta culture e amra bhalobhabe palon korte hobe.

Shanskritik melbondhon bojay rekhe shokol ke oikkoboddho hoar ahoban janano hoy romna botomuler ayojon theke.

Bisshayon ke shikar kore Bangali shonskritir shrestho orjongulo notun projonmer majhe tule dhora hoy ekok o shommilito poribeshoner maddhome.

Shanskritik agrashoner juge torun projonmo akash shonskritir probhabe bhulte bosheche nijossho shonskriti tai chhayanot er borshoboron onushthener ebarer protipaddo bisshayoner juge shekorer shondhane gaane gaane ar shure shure torun projonmo ke ahoban janano holo nijer shonskriti te firte.

(Music)

Kazi Imran, Channel I.

Data 2: Channel 24

Title: Shagoto Bangla 1425

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2J24LKW5YCU>

14. 4. 2018

Duration 2.13 minutes

Romna botomule shure shure notun bochorke boron korlo chhayanot.

Dirgho oitijjer dharabahikotay Romna botomule gaane shure notun bochor ke boron korlo chhayanot. Choddosho pochish bongabder prothom shurjoke shagoto janate bhor thekei shekhane hajir hote thake hajaro manush.

Jirnota bhule shamne egiye jawar prottoy chhilo tader konthhe.

Khan Mamuner camera e aro janachcen Jinia Kobir Shuchona.

Shurer mayajaale aro ekti bhor. Bangla choddosho pochisher prothom shokal.romna botomule dhropodir shurer murchona e Bangla notun bochor ke shagoto janalo chhayanot. Ordho shotabdir beshi shomoy dhore e ayojone shuruta hoy.

Borshoboroner ayojone jog dite bhorer alo futar agei hajir hon hajaro manush. Chokhe mukhe notun uchchash notun prottayasha ekrash shopno. Romna botobrikkher chhayatole ei shurela Baishakh tai jeno shob kichu chhapiye shouhardo ar shompritir ekti opurbo melbondhon. Shanti manobota ar manusher odhikar rokkhay oikkomotter ei protifolone egiye jabe prio Bangladesh emon prottayashar kotha shunalen ayojok ra.

Purono sriti glani bhule chhayanoter borshoboroner ayojone milito hoyeche bangali konthoshshor. Shurer ei oitijjo chhoriye porbe projonmo theke projonme. Gore uthbe shukhi shomriddho oshamprodayik Bangladesh. Bochor ghure shei prottayasha e janan dey Baishakh.

Data 3: ATN Bangla News Channel

Duration 3.15 minutes

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOyImBu8JZM>

Rahmatullah Biplob

ATN Bangla News at 2 pm (1.48 sec to 5.04 sec)

14. 4. 2018

Shubho noboborsho

Aaj Pahela Baishakh

1425 bangla bochorer prothom din.

Bangali oitijjo utshob anondo boroner din.

Bissho oitijjer shikriti pawa mongol shobhajatrar moddho diye notun ke boron kore nilo rajdhani bashi.

Baishakhi shaj poshake ete shamil hon utshobmukhor lakho manush.

Rajpothe nechechen geyechen tara.

Nirapotta jhukir kotha mathay rekhe borshoboroner ei shobhajatra ghire akash o matite chhilo bibhinno bahinir kora pahara.

(Music)

Pahela Baishakher ei ayojone jog dite bohudiner prostuti rajdhani bashir tai shokal hobar opekkha chhilo kebol.

Mongol shobha jattrar kendro bindu charukola institute prangon. E pothe janbahon cholachal bondho kore deya hoyechilo bhorer agei. Shekhane chilo paaye hete asha utshobmukhor ogonito manusher dhol.

Shokal shoa noy tay Bangla motor mukhe shuru hoy mongol shobha jatra.

Banglar chirayoto shaaje shobha jattray ebar chilo aat ti protik.

Jeshob ghire age piche lakho manusher dhol chhilo praii dui kilometer elaka jure.

Tar nirapotta e bibhinno bahinir shoshostro niostro kothor pahara.

Shobhajattray manusher nirapotta debar pashapashi ebar helicopter theke leaflet chhoray rapid action battalion (RAB).

Shahbag theke kuri minute e shobha jatra pouche Sheraton more.

Shekhan theke firti poth je poth keboli utshobmukhor manusher.

Mongol shobhajattrar oikker moto shafollo shonkote deshbashi ke ek thakar ahoban janar ayojonkarira.

Shobhajatra e boraborer motoi shamne chhilen charukola institute er shilpi shikkharthi ra.

Echarao bibhinno shikkha protishthan shamajik shonggothon sheba prothisthan.

O desh bidesher hajaro manush neche geye matiye rakhen shobhajattrar puro poth.

Rajdhani dhakar shobcheye boro utshober ayojon nirbhigno nirapod korte rajdhani te aaisrinkhola rokkha kari bahinir eto ayojon.

Ei ayojon e shadharon manusher shotosfurto ongshogrohon mongol shobhajattrar moto mongolmoy hoyeche ebaro.

Domains of Kanuri Loanwords in Margi

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Abstract

The socio-cultural contact between Kanuri and Margi led to an inevitable borrowing of words from Kanuri to Margi. As such, this research paper deals with the investigation of the different domains of incidence in that the borrowing took place. In collecting data for the research, an unstructured interview was used (along with a tape recorder) to record the articulation of the informants for transcription purposes. Brann's (2006) 16 Domains of Incidence was adopted as the model of approach in this research. The data collected showed that there are eight domains where loanwords from Kanuri to Margi took place. The domains include school, office, market, temple, club, home, color, time and direction, weather and climate. The work identified 78 Kanuri loanwords in Margi. The numbers of loanwords identified in each of the domains are: school 7, office 6, market 10, temple 8, club 2, home 29, colour time and direction 13, weather and climate 3. The findings of the research established that the domain of home has the highest number of Kanuri loanwords in Margi. Finally, this paper claims that the early contact that led to borrowing between Kanuri and Margi was in their place of residence, customary or official location. Therefore, the knowledge acquired can serve as a valuable reference material for linguists who might be interested in the study of loanwords and comparative linguistics between Kanuri, Margi and other African languages.

Keywords: domain, loanwords, Kanuri, Margi, language

1. Introduction

This paper is a study of the domains of Kanuri loanwords in Margi. Here, domains of incidence refer to the different social contexts or instances of interaction between people. It is the setting where people and family members meet for different aspects of life, and in relation to that, the speech communities they occupy contain different numbers of domains that define their social lives. These include among others: religion, education, club, bars, home. This paper explores the different settings through which Kanuri and Margi interact with each other which in turn, leads to a



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borrowing from Kanuri (the source language) to Margi (the target language). It also identifies the particular domain where the target language borrows heavily from the source language.

Linguistic borrowing is a very common and intensively studied phenomenon. A particularly prominent group of borrowings are loanwords, and a series of recent publications can be found in the African contexts that have analyzed their integration into the target language (Salim, 1981; Yalwa, 1991; Bulakarima, 1999; Abdullahi, 2008; Modu; 2017). It is possible for one language to take words from another and make them part of its own vocabulary. The language from which elements are taken is known as the *donor/source* and the one which takes from another is known as the *recipient/target* language (Ogah & Amos, 2009). Therefore, loanwords are words borrowed from one language to another. Though most of the studies on loanwords are centered on their phonological adaptation process, the current research tends to be different by concentrating rather on the domains of incidence that partake in the process of borrowing.

1.1 Background of the study

Many researchers conducted their studies in a way where Kanuri was treated as either a donor or recipient of the words. This is because Kanuri has borrowed from many different languages, and other languages have also borrowed from it, one of which is Margi. Because Margi is one of the less extensively written languages, reviews on its linguistics borrowing or other aspects are rare. Nevertheless, the former reviews provided hitherto serve the purpose of this research.

Both Margi and Kanuri are from different language families. As classified in Greenberg (1966), Kanuri is a member of the Saharan family of the Nilo-Saharan phylum of the African languages, while Schuh (1982) in his classification of the Chadic family included Margi as the member of the Chadic family of the Afro-Asiatic Phylum. However, with regular contacts between the two languages, mutual borrowing becomes inevitable. Hence, a brief background of both the source and target languages is provided.

1.1.1 The Kanuri language

According to Greenberg (1966) in Shettima and Bulakarima (2012), Kanuri is a member of the Saharan branch of the Nilo-Saharan phylum of African languages. This has been widely accepted and followed by many (p. 30). Greenberg (1966) presents the Saharan branch according to the following groupings: Saharan (a) Kanuri and Kanembu, (b) Teda and Daza, (c) Berti and Zaghawa. However, Greenberg (1971) in a later publication reduced the number of Saharan sub-branches, simply by listing the major languages of each group as follows: Saharan: Kanuri, Teda, Zaghawa and Berti (p. 423). These, he refers to as four basic units of the Saharan language family.

Kanuri, however, is dialectally fairly diverse. Standard Kanuri is the variety spoken in and around Maiduguri, a variety now used on radio and television broadcast and seen in most works printed in Kanuri (Cyffer & Hutchison, 1990). Similarly, Bulakarima (1997) identifies six dialects of Kanuri instead of the four dialects earlier proposed in Bulakarima (1987). According to him, these six dialects constitute what is referred to as the Kanuri Language. They are Bilma, Dagəra, Manga, Mowar, Suwurti and Yerwa.

1.1.2 *The Margi language*

According to Greenberg (1963), Margi language belongs to the Chadic language family that has not been studied extensively. Newman (1990), classifies Chadic as a family which belongs to the Afro-Asiatic phylum as consisting of four coordinate branches – West, Biu-Mandara, Central, East and Masa (Jungraithmayr & Ibrizmov, 1994) (p. 95). Margi belongs to the Central Chadic, Biu-Mandara Sub-group A: thus, making it a close relative of Bura, Kilba and a more distant relative of Hausa (Dlibugunaya, 1999).

Hoffmann (1963) in his attempt to classify Margi dialects recognized its four divisions as (p. 3):

- a. The *Màrygí Bábál*: “The Margi of the plain (*bábál* “open place”)”,
- b. The *Màrygí Dzənyú*: “The Margi of near (*údzər*) the mountain (*nyú*)”,
- c. The *Màrygí Pùtái*: “The Margi of the West (*Pùtái*)’ or briefly ‘West Margi’ and
- d. The *Màrygí tí ntəm* (also simply *mjir tí ntəm*): also explained as “the Margi (or “people”) who cry (mourn) with a pot” (*tí ntəm* instead of *tíd əntəm*, from *tì* ‘to cry’, *dú* ‘with’, *əntəm* ‘pot’).

1.1.3 *Contact between the two languages*

Löhr (1998) opines that relevant linguistic findings have established strong connections between Kanuri and Margi via Malgwa (Formerly known as “Gamergu”). Similarly, Cyffer, Löhr, Platte, & Tijjani (1996) state that:

The area around the Lake Chad is characterized as an example for a region where ethnic changes abundantly took place and still do. For example some Kanuri districts, or the leaders of those districts, are (unofficially) named after other ethnic names (e.g. *Margi*, *Shuwa*) or Kanuri clan names are identical with ethnic names of other groups, e.g. Tera, Bade. Both people speak a Chadic language and live in the south and west of the Kanuri respectively. These are indications that the Kanuri formerly absorbed and integrated these peoples (p. 49).

The above assertion shows that Kanuri has contact with many Chadic languages in which Margi is not an exception. As a result of these contacts, borrowing of words became unavoidable.

2. Literature Review

Borrowing is the process of importing linguistic items from one linguistic system into another, “a process that occurs when two languages are in contact over a period of time. It is an instance where foreign elements are introduced in the native language, while in the substrata interference speakers adopt another language and abandon their own” (Abdullahi, 2008:24).

In his discussion of the different types of borrowing, Muhammed (1987) mentions two primary types of linguistic borrowing. These are direct borrowing and cultural borrowing. According to him, “direct borrowing deals with borrowing within the same speech area, and cultural borrowing is when the borrowed items are from different languages” (p. 69). Consequently, he realizes that there is inadequacy in distinguishing between the two by saying that “there is no absolute distinction to be made between dialect boundaries and language boundaries,” asserting that “linguistic borrowing also depends upon the nature and degree of contact between two languages.” (p. 69). In another view, Salim (1981) identifies two types of borrowing: intra-language and inter-language. He explains that “both types of borrowing have similarity in that the behaviour of given speakers may be either a conscious or unconscious one” (p. 16).

So many attempts have been made to distinguish code switching and borrowing. One of the early approaches in doing so is that of Scotton (1988) who uses the level of social significance of the item. His view is that if the non-native item carries social significance, it is a code-switch. The criterion might not be helpful where the form and meaning are identical but the label is different. The assertion of Hoffer (2002) is that, “Since 1950 many attempts have been made to find diagnostic criteria which will distinguish borrowing, transfer, interference, code-switching, code-mixing, so on” (p. 6). Abdullahi (2008) claims that “up to now, there is no consensus in an attempt to distinguish between code-switching and borrowing” (p. 39). However, the chief criteria used in distinguishing them have been:

- a. degree of use by monolinguals, and;
- b. degree of morphophonemic integration.

The first criteria entail that established loans are commonly used by monolingual speakers, whereas code-switching tends to be a transitory phenomenon. Some linguists however, argue that the frequency of occurrence is an inconclusive measure to differentiate between code-switching and borrowing. Poplack (1988) too seems

to suggest that “the use of a borrowed item is code-switching until enough speakers use it and it is accepted by native speakers into their dictionary” (p. 220). Based on the above views of different scholars, we can deduce that the main difference between borrowing and code-switching is that borrowed items are integrated into the borrowing language, while code-switching implies the use of two or more different language codes within the same stretch of speech.

In his publication, Allison (2015) says that “the socio-cultural influence the Kanuri had on the Makary Kotoko language is evident from the number of Kanuri loanwords in the language” (p. 5). He identified 916 borrowings in a database containing a little over 3000 distinct lexical entries, out of which 401 have a Classical Arabic (C.A.) source. Of those with a C.A. source, 133 show evidence of having been borrowed through Kanuri. In addition, another 379 items (with no apparent C.A. source) have been borrowed from Kanuri. This makes borrowings from Kanuri (512 in total) account for more than half of the known borrowings in the language and about one-sixth of the Makary Kotoko lexical database. The table below shows how the borrowings from Kanuri (considering only those with no apparent C.A. source) are distributed among the different lexical categories of Makary Kotoko.

Kanuri borrowings	Number
Nouns	302
Verbs	12
Adjectives	32
Adverbs	15
Ideophones	8
Grammatical morphemes	10
TOTAL	379

The above distribution shows that Nouns were heavily borrowed by the Makary Kotoko language with a total number of 302 lexical items. This is followed by adjectives with 32 lexical items, 15 adverbs, 12 verbs, 10 grammatical morphemes and 8 ideophones, making ideophones the least lexical category borrowed from Kanuri.

Grema (2011) in his analysis of Kanuri loanwords in Hausa classifies the loans based on the semantic domain of usage of the loanwords in Hausa as well as the phonological and morphological adaptations of them. Eight specific domains were identified in the work. They are: the domains of Education, Religion, and Culture, Politics, Transportation, Farm, Personal and Place names, Homes and Anomalous.

Percentages of each of these domains were identified. Based on the findings, the domain of religion and culture has the greatest number of loanwords from Kanuri to Hausa with 48.10 percent. This is according to him, due to the fact that Islam came to the Kanem Borno Empire before reaching the Hausa land.

Mohammadou (1997), in his study of Kanuri imprint on Adamawa Fulbe and Fulfulde, found that the Fulfulde-Kanuri contacts successively took place in a double contrasting environment of Borno and Fombina. In his findings, Mohammadou (1997) obtained 2,221 Kanuri loanwords in Fulfulde. For statistical distribution and of the loans, he distributed them into eight sections:

- a. Environment- 237 Loans,
- b. Man and society- 585 Loans,
- c. Sedentarization- 317 Loans,
- d. Islamization- 409 Loans,
- e. Jihad- 346 Loans,
- f. Abstracts- 173 Loans,
- g. Arts- 64 Loans, and
- h. Language- 86 Loans.

Bulakarima (1999) in his analysis of Kanuri loanwords in Guddiranci states that “Guddiranci borrowed words from Kanuri either directly or indirectly. Although Guddiranci has intimate contacts with other Chadic languages, Karai Karai, Ngizim, Bole, Ngamo and Bade as well as some Niger-Congo languages (Fulfulde).” His findings reveal that out of the 91 loanwords found in Guddiranci, 45 are from Kanuri while the remaining 46 are from Karai Karai, Ngizim, Bole, Ngamo, Fulfulde and Bade.

Bulakarima (2001) provides not only an important collection of English and French loanwords in Kanuri but also discusses their sound correspondences. According to him, since the ultimate aim of the study is to pave way for the incorporation of all the necessary loanwords and phrases, even the Greek compound words like *demos cracia* which was Anglicized to “democracy” and transferred to the Kanuri language via Arabization by suffixing “tiya” to the roots “demos” - people and “kratein” – to rule – to form the word “dimukratia” in Kanuri.

The work of Schuh (2003) is one of the most important works that focuses on the phonological and morphological adaptations of Kanuri words as they have been borrowed into other Chadic languages (Bade and Ngizim). The very large majority of loanwords identified are ‘substantive’ items- nouns and verbs. For example, in his analysis, of the 561 Kanuri loanwords in Ngizim, 390 are nouns and 118 are verbs, the remaining 53 being a mixture of adjectives, adverbs, ideophones, interjections,

particles and conjunctions.

In her work, Rothmaler (2006) examines how Arabic words are integrated into Kanuri and used in producing the shape of the words to fit into the Kanuri lexicon through the insertion and weakening of an epenthetic vowel at a word-initial position. Example:

- a. áláji < al-hajj “Title for somebody who has undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca”
- b. alkali < al-khadi “Judge”

Here, the nouns are incorporated including the article *al* which is the definite form of the noun. While in these words:

- a. líwúlà < al ibra “Needle”
- b. láirà < al akira “here after”

This is a case of the weakening of the sounds /b/ and /k/ in the borrowed words as nouns with the article and the initial vowel dropped.

The most extensive single work on Margi and also the most detailed and reliable is that of Hoffmann (1963) who provides a detailed description of the phonology, morphology and syntax of Babal Margi.

Dlibugunaya (2016) establishes a Margi phonemic inventory by using the classical phonemic discovery procedure of particularly minimal pairs and free variation. The work identifies the consonant and the vowel system of Margi and provides detailed descriptions with regard to their distribution into a different environment in a word. The finding of the work reveals that the consonant /v/ does not occur in a word-initial position, while the consonants /b, w, f, v, t, d, d̥, z, dz, n, tl, dl, sh, zh, c, gy, ky, hy, ghy, ny, k, g, h, gh, j, 'w, 'y/ do not occur in the word-final position. But the consonants /j, v/ can only occur in word-initial and medial positions. Concerning the distribution of phonetic vowels in Margi, Dlibugunaya (2016) states that these can occur in all the three positions in a word, i.e., word-initial, word-medial, and word-final positions.

3. Methodology

The methods through which the data for this research is collected are discussed under the following sub-headings: the area of the study, method of data collection, sample selection, description of the method, and data collection procedure.

3.1 Area of the study

This research is based on the Margi (*Margi Putai*) or West Margi spoken in Damboa Local Government Area of Borno state. The Margi West (*Margi Putai*) dialect is

chosen for this research because of its contact with the Kanuri language.

3.2 Method for data collection

An unstructured interview is applied to the selected groups of *Margi Putai* native speakers. A tape recorder is also used to record the articulation of the lexical items for the purpose of transcription by the researcher. This method is adopted in order to give a chance to those who can neither read nor write. Therefore, obtaining information from such people is impossible by the application of a mere questionnaire.

3.3 Sample selection

Fifty (50) *Margi Putai* respondents were selected from the area of the study. The average age of the sample population of people interviewed ranged from 25 to 50. This is because people of that age-range tend to have full mastery of their native language.

3.4 Data collection procedure

The researcher lists 300 words randomly drawn from Bulakarima, Bosoma, & Bulakarima's (2003) *Kanuri-English Dictionary*, which were presented to the respondents to give their *Margi Putai* equivalents on the question schedule prepared for the interview. The same manner is maintained from one respondent to the other.

3.5 Description of the method

The interview questions are divided into two sections: section one being the introductory part where information about the participants are collected, it consists of questions such as; name, age, occupation, his or her language variety, local government, village, and educational background (if any). In section two, the researcher lists the selected number of basic vocabulary as in the Bulakarima et al (2003) *Kanuri-English Dictionary*. Informants are asked to provide their *Margi Putai* equivalents. However, the researcher is at liberty to read out the words in the list to his informants.

3.6 Model of approach

The model of approach that was adopted for this research is that of Brann (2006). The work of Brann (2006) identifies three typologies or *archi* domains that can be applied to Nigerian urbana. The three levels are: local, state, and federal. Each of these *archi* domains as discussed in Brann (2006) are seen in three different levels of incidence or media of expressions: the local vernacular languages, the lingua francas and the official languages.

The work of Brann (2006) identifies 16 domains of incidence. These are:

- a. **Familiar:** 1. Home (H), 2. Farm (F), 3. Workshop (W)
- b. **Communal:** 4. School (S), 5. Market (M), 6. Club (C), 7. Resto (R), 8. Dispensary (D), 9. Temple (T), 10. Entertainment (E).

- c. **Public:** 11. Office (O), 12. Legion (L), 13. Assembly (A), 14. Bar (B), 15. Palace (P), and 16. Unibus (U).

The Kanuri loanwords in Margi identified in this research were established on the basis of the themes derived from the contact between Kanuri and Margi. As such, the loanwords are classified into domains as in Brann (2006).

4. Discussion on Findings

Based on the data obtained for the current research, eight domains were identified. These are the domains of school, office, market, temple, club, home, colour, time and direction, and weather and climate.

4.1 School

The Kanuri loanwords in this group belong to the domain of school (education). School is any place of instruction, whether traditional, Islamic, or western (public) (Brann, 2006). The loanwords identified in this domain belong to Islamic, not western or traditional education.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Kanuri</i>	<i>Margi</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
a.	Kakkadə	kakadu	‘book’
b.	Maləm	Malum	‘teacher’
c.	kəra	kərkəra	‘reading’
d.	goni	gwani	‘scholar’
e.	fasari	pasari	‘translation’
f.	ruwo	rubo	‘writing’
g.	masku	masku	‘expert’

The words above are found only in Islamic education within the Kanuri speaking communities. For example, *máləm* is used mostly in referring to a person that teaches small children the Quran at the *Sangaya* level while *gòní* is a teacher to the *máləm* who teaches the advanced aspect of the religion. Therefore, compared with the western education, *máləm* is equivalent to an NCE, Diploma or Degree holder, while *gòní* can be accorded the level of a Masters or PhD holder.

4.2 Office

An office is at the centre of either public or private administrations corresponding to local, state and federal levels (Brann, 2006). The words in this subsection are mostly used in the traditional system of administration in Kanuri. They are borrowed into Margi to serve the same purpose.

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Kanuri</i>	<i>Margi</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
a.	maina	maina	‘prince’
b.	yerima	yerima	‘prince’
c.	bələma	bulaama	‘ward head’
d.	galadima	galadima	‘senior title’
e.	kaigama	kaigama	‘senior title’
f.	Nana	Nana	‘princess’

In the above examples, the words *máinà* and *yerima* (in a and b) with the same gloss ‘prince’ are used in different cases. The one in (a) is used generally for the King’s son, while the one in (b) is used to denote the senior prince of the ruling house. The senior title *Kaigama* is used to denote commander of the Army whereas *galadima* is derived from the word *galtə>galatə* which literally means “advice” together with the bound morpheme (suffix) *-ma* which is used to derive agential noun from a verb. As such, *galtəma>galatəma>galadima* is a traditional title given to an adviser of the Shehu or Emir.

4.3 Market

A marketplace denotes any level of exchange or purchase of goods either at the local family stall or at the stock exchange market. Depending on the level of the markets, local languages are used at the level of market stalls in the home market, buyer’s languages are used in the traditional market whereas, in supermarkets, prices are fixed on the products, which does not give room for bargain. In the case of Kanuri and Margi, the contacts that led to borrowing were a result of traditional market exchanges that are based on Kanuri. The Kanuri loanwords in this group are made up of those that belong to trade and occupation.

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Kanuri</i>	<i>Margi</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
a.	butu	butuu	‘cheap’
b.	kungəna	kunguna	‘money’
c.	zau	jau	‘expensive’
d.	kasuwu	kasuku	‘market’
e.	riwa	riba	‘profit’
f.	zar	jaar	‘capital’
g.	reta	reta	‘half’
h.	kare	Kari	‘load’

i.	kagəl	kakil	‘smith’
j.	kagəlma	kakilma	‘blacksmith’

The data above indicates that several lexical items were borrowed into Margi language within the domain of the market. This is to show that the two languages have contact with respect to trading and occupational affairs. In example (d) above, the Kanuri word *kasuwu* was borrowed as *kasuku* by changing the bilabial semi-vowel /w/ to velar plosive /k/. This is because the word as used in SKO is a sonarized form of *kasugu*, and due to early contact between the two languages, Margi borrowed and maintained the old form as *kasuku* with some phonological modifications which were discussed in Modu (2017).

4.4 Temple

The loanwords identified in this group are those that have to do with religion. This includes traditional, Christian, or Muslim. The loanwords belonging to religion are that of the Islamic religion. Although some Margi speakers are Christians while others are Muslims (especially the *Margi Putai* dialect spoken in Damboa Local Government Area), we can say that as a result of their early contact with Kanuri people, the following words were borrowed into Margi within the domain of Islamic religion as given below:

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Kanuri</i>	<i>Margi</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
a.	asham	asham	‘fasting’
b.	mashidi	Mashidi	‘mosque’
c.	luwuran	lukuran	‘Quran’
d.	sala	sala	‘prayer’
e.	liman	liman	‘imam’
f.	laira	laira	‘hereafter’
g.	ladan	ladan	‘muezzin’
h.	zanna	janna	‘paradise’

From the words above, we can conclude that Margi borrows many lexical items from Kanuri that are used in the domain of religion. This shows that the Margi speakers use such words in their Islamic worships.

4.5 Club

The Kanuri loanwords in Margi in this domain are the ones found in settings of social relaxation outside the home. That is to say, the words are used at entertainment centers:

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Kanuri</i>	<i>Margi</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
a.	ganga	ganga	‘drum’
b.	duwu	duku	‘praise, singer, musician’

The words above are used for entertainment purposes, especially during ceremonies and occasions. For example, it is a commonly known fact that there are people in Kanuri communities who go from one occasion to the other praising people and at times singing in order to earn their livings. Such kinds of people are called *dúwù* in Kanuri. When borrowed into Margi it became *duku*. The reason was that the word was borrowed when the phonology of the source language had not changed.

4.6 Home

The lexical items in this group are those related to objects, structures, materials, animals, and food items that are used at home. It is also a domain of both nuclear and extended families (Brann, 2006). Other words that are categorized into this sub-section are those that are used for naming persons and body parts. Those names are used in Kanuri communities and were borrowed into Margi as a result of a direct interaction between the speakers of the two languages. The following examples illustrate this:

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Kanuri</i>	<i>Margi</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
a.	njitta	cita	‘pepper’
b.	bəji	buchi	‘mat’
c.	kəndai	kindai	‘woven raffia basket’
d.	kange	kangi	‘smoke’
e.	guwam	gubam	‘pot(water pot/storeypot)’
f.	təmbəli	tumbuli	‘toilet’
g.	buwu	buku	‘ashes’
h.	garu	garu	‘wall’
i.	tasa	tasa	‘metal dish’
j.	sanduwu	sanduku	‘box’
k.	kəmaski	kumaski	‘neighbor’
l.	fatu	patu	‘kitten/new born child’
m.	tarwuna	targuna	‘rabbit’

n.	tautau	toto	‘spider’
o.	koro	kwara	‘donkey’
p.	fər	pur	‘horse’
q.	dagəl	dagil	‘ladder’
r.	səmana	sumana	‘conversation’
s.	shawa	shawa	‘beautiful’
t.	ashir	ashir	‘secret’
u.	Kaka	Kaka	‘grandparent’
v.	Gaji	Gaji	‘lastborn’
w.	Gambo	Gambo	‘a unisex name given to a child born after twins’
x.	bibi	bibi	‘upper arm’
y.	fufu	pupu	‘lungs’
z.	ngulondo	gulandaa	‘finger’
aa.	ngumi	gum	‘chin’
bb.	dəmber	dimbur	‘buttocks’
cc.	shimalo	shimalo	‘tears’

The example (f) above *təmbəli* ‘toilet’ is dialectal and it is used mostly in Manga dialect. This is because other dialects like *Yerwa* prefer *səlgá>salaa*. Other dialects do use *ngàwùdí* in referring to the same place (toilet). The example of animals found under this domain are used mostly at home for day-to-day use, but *dagəl>dagil* seems to be confusing as to whether it will be classified as a domestic or wild animal. In this case, it can mean both domestic and wild animal in the sense that even though it is found mostly in the bush, some people do keep it as a pet in their houses.

The examples (u, x, w) above which are names of people are used as common nouns. This is because the name *kàkà* meaning ‘grandparent’ can be used by any man or woman who has grandchildren. *Gàjí* is used in naming a last born in a family. It is also used for both sexes. *Gàmbó* is used to name one who was born after twins, and it is a unisex name. Therefore, the Kanuri loanwords that are used in naming people which have been borrowed into Margi are mostly common nouns and at the same time unisex names. As such, there is no evidence so far in this research that identified any instance in which personal names are borrowed from Kanuri to Margi.

4.7 Color, Time and Direction

The Kanuri loanwords in Margi under this domain are those which are used in association with time, color and direction.

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Kanuri</i>	<i>Margi</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
a.	yala	yala	‘North’
b.	anəm	anum	‘South’
c.	fəte	putai	‘West’
d.	gədi	gidi	‘East’
e.	mawu	maguu	‘week’
f.	Səbdə	Subdu	‘Saturday’
g.	Talawu	Talaku	‘Tuesday’
h.	Zəma	Jumaa	‘Friday’
i.	kurwum	kurkum	‘yellow’
j.	sələm	sulum	‘black’
k.	liwula	lipila	‘blue’
l.	larawa	larapa	‘Wednesday’
m.	lamisə	lamisu	‘Thursday’

The loanwords in the examples above show that Margi borrowed so many Kanuri words that deal with time and direction. Based on this, it can be asserted that one of the dialects of Margi, “*Margi Putai*” (West Margi) got its name from Kanuri. The term ‘*Fute*,’ for instance, in Kanuri means “West.”

4.8 Weather and Climate

There are some words which are related to weather and climate. That is to say, they describe certain periods of time. For example:

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Kanuri</i>	<i>Margi</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
a.	kasam	kasam	‘wind’
b.	kulongu	kulonku	‘dew’
c.	bantəgəne	bantukune	‘harmattan’

In the examples above, it is evident that Margi borrowed some Kanuri lexical items that deal with weather and climate. And that out of the three words borrowed, both (a) and (b) were directly borrowed with no phonological changes while in (c) there are some phonological modifications which were all dealt with in Modu (2017).

5. Conclusion

This research provides domains in which Margi borrowed Kanuri words. The work has discussed the different modes of contact between the two languages and how the contacts affected the lexicons of both. Based on the data collected and analyzed, eight domains were identified in the work. These are the domains of school, office, market, temple, club, home, colour, time and direction, and weather and climate. About 78 Kanuri loanwords in Margi were identified in this work. The distribution of words shows that the domain of school has 7 loanwords, office places have 6, market 10, temple 8, club 2, names of persons and body parts 9, home 20, colour, time and direction 13, weather and climate 3. Among all of these domains, it is apparent that the domain of home has the highest number of words. Hence, we can deduce that the early contact that led to borrowing between Kanuri and Margi was in their place of residence or their customary or original locations.

The research further shows that there is a contact between Kanuri and Margi which led to borrowing heavily from Kanuri to Margi. It also provides an insight into the long-existing linguistic borrowings between Kanuri and Margi languages. On this basis, it serves as a valuable reference material for linguists who may be interested in the study of loanwords. It also stands to be of great help to teachers, students and researchers who may wish to further their investigation in comparative linguistics between Kanuri and Margi and other African languages.

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Classroom Interaction as a Way of Developing Students' Speaking Skill at the Tertiary Level EFL Classroom: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract

Teaching speaking skills through classroom interaction is usually a neglected program at the tertiary EFL education in Bangladesh. This study primarily aims at discovering the current scenario of the practices and problems of classroom interaction at a Bangladeshi tertiary EFL classroom. This study further proposes some strategies for developing speaking skills through classroom interaction. The data were collected from 110 student respondents and 11 teacher respondents of 4 universities based on the stratified random sampling. For collecting and analyzing data, a mixed-methods approach (QUAN-QUAL) was applied. The data collection methods were a questionnaire survey on the tertiary EFL students and a semi-structured interview of the tertiary EFL teachers. The results show that though students and teachers were aware of classroom interaction, very little communication actually took place in the classroom because of teachers' monopolizing the talk time and learners' getting little to no talk time at all. The study also exposes that most of the students did not interact spontaneously and teachers used a great deal of Bangla in the EFL classroom. These hampered students' speaking skills development. Finally, this paper presents some pedagogical implications and offers some recommendations for the considerations of the tertiary EFL teachers, learners, and policymakers.

Keywords: classroom interaction, speaking skills, tertiary level, EFL classroom, ELT

Introduction

In the current world, English is the most prominent lingua franca which is massively used at international business meetings and academic conferences (Formkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2011). Robson (2011) states "English is spoken at a useful level by some 1.75 billion people worldwide – that's one in every four" (p. 2). Currently, it has become the most dominant language in the fields of trade and commerce, science and technology, international relations, and education (Harmer, 2011) and over 1 billion people across the globe are learning English (Luke, 2021). To cope with this reality, ELT practices in Bangladesh had a shift from the popular



Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the last three decades (Rahman & Pandian, 2018a; 2018b) and many policies have been adopted in recent years to standardize English language teaching (ELT).

Despite all these efforts our education system employed, the outcomes are still depressing (Ali & Walker, 2014; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). Students' performance in English is generally found to be very poor (Chowdhury & Kamal, 2014) and "Bangladesh has remained largely unsuccessful in attaining self-reliance in English language teaching" (Rahman et al., 2019). Regarding the overall English language proficiency of a university student, Imam (2005) reports that the average level of English language skills of a university student is equivalent to that of a class 7 student. In a recent study upon the tertiary level students, Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) found that majority of the tertiary EFL students are very weak in speaking English. Such a background prompted the educators of this part of the world to enrich the ELT curriculum at the tertiary level in order to prepare the students for global competitions and job opportunities (Sultana, 2014; Choudhury & Kabir, 2014). In addition, different steps have been taken at the tertiary level to improve students' communication skills, namely those of listening and speaking. However, Maniruzzaman (2012) observes, although these two skills have started gaining some importance in the curriculum and discussion, they are still neglected in the instructions and assessment system. Although the researchers have indicated that listening and speaking skills are still neglected, it is not clear how much they are neglected in our classroom and assessment system. Particularly there is very little data on the current practices of the teaching and learning of speaking skills through classroom interaction at the tertiary EFL classroom. This deficiency prompted the researchers of the current study to investigate the real classroom practice of teaching speaking skills through classroom interaction.

In another study conducted on the humanities students of Dhaka University, Chowdhury (2010) finds that more than 50% of the students "rarely-never" (p. 69) spoke in the classroom. Even though from her study we find a picture of classroom interaction and the state of our tertiary students' speaking ability, the data has become somewhat old which was sampled from only one university. Thus, the researchers of the current study got interested in recognizing the current general state of the tertiary students' speaking proficiency and the practices of Bangladeshi classroom interaction.

Alam and Khan (2014) and Chowdhury and Kabir (2014) view that Bangladeshi tertiary students are usually weak in communicative skills. In this regard, they find some gaps between the theory and the practice in teaching English communication skills, particularly speaking but they have not mentioned explicitly what those gaps

are and how much the students are weak in interactive speaking. Therefore, the present researchers became curious to unearth the gaps and reasons for students' weaknesses in this skill.

Taking all the realities into consideration, the researchers of the current study decided to conduct a study and the primary objective of it is to observe the real classroom interaction practices, particularly the role of teachers in the tertiary EFL classroom of Bangladesh. Another objective of the study is to show how far classroom interaction strategies develop learners' speaking ability. Finally, it aims to explore the gap between the standard practice of classroom interaction and the real classroom interaction scenario here at the tertiary level EFL classroom and the obstacles EFL teachers and learners face in carrying out interactive activities in the language classroom.

In order to meet the objectives discussed above, three research questions were formulated to carry out the present investigation. The research questions are given below:

Research question 1:

What is the common classroom interaction scenario in the tertiary EFL classes, and how far does classroom interaction enhance tertiary EFL students' speaking skills?

Research question 2:

What roles are played and strategies followed by the tertiary EFL teachers of Bangladesh to make the EFL classes interactive and develop students' speaking skills?

Research question 3:

What hindrances do tertiary EFL teachers and students encounter while carrying out interactive activities in a speaking class?

For obtaining the answers to the research questions, a brief survey was conducted in four universities of Dhaka that helped the researchers elicit the views of the concerned students and teachers. The survey results have been presented and discussed in this paper systematically. Finally, based on the findings and analyses, some pedagogical implications have been highlighted for the concerned stakeholders: students, teachers, and policymakers.

Background of the study

The evolution of ELT in Bangladesh: Past and present

Though English in Bangladesh is generally considered a foreign language, McArthur (1996) terms Bangladesh as an ESL country. In this connection, Sarwar (2013) states, "English has the status of an unofficial second language in Bangladesh and is compulsory from the primary level in all state-run schools where the medium of instruction is Bengali" (p. 145). In the Pakistan period, English enjoyed the status

of the second language and it was taught as a functional means of communication at secondary schools in Pakistan (Hasan 2004) but immediately after the liberation in 1971, the status of English was changed and Bangla was given higher prestige in all spheres of the society, predominantly in education (Rahman et al, 2019). The outcome was not beneficial to the EFL learners here as it led to a fall in the proficiencies in English skills among the learner communities (Rahman et al, 2019). As part of the policy, English as a compulsory subject was withdrawn from the tertiary level. Moreover, because of the Bengali Language Implementation Act 1987, English lost the status of the official second language which yielded a drastic result as “the standard of English fell to the abysmal depth in public schools and universities” (Hassan, 2004, p.11). Practically we fell behind although, ideally, we wanted to proceed.

Having realized the consequences of students’ low performances in English skills, the government later came forward to make up for the loss. In order to develop students’ communicative competence, CLT was first introduced in the secondary and higher secondary levels in the 1990s by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (Barman, Sultana & Basu, 2007). The Private University Act 1992 prompted the setting up of a good number of universities and the act allowed English to be used as the medium of instruction. According to the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC), there are 49 public universities and 107 private universities operational in seven divisions of the country (UGC, 2021). For all disciplines, Functional English courses have been made obligatory by the UGC and the latest education policy, National Education Policy-2010 (National Education Policy 2010: p. 32, Clause 09). Many universities especially private universities now offer additional one or two English courses of 100 marks for 3 credits in order to give extra support to the development of students’ English language skills (Akteruzzaman & Islam, 2017). They have initiated different EFL programs to teach students the basic language skills (BLS) of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English and prepare them for the global competitions and job opportunities (Sultana, 2014; Choudhury & Kabir, 2014). These initiatives have already helped the learners excel in academic English exams and the passing rates in these subjects have increased notably though unfortunately, these rates do not reflect the original development of their language skills (Chowdhury & Kamal, 2014).

Literature Review

Teaching interactional speaking skills at the EFL classroom: Pedagogical suggestions

“Classroom interaction has been a central issue in teaching and learning English in the era of communicative language teaching” (Sundari, 2017, p.146). A good number of studies and books related to comprehensible input, output, and the role

of interaction in second language acquisition (Ellis, 1991; Krashen, 1989; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) have added significant contributions to the development of language teaching and learning. English being a major international language of communication, it is important that EFL learners learn to speak and interact in a multiplicity of situations using the language. Especially, speaking in English is considered a skill upon which a person is judged “at face value” (McDonough, Shaw, & Masuhara 2013, p. 157). Therefore, the intricacy of speaking and interactional skills can be described by “...the ability to fill time with talk...the ability to talk in coherent, reasoned and semantically dense sentences... the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts” (Richards, 1990, p. 75).

Regarding the interactional activities in the EFL classroom, Shumin (2002) suggests that primarily adult learners should be engaged in short, interactional exchanges in which they will make short utterances and then participate in small talks in the target language and so on. Pair work and group work are also suggested as important strategies to increase speaking fluency (Brown, 2001; Green, 1989; Nation 1989). Nation (1989), for instance, affirms that “one of the most useful procedures is the movement from individual to pair to group to whole class activity” (p. 26). Regarding teaching interactional skills in the speaking class, Bohlke (2014), Goh (2007) and Nunan (2015) also put emphasis on undertaking interactional skills like regulated turn-takings, maintaining and closing a dialogue, and other conversation management strategies alike.

In order to enhance classroom interaction, Nunan (2015) suggests, while designing the speaking skill syllabus, teachers should consider the global, national, and local contexts and create opportunities for students to talk by using group work or pair work. Tomlinson and Dat (2004) also suggest that teachers should encourage oral participation, nurture a supportive atmosphere in the classroom, provide constructive feedback to the production of students, and encourage peer interaction in the speaking development classes.

Classroom interaction and the development of students' speaking skills: Teachers' role in the EFL classroom

In the EFL classroom, non-native English speakers need to be prepared to speak in different situations and classroom interactions can be a strong way to develop their oral skills. In order to facilitate students' speaking fluency, teachers should ensure their maximum exposure to the target language (Brown, 2007; Scrivener, 2005) and motivate them to interact with each other (Ur, 1996). Regarding the types of interaction, Rivers (1987) and Tomlinson and Dat (2004) suggest two major kinds: teacher-learner interaction and learner-learner interaction. They also suggest that teachers must make a practical arrangement in the EFL class so that students get enough opportunities to think, reflect and rehearse.

With regards to developing learners' speaking abilities, Harmer (2011) stresses that in the EFL classroom a language teacher should play the roles of a facilitator, a manager and an organizer of different interactive activities like: designing and organizing pair work and group work, giving feedback, playing whatever role that is required, and arranging different spoken discourse activities. One of the major problems EFL learners face in the classroom is the anxiety to interact which has a negative impact on their oral fluency (Horwitz, Cope and Horwitz, 1986). In order to help students overcome this anxiety, Brown (2001) suggests, "Our job as teachers is to provide the kind of warm, embracing climate that encourages students to speak, however halting or broken their attempts may be" (p. 269).

Studies on interactional speaking activities at the tertiary EFL classroom

In a research on the tertiary EFL students in Palestine, Nakhalah (2016) finds "the levels of students of English at Al Quds Open University in speaking skills is medium" (p. 104). He also observes that the lack of a proper interactional environment in the EFL classroom and teachers' negligence in arranging classroom interaction are major reasons for learners' backwardness in improving their speaking skills.

In another research conducted on the Tunisian tertiary teachers, Ounis (2017) reports that Tunisian EFL teachers carry out diverse types of classroom activities like "oral presentations, debates and role plays as the major speaking tasks" (p. 101) and motivates learners to be involved in communicative interactions with one another. About the output of the classroom interaction and oral assessments, she expresses her satisfaction and states "Therefore, the careful choice of oral performance tasks mirrors Stiggin's (2008) ideas that assessment does help teachers make instructional and educational decisions. Through the classroom management of appropriate and relevant tasks, the quality of assessment is guaranteed" (Ounis, 2017, pp. 101-102).

In another similar study conducted on some private universities in Bangladesh, Farooqui (2007) finds tertiary students' spoken proficiency is very poor, although private universities provide students with various interactive activities and competitions. She further observes that most of the students feel shy and do not want to interact in front of the class. Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) find a similar scenario in public universities where "a huge number of students never talk in the class" (p. 131). Regarding teachers' initiative to promote classroom interaction, they find that many of the teachers do not care about their responsibility to promote conversational skills in the EFL classroom and "such kind of non-cooperation on the part of teachers highly contributes to the lacking of competency in conversation skill in English" (Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020, p. 131).

Seedhouse and Jenks (2015) suggest that in the language classroom, interaction should be made an inseparable part of education. In our case in Bangladesh, the situation is different and there seems to be a big gap between policy imperatives

and classroom realities; thus it can be concluded that here the tertiary level language skills and curriculum objectives are rather poorly met (Rahman et al., 2019).

The literature on teaching interactional spoken English to tertiary learners in Bangladesh is very scarce (Farooqui, 2007). In addition, regarding the practices of speaking skills like how much time is spent for developing the interactional speaking skills, what roles teachers play in the classroom, what strategies they follow in carrying out the interactive activities at the tertiary EFL classroom and so on, very little data is available. From the available data it is found that there are some practices of speaking skills in the classroom but in many cases the results are not up to the mark. Though we get some information regarding classroom practices at private universities from Farooqui (2007), Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020), the studies were conducted in very limited research sites and hence the findings cannot be generalized.

Regarding the interactional speaking skills practices in the public universality EFL classroom, Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) report a very grim picture. In their study they find that about 40% of the students very rarely interact in the class, 53% students interact occasionally and only 8% students interact in English very often. From the studies of Maniruzzaman (2012), and Alam and Sinha (2009) regarding teaching and learning speaking skills, it is further proved that indeed, speaking is a neglected skill at the tertiary level of Bangladesh. However, there is not much clear and comprehensive data available on how much this skill is neglected in the local instructions and assessment system and what interactive activities are undertaken by the tertiary EFL teachers. Therefore, additional and updated data need to be collected to enable the researchers to examine and address the issue more closely and extensively.

Methodology of the Empirical Investigation

Research design

In terms of approach, it was a mixed-methods research as both the aspects of quantitative and qualitative methods in the stages of data collection and data analyses were employed. In terms of typology, it is a descriptive and explanatory research in nature.

Study areas

The proposed study areas were 4 selected private universities in Dhaka Metropolis. For collecting the necessary data, researchers visited those universities for about 25 days starting from 29th October to 22nd November 2019. For visiting the universities and collecting data from the students and teachers, permission from the heads of the departments of English and the concerned authorities of the universities were taken in due manner.

Participants of the study

The target population/subjects for the present study were of the tertiary level-undergraduate students and their teachers. The student respondents were university students who were either studying or had already studied compulsory functional English courses at the entry-level and the teacher respondents were their concerned English language teachers.

In total 110 students from 4 Universities based on stratified random sampling were selected, and they participated in the questionnaire survey voluntarily. Among the student respondents 79 were male and 31, female. Their ages were between 20-25 years.

A total of 11 EFL teachers participated in the research. Among them 5 were male and 6 were female. All of them graduated in English from different universities and most of them were highly experienced English Teachers. The total sample size of the study was 121.

Data sources

The cardinal sources of our data were the students and the EFL teachers of the departments of English from the universities we selected. Students' feedback in questionnaire surveys and interview feedback of their EFL teachers were the most important primary data. Curriculum development theory books, books on language skills theories and research methods, government gazettes, relevant MPhil and PhD dissertations, and internet websites were used as the secondary sources of data.

Data collection instruments

The instruments used to collect the data were students' questionnaire for questionnaire survey, interview notes, and note-taking sheets for semi-structured interviews of the teachers.

The student questionnaire consisted of 11 questions with multiple choice answers. For the purpose of maintaining validity and reliability, the questionnaire contained questions that directly matched the major issues of investigation of the study. Thus, through the student questionnaire our quantitative data were collected from the students. A similar instrument was used in the studies of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020), Tercan and Dikilitaş (2015), and Ounis (2017).

Later, in order to find out the gaps between students' expectations and their achievements regarding the improvement of their speaking skills, the researchers took a semi-structured one-to-one interview of some EFL teachers of the concerned universities. Thus, our qualitative data were collected from the teachers. To ensure the authenticity of the data, due permission was taken from the authorities and the teachers beforehand while the confidentiality of the respondents' personal

information was guaranteed. The interviews followed a semi-structured format because the study started with a fairly clear focus and then it addressed more specific issues. Each question was followed by inquiries planned to attain more thorough replies. Each interview lasted about 35 minutes and they were conducted in the participants' university offices. Most of the questions focused on the strategies that teachers used in teaching interactive speaking skills in the EFL classroom. Some questions were asked about their perceptions regarding students' classroom interaction difficulties and the steps teachers took to minimize them (the interview questions are given in Appendix B). Interview transcripts were later sent to the respondents for verification to increase the credibility of the study. Fade (2003) and Mays and Pope (2000) followed a similar technique in their research. In order to collect similar data, this instrument was also used in similar studies conducted by Farooqui (2007), and Nakhalah (2016).

Data collection procedure

To collect data from the student respondents the researchers visited their EFL classes at the appointed times and one of the faculty members of each university helped the researchers to meet the student respondents. Then the researchers briefed those students about the purpose, objectives, and significance of the current study and clarified all their queries. Finally, the respondents were provided with the questionnaires. After filling out the questionnaires, they returned the papers to the researchers. This way the quantitative data were collected from 110 student respondents of 4 universities.

To collect the data from the teachers, they were explained the reasons and aims of the current research, also the major questions of the thesis. The interviews were recorded and all the important points of their feedback were noted down. All the interviewees were asked the same questions as noted on the interview sheet.

Data analysis and presentation procedure

The current research adopted thematic approaches for data gathering and analysis. All qualitative data were logically interpreted and placed. Mathematical tools and descriptive statistical methods were used for analyzing the quantitative data using MS Excel 19 and were presented in tables, followed by subsequent discussions.

Data Analysis and Findings

Analysis of quantitative data collected from student questionnaire

In an attempt to investigate the importance of classroom interaction in improving EFL students' speaking skills and the real scenario of classroom interaction and the relevant challenges tertiary students faced in developing their speaking ability, student respondents were asked 14 multiple choice questions through a questionnaire survey. The data collected from their answers are analyzed below.

Amount/frequency of student- student interaction inside the classroom

Table 1: Amount/frequency of student-student interaction inside the classroom

Options/Amount or frequency	Opinion of Total Number of Student Respondents	Percentage of Total Number of Student Respondents
Always	21	19%
Very Often	22	20%
Sometimes	53	58%
Seldom	9	8%
Never	6	5%

The data depicted in Table 1 show that the majority of the respondents (71%) experienced a poor show of student-student interaction inside the EFL classroom while only 29% felt that there was enough opportunity for them to participate in peer interaction. This finding is very parallel to that of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) who find that only “6.66% often and 0.95% respondents always speak English” (p. 125). This goes against the popular suggestion of the scholars regarding the expected amount of student-student interaction that supposedly takes place in our EFL classes.

Seedhouse and Jenks (2015) suggest, in the language classroom interaction should be made an inseparable part of education. This picture also goes against the curricular objectives of the tertiary EFL education of Bangladesh. The same is also resonated with the observations of Rahman et al., (2019) who have found evidence that the curriculum objectives of our tertiary level language skills are hardly met in practice (Rahman et al., 2019).

Amount/frequency of student-student interaction outside the classroom

Table 2: Amount/frequency of student-student interaction outside the classroom

Options	Total Number of Student Respondents	Percentage of Student Respondents
Always	17	16%
Very often	11	10%
Often	17	16%
Occasionally	24	22%
Rarely	39	36%

Table 2 shows a poor picture of student-student interaction outside the classroom. The data show that only 26% of the students tried positively to interact outside the classroom while 38% interacted occasionally and a big percentage (36%) rarely interacted outside the classroom. It is observed that the majority of our student respondents were reluctant to interact in English both inside and outside the EFL classroom.

Amount/frequency of student-teacher interaction inside the classroom

Table 3: Amount/frequency of student-teacher interaction inside the classroom

Options	Opinions of Total Number of Student Respondents	Percentage of Student Respondents
Always	20	17%
Very often	27	23%
Often	27	23%
Occasionally	19	16%
Rarely	25	21%

From the results obtained from Table 3, it is seen that only 40% of the student respondents felt there was enough student-teacher interaction in the EFL classroom, while 39% felt this sort of interaction took place often and occasionally. On the other hand, a significant number of respondents (21%) experienced that student-teacher interaction in the EFL classroom took place very rarely. However, it can be deduced that the rate of teacher-student interaction in the EFL classroom was not satisfactory enough. Although in the Tunisian context it is seen that this support is satisfactory enough in the tertiary EFL classroom (Ounis, 2017), in the Bangladeshi context this picture is different as reported by the study of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020). In this regard, they find that many of the teachers do not care about their responsibility to promote speaking skills in the tertiary EFL classroom.

Commonly used interaction patterns in the classroom

Table 4: Commonly used interaction patterns in the classroom

Options	Total Number of Student Respondents (out of 100)	Percentage of Student Respondents
T-S	50	45%
T-Ss	71	64%
S-T	24	22%

Ss-T	26	24%
S-S	17	15%
Ss-Ss	10	9%

Table 4 shows the majority of the student respondents (65%) felt the most common pattern of interactions practiced in the classroom was “T-Ss” and 45% felt “T-S.” That means most of the interactions were teacher centered. On the other hand, on average, 23% of the respondents felt that the patterns “Ss-T” or “S-T” took place too and, an average 12% voted for “S-S” and “Ss-Ss” patterns. This picture clearly shows that student-student interaction was very rare in the tertiary EFL classroom and that the EFL classes were highly teacher-centered. This finding is also supported by the study of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) who report “a huge number of students never talk in the class” (p. 131). They also observe that students “do not feel comfortable speaking English with one another” (p. 131).

Popular interaction techniques and strategies practiced in the speaking skill classroom

Table 5: Popular interaction techniques and strategies

Options	Total no. of Student Respondents Participated in the Activity Type	Percentage of the Student Respondents
Pair work	13	11%
Group Work	54	44%
General Classroom discussion with the teacher	43	35%
Simulation and Role Plays	13	10%

Regarding student respondents’ perception about the most popular interaction techniques and strategies practiced in the speaking skill classroom, Table 5 shows, 55% of the student respondents believed the most effective classroom interaction techniques were pair work and group work. Their perception is also in tandem with that of Harmer (2011) who suggests that a language teacher should be a facilitator and an organizer of different activities like pair work and group work, role plays, different spoken discourses, and interactive activities. This is also supported by the study of Khan (2017) who report that “most students prefer group discussion for problem-solving’ (p. 57).

Contribution of classroom interaction to the development of students' speaking skills

Table 6: The contribution of classroom interaction in the development of students' speaking skills

Options/Amount of Influence	Total Number of Student Respondents Opined	Percentage of the Student Respondents
A lot	57	52%
Pretty much	37	34%
Moderate	9	8%
A little	7	6%

Table 6 clearly shows that the vast majority of the student respondents (86%) believed that classroom interaction was a useful tool to enhance their oral skills. This finding agrees with the suggestions of Shumin (2002) who observes that graded interactive activities in the EFL classroom will make the learners confident in speaking gradually and will lead them to be successful speakers in the long run. Brown (2001), Green (1989), and Nation (1989), in addition, suggest that pair work and group work are two of the major interactive activities that will help increase the successful chances of speaking fluency in adult learners.

Percentage of truly interactive English lessons

Table 7: Students' satisfaction level regarding classroom interaction scenario

Options/ percentage of truly interactive classes	Total Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Almost all of the classes (about 100%)	9	8%
Most all of the classes (about 80%)	15	14%
Majority of the classes (about 60%)	20	18%
Some of classes (about 40%)	37	34%
Very few classes (about 20%)	29	26%

Regarding students' satisfaction level of the classroom interaction scenario, the results displayed in Table 7 imply that about one-third of the respondents were happy with the practices of the classroom interaction while two-thirds of them were not satisfied enough. The results show that only 22% respondents felt that their EFL classes were truly interactive while 18% believed that the classroom interaction scenario was just satisfactory enough and the majority of the respondents (60%) said that the classroom interaction scenario was poor. These findings are also supported by the studies of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020), Maniruzzaman

(2012), and Alam and Sinha (2009). They observe that though Bangladeshi tertiary education has theoretically adopted speaking skill as an important language skill to be practiced in the EFL classroom, it is still a neglected skill in both instructions and assessments.

Students' level of speaking proficiency

Table 8: Student' level of speaking proficiency

Options/ Levels	Total Number of Student Respondents	Percentage
Very good	4	4%
Good	41	37%
Average	46	42%
Poor	19	17%

The data of Table 8 show that the speaking proficiency level of the majority of the student respondents (59%) was not up to the mark while the speaking proficiency level of 41% was satisfactory, i.e. good or very good. These findings are synonymous with the findings of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) who report that in the tertiary EFL classes "... a huge number of students never talk in the class" (p. 131). They also observe that tertiary students do not feel comfortable with using English in the classroom too (p. 131).

Students' satisfaction level regarding classroom interaction scenario

Table 9: Students' satisfaction level regarding classroom interaction scenario

Options	Total Number of Student Respondents	Percentage of Student Respondents
Very much	22	20%
Pretty much	20	18%
Moderate	51	46%
Very little	19	16%

How much EFL teachers encourage students to develop their interactive speaking skills in the classroom

Table 10: The extent of teachers' role in encouraging students to develop their interactive speaking skill in the classroom

Options/Frequency of Teachers' Encouragements	Opinions of Total Number of Student Respondents	Percentage of Student Respondents
Always	57	52%
Very often	22	20%
Often	19	18%
Occasionally	7	6%
Rarely	4	6%

Regarding teachers' role in encouraging students to develop their interactive speaking skills in the classroom, it was found, as per Table 10 that the majority of the EFL teachers (72%) encouraged and motivated students to interact in English while 28% of the teachers did not act to the expected extent. From the data it is seen that the teachers' motivation level was high but in this case the report of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) gives us something different. They observe that many of the tertiary EFL teachers did not bother about discharging their responsibility as an organizer or a facilitator; rather, they played the role of a controller and a ruler and such a role highly contributed to the students' "lacking of speaking competency in conversation skills in English" (p. 132).

Roles played by EFL teachers in making the lessons interactive

Table 11: Roles played by EFL teachers in making the lessons interactive

Roles of EFL Teachers	Number of Student Respondents Responded (out of 110)	Percentage of the Respondents Mention about Their Teachers' Roles
Controller	40	37%
Assessor	10	9%
Assessor	56	51%
Organizer	56	51%
Prompter	36	33%
Resource Person	33	30%

Participant	34	31%
Tutor	38	36%
Observer	29	26%

Table 11 shows that most of the student respondents (51% equally) thought their teachers played two main roles: one of a corrector and the other of an organizer. 37% of the respondents gave their opinions about the teachers' role being that of the controller, 35% of the tutor, 33% of the prompter, 31% of the participant, 30% of the resource person, 26% of the observer and 9%, the assessor. Although language teachers play some general roles, to improve students' interactive skills, they should also play the roles of an organizer or a manager in the EFL classroom (Harmer, 2011). In this case, Table 11 shows that only 51% teachers played this role and the rest of them did not, which logically demonstrates that there were much fewer interactive activities in the EFL classroom than expected. On the other hand, it is seen that teachers' greater roles of an organizer and a motivator brought a very good result for the Tunisian tertiary students. In a study conducted on the Tunisian tertiary EFL teachers, Ounis (2017) reports that they successfully carried out diverse types of classroom activities like "oral presentations, debates and role plays as the major speaking tasks" (p. 101) and motivated learners to be involved in communicative interactions with one another. About the output of the classroom interaction and oral assessment with the EFL learners, she reports a very satisfactory result (p. 101). From the data it is seen that regarding classroom interaction Bangladeshi EFL learners, in comparison, had much less of an expected service from their EFL teachers.

The extent of teachers' contribution to the correction of students' speaking errors or mistakes during the classroom interaction

Table 12: The extent of teachers' contribution to the correction of students' speaking errors or mistakes

Options	Total Number of Student Respondents	Percentage of Student Respondents
Always	64	59%
Very often	17	16%
Often	15	14%
Occasionally	3	3%
Rarely	9	8%

Student respondents were asked to comment about the teachers' role in correcting their errors or mistakes and giving feedback during their speaking lessons.

Results, as presented in Table 12, show that the majority of the teachers (75%) were positively active in correcting students' mistakes/errors or giving feedback in speaking lessons while one-fourth of them were not active in this role. This finding supports what some other researchers, too have discovered. They opine that in the language classroom the teacher usually controls the activities as the knower and gives feedback or correction whenever students make errors (Murray & Christison, 2011; Ur, 2009; Walsh, 2011). From the data of the current research, it is seen that the majority of the teachers were active in helping the students overcome their speaking difficulties and errors. From the findings it can be expected that tertiary students greatly benefited out of their teachers' services but the research results of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) contradict the expectations as they find only 7% of the tertiary students interacted spontaneously in the EFL classroom (Mridha and Muniruzzaman, 2020).

Reasons of students' speaking reticence in the EFL classroom

Table 13: Reasons of students' speaking reticence in the EFL classroom

Reasons	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Lack of confidence	40	36%
Classroom teaching learning environment not supporting enough	20	18%
Lessons are not interesting	40	36%
Lack of enough language resource	55	50%

When asked about their own perception regarding the reasons for their speaking reticence in the classroom, the majority of the student respondents (86%) said, as presented in Table 13, they lacked enough language resources and confidence to speak and interact in the classroom. This finding is very synonymous with that of Farooqui (2007) who reports that EFL students usually have a small English vocabulary and perform very poorly in speaking. As the reason, she says, "They feel shy and do not want to speak in front of the class" (Farooqui, 2007, p. 102). About one-third of the respondents of the current research also opined that they did not find the lessons interesting or engaging and that their classroom teaching/learning environment was not supportive enough to enhance their participation in interactive activities. This reason can be attributed to the reasons shown by Farooqui (2007) as she finds that students come to study at the tertiary level in Bangladesh with an educational background where EFL classes see very little interaction and creativity. She further adds that although university teachers try their best to support their students, most of the pupils feel nervous to initiate any interaction because of their weak background in English (Farooqui, 2007).

Analysis of Qualitative Data Collected from Teachers' Interviews

In an attempt to investigate the importance of classroom interaction to improve EFL students' speaking skills and the real scenario of classroom communication in the tertiary EFL classes, also to discuss the many challenges our teachers and students face while developing their speaking abilities, a total of 11 English teachers from 4 universities were interviewed. The interview sheet consisted of 11 questions: both "closed" and "open-ended." The closed questions required teachers to answer "Yes" or "No", and through the open-ended questions, teachers' elaborate views and their knowledge about the issues were elicited. During the interview, all the salient points and themes from the teachers' replies to each question were noted down. In addition, all interviews were audio-recorded to support the data analyses where necessary. Each interview lasted approximately half an hour.

General Findings

Prior to the interview, teachers provided information on their personal background through Question no. 1 (see Appendix B). Teachers' information gathered from the bio-data show that there were 5 male teachers and 6 female teachers. Their ages ranged from 22 to 35 years. All of them were Bangladeshi nationals. Nine of them graduated from the University of Dhaka, one from Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, and the other from American International University of Bangladesh.

The data collected from their responses show that 3 teachers had been teaching English for eight years, 1 teacher for five years, 3 for four years, 3 for three years, and the rest 2 for about one year. This denotes that a majority of them were experienced EFL teachers. When asked about their job satisfaction, they gave positive feedback about their profession and responsibilities as an EFL teacher and shared some of their happy memories of their teaching career. Most of them said that although there were some challenges and issues, they liked interacting with the students in the question-answer session. They also affirmed that in their respective EFL classes they shared ideas and experiences with the students in all necessary cases. 3 teachers pointed out that they appreciated the efforts of the students in classroom interaction.

Special Findings

The recurrent themes and significant comments of EFL teachers regarding the teaching of interactive speaking skills in the EFL classroom were identified and incorporated into three main sections:

- Roles played and strategies followed by EFL teachers to make classes interactive and develop students' speaking skills
- How far classroom interaction enhanced tertiary EFL students' speaking skills, and

- The major hindrances teachers encountered in developing students' interactive speaking skills

Roles played and strategies followed by EFL teachers to make classes interactive and develop students' speaking skills

While answering questions regarding the above-mentioned issues most of the teachers said that they were aware of the many benefits of classroom interaction but the actual instances of such communication were much lesser than necessary. They attributed this gap to the shortage of class time. Most of them further reported that the common interaction pattern they followed in the classroom was T-Ss. This implies that the classes were largely teacher-centered. A similar finding is also supported by the work of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) who found that the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL classes were mostly teacher-dominated and an ideal interactive scenario was largely absent in the EFL classroom because of that. The same is also supported by Thorton (2006) who observes that students came to tertiary level in Bangladesh with an educational background where "classroom activity is characterised by the teacher delivering the syllabus which students ingest, leaving little room for genuine enquiry, questioning or criticism" (p. 190). Some of the teachers said they applied S-S, T-S, S-Ss patterns too because they thought that students' speaking skills would develop further if they talked with their classmates more than they did with their teachers.

How far classroom interaction enhanced tertiary EFL students' speaking skills

The data show only 1 out of 11 teachers used mainly English as the medium of classroom instruction in the EFL class. While asked about her motivation behind carrying out the classroom instruction in English, she said that she had studied in an English medium school where English was the primary medium of conversation. She added that she felt comfortable with speaking and teaching in English in her classroom. All the rest of the teachers reported that they used both Bengali and English in the classroom teaching. While asked about the reason for using two languages in the classroom, they gave more or less a common answer. They said if they always interacted with students in English, students would have failed to understand the text properly.

In a close-ended question, teachers were asked if classroom interaction was a meaningful way to develop learners' speaking ability. In reply to the question, every teacher said "yes."

In reply to the query regarding the effectiveness of classroom interaction to help students develop their speaking skills, all the teachers opined that their students learned much better if they worked in pairs or groups. They also added that this activity developed students' intellectual understanding, communication skills,

managerial qualities, interpersonal skills, etc., and helped them to be more fluent in speaking. Some teachers said students worked better in pair/group tasks as weak students got ideas and support from the stronger ones in shared talks.

In reply to the question regarding what interactive activities they mostly used in the speaking classrooms, the data demonstrate that, most of the teachers organized group work, pair work, role-plays, warm-up sessions and they also used multimedia to facilitate and motivate students to interact in the classroom. The finding agrees with the suggestions of Harmer (2011) who opines that a language teacher should organize different activities like pair work, group work, role-plays, and different spoken discourse or interactive activities in the EFL classroom. This is further supported by the study of Khan (2017) who reports that “most students prefer group discussion for problem-solving” (p. 57).

Major hindrances teachers encountered in developing students’ speaking skills

In reply to the question regarding the above-mentioned query, all the teachers reported some obstacles they faced trying to make their classes interactive. The major ones are: students’ poor vocabulary stock and other linguistic resources; gaps among students’ language proficiency levels; lack of proper academic environment and motivation; poor speaking proficiency level and lack of confidence. The data also agree with the observations of Savaşçı (2014) who finds that feelings such as lack of confidence and fear of making errors are some of the major causes for students’ speaking reticence in the classroom (p. 2686). The teachers also reported that short instructional periods might turn out to be another obstacle to the development of students’ interactive speaking skills.

Furthermore, it is understood that institutional policies, curriculum, students’ exposure to the language, and social and educational backgrounds apparently influence how teachers and students interact with each other. This research finding also supports the suggestions by Stern (1983, as cited in Hall, 2011) about contextual factors in language teaching. Seedhouse and Jenks (2015) also observe that classroom interaction might be affected by the institutional and national policies and learners’ linguistic or cultural backgrounds.

Discussions on the Main Research Questions

In the questionnaire survey for students under Q.I – Q.X, respondents were asked to give their own perceptions regarding different practices of classroom interaction they experienced in their EFL classes. Through these questions, they were also asked to comment about the efficacy of the classroom interaction activities in developing their speaking skills. Q.XI – Q.XIII were based on what roles teachers played to make the EFL classes interactive and develop students’ speaking skills while Q.IX was based on the potential challenges and difficulties students faced trying to be interactive in the class.

The emerged data reveal that in most of the EFL classes, the interaction pattern followed is T-Ss and the majority of the student respondents experienced a poor show of student-student interaction inside and outside the EFL classroom. In addition, it is also found that the percentage of truly interactive classes was very poor. This implies that the tertiary EFL classes were largely teacher-centered which is also supported by the findings of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020). They find that our tertiary EFL classes were mostly teacher-dominated and an ideal interactive scenario is largely absent. Regarding teacher-initiated interactions, the majority of the students also felt that the rate of teacher–student communication in the EFL classroom was not satisfactory enough. This finding is highly parallel to that of Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) who report that only “6.66% often and 0.95% respondents always speak English” (p. 125). The results also go against the suggestion of the scholars regarding the expected amount of student-student interactions to take place in the EFL classes. Tomlinson and Dat (2004) suggest that EFL students will be able to speak better if their teachers encourage oral participation, nurture a supportive atmosphere, and encourage peer interaction. Although it is seen that in the Tunisian context this support is satisfactory enough in the tertiary EFL classroom (Ounis, 2017) this picture is quite different in the Bangladeshi context.

With regards to students' satisfaction level towards the efficacy of the classroom interaction, it is seen that the majority of the students were not happy with the outcome of the classroom interaction and the vast majority of the students believed that most of the EFL classes were not truly interactive. This implies that the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL classrooms are still not practically ready to develop students' speaking abilities to the expected level. The research results further demonstrate that a good number of students did not find the lessons interesting and the classroom teaching/learning environment supportive enough to enhance their participation in the interactive activities. This finding further supports the work of Farooqui (2007) who observes that students come to the tertiary level in Bangladesh with an educational background where teachers just delivered the syllabus and organized the exams “leaving little room for genuine enquiry, questioning or criticism” (Thornton, 2006).

With regards to the teachers' address of speaking errors, the majority of the students opined that their teachers were positively active in correcting their mistakes and errors and giving feedback in speaking lessons. It is also worth observing that a good number of the teachers were not found active in this role. In this regard, Murray and Christison (2011), Ur (2009), and Walsh (2011) opine that in the classroom, traditionally controls are at the teacher's hand as the knower and they should give feedback or correct the speaking mistakes when students speak. Furthermore, the

learning environment requires teachers to play various roles to fulfill students' different needs but the data show that teachers mainly play two major roles: the role of a corrector and a prompter. This implies that most of the teachers mainly focused more on mistakes than on the flow of interaction which is not a helpful practice for developing learners' speaking fluency as their practice is interrupted very frequently and they may feel low for their mistakes. Teachers will correct the mistakes made but their main target should be allowing the pupils to produce language without interruption and fear (Brown, 2007).

During interactive sessions in the EFL classroom, the data reveal that the students encountered many obstacles. A good majority of them (86%) lacked enough language resources and confidence to speak and interact in English. This finding is very synonymous with those of Farooqui (2007) who reports that "students usually have a small English vocabulary" (p. 102). For this reason, they lack confidence, feel shy, and do not want to speak in front of the class (Farooqui, 2007). Farooqui (2007) also observes that though university EFL teachers try their best to create a favorable environment, most of the students feel anxious and lack the courage to initiate any sort of conversation.

Teachers' interview sheets also contained 11 questions to collect their perceptions about the classroom interaction practices in the EFL classes they taught and the challenges they faced in developing students' interactive speaking skills.

The findings from the teachers' interviews reveal that in the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL classroom, interaction included not only some oral practices but also personal and pedagogical practices. Some of the teachers said they applied S-S, T-S, S-Ss patterns because they thought that their students' speaking skills would develop further if they had talked with their classmates more than with the teachers themselves. It is also seen that in the EFL classroom teachers mainly used English to manage the class but more often than not they used both Bangla and English in their lectures. They said they had to use both the languages in order to build rapport with their students and explain the lessons better. The data also demonstrate that teachers put effort to create a congenial atmosphere in the EFL class and involved students in interactive speaking skill activities. This might prove to be consistent with the second language classroom activities suggested by Harmer (2011) and second language classroom modes by Walsh (2011). Undoubtedly, this managerial mode is one of the primary classroom interaction features which are used to organize a successful physical classroom environment. It is also demonstrated by the data that students tend to learn much better if they work in pairs or groups because this shared activity develops their intellectual understanding, communication skills, and managerial skills; eradicates their gaps of knowledge; and helps them become more fluent in

time. This view is also supported by Khan (2017) who observes that students learn better in group work.

Regarding the types of interactive activities teachers mostly used in the speaking classes, the data demonstrate that most of them organized group work, pair work, role plays, warm-up sessions, using multimedia to facilitate and motivate students to interact in the classroom. The finding agrees with the suggestions of Harmer (2011) who confirms that a language teacher should organize different activities like pair work, group work, role-plays, and different spoken discourse and interactive activities in the EFL classroom.

The data collected from the teachers' interviews also demonstrate that they face some realities and practical challenges which hindered their classes from being truly interactive. The major ones were students' poor vocabulary stock and limited linguistic materials, gaps among their language proficiency levels, lack of proper academic environment and motivation, a poor EFL background, and a very limited time allocation for interactive activities in the EFL classes. Therefore, it can be suggested that institutional policies, curriculum, students' exposure to the language, and their social and educational background are the factors that seemingly influence how teachers and students interact with each other. This research finding may also support the suggestions offered by Stern (1983, in Hall, 2011) and Seedhouse and Jenks (2015) about different contextual factors that are involved in language teaching. They suggest that the culture of the classroom interaction might also be affected by the institutional/national policies and learners' linguistic or cultural backgrounds. They also suggest that classroom interaction can be affected by several variables outside the classroom too.

To sum up, the results from this study confirm both the positive influence and helpful effects of classroom interaction on students' speaking skills. This research exposes some ground realities and factors that affect the development of the interactional speaking skills of tertiary EFL students of Bangladesh. Although both students and teachers showed positive attitudes towards an interactive and engaging classroom environment, it is evident that Bangladeshi tertiary EFL classrooms are still not prepared to deliver the services to a satisfactory level.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Though this paper has produced a good number of findings regarding the classroom interaction scenario and tertiary level students' speaking skills development in Bangladesh, it has some limitations too in terms of samples, instruments, and task types. First, it offers findings from the respondents that represent only one region of Bangladesh and this suggests that the data is very limited to be considered a generalized finding. Second, only two instruments were used to collect the data: a

questionnaire survey for students and semi-structured interviews for teachers. Data triangulation and methodological triangulation were not largely employed. Third, only one type of tertiary institution, namely the private university was included in the study (four of them). If the samples had been selected from some more regions and they had represented all types of universities and tertiary institutions, and if proper data triangulation and methodological triangulations had been employed, the study might have generated more generalized and comprehensive data. For future research, this study suggests that the researchers include respondents from all types of tertiary institutions representing all regions of Bangladesh. It also suggests that future researchers should apply more data collection methods and include more data sources. All these steps, if implemented, will help us develop a richer database and explore more solid findings in the field of interactional speaking skill development.

Conclusion

This research highlights the importance of classroom interaction for the overall improvement of the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL students' speaking skills and the findings strongly suggest that classroom interaction can be a very effective tool to develop their communicative abilities. Consequently, extensive classroom interaction is highly recommended in the tertiary level EFL classroom in Bangladesh as it fosters an exchange of knowledge, expedites autonomous learning and builds up confidence in the students, consequently promoting their expertise in oral communication.

The results also assert that although both students and teachers strongly believe that classroom interaction is a very effective strategy to develop students' speaking and communication skills, Bangladeshi tertiary level EFL classrooms are not still prepared to implement the effective practices of classroom interaction techniques in the truest sense and consequently being deprived of its potentials to offer deserving outputs to the tertiary learners.

In the light of these findings, the summary of this entire work can be illustrated in the following two main points:

Bangladeshi tertiary students want to see their ELT teachers in the role of better organizers, prompters and resource persons. Teachers with these three key roles will then assist them to interact and speak better in the EFL classroom and make them confident users of English.

Teachers should incorporate cooperative learning techniques as a mandatory teaching-learning activity in the tertiary EFL classroom where learners can think and research independently and interact in pairs or groups comfortably. Teachers also need to provide students with more opportunities in the

classroom to interact with each other since they enjoy group work and pair work the most.

Above all, this research elicits some insights into the relationship between classroom interaction and students' speaking proficiency. These insights could be useful to the tertiary EFL teachers in being informed of the ground reality more and strengthening their classroom teaching strategies. These could also help the tertiary EFL students develop their understanding of a pragmatic way of developing their speaking skills.

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Appendix A: Questions for Students **Questionnaire for Students**

(Please circle the number of correct option/options as answers to the following questions or statements.)

Dear Respondent(s):

As-salamu alaikum. This is for your kind information that we, Md. Nurullah Patwary and Swarna Chowdhury are carrying out a field research on "Classroom Interaction as a Way of Developing Students' Speaking Skills at the Tertiary Level EFL Classroom: An Empirical Investigation." For our research work, we need answers to the questions given in the questionnaire. Your

valuable information will help us create awareness in the teaching and learning of English skills specially those of speaking in the tertiary level of our country. Your information will be used only for research purposes and your personal details will be kept confidential, so please feel free to share genuine responses.

Your participation in this survey will greatly contribute to the research. You are expected to cooperate in this regard and we thank you in advance.

Name:
Name of your Institution:
Department:
Semester:
Batch:

Questionnaire for Students

- I. **How often do you interact with your classmates inside the classroom?**
 - a. always
 - b. very often
 - c. often
 - d. occasionally
- II. **How often do you interact with your classmates outside the classroom?**
 - a. always
 - b. often
 - c. sometimes
 - d. seldom
 - e. never
 - f. rarely
- III. **How often do you interact with your teachers inside and outside the classroom?**
 - a. always
 - b. very often
 - c. often
 - d. occasionally
 - e. Rarely
- IV. **Which of these interaction pattern/patterns usually happen in the language classroom? (T means teacher, S=single student, Ss= Students)**
 - a. T-S;
 - b. T-Ss;
 - c. S-T;
 - d. Ss- T;
 - e. S-S;
 - f. Ss-Ss
- V. **How much do you think regular interaction in the classroom helps you improve your speaking skills?**

- a. a lot
 - b. pretty much
 - c. moderate
 - d. a little
- VI. **Which of the following interaction techniques do you enjoy the most?**
- a. pair work
 - b. group work
 - c. general classroom discussion with the teacher
 - d. simulation (imitation) and role plays
- VII. **Which language do you and your teacher mostly use in English classes?**
- a. Bengali
 - b. English
 - c. both
- VIII. **What percentage of your English classes is truly interactive?**
- a. About 100% (Almost all of the classes)
 - b. About 80% (Most of the classes)
 - c. About 60% (Majority of the classes)
 - d. About 40% (Some of the classes)
 - e. About 20% (Very few classes)
- IX. **How do you consider your level of English speaking skills?**
- a. very good
 - b. good
 - c. average
 - d. poor
- X. **How happy are you with the scopes of classroom interaction in your English lessons?**
- a. very much
 - b. pretty much
 - c. moderate
 - d. very little
- XI. **How often does your teacher encourage you to speak English in the classroom?**
- a. always
 - b. very often
 - c. often
 - d. occasionally
 - e. rarely
- XII. **What roles are generally played by your teachers in English lessons?**
- a. controller
 - b. assessor
 - c. corrector
 - d. organizer
 - e. prompter
 - f. resource person
 - g. participant

- h. tutor
- i. observer

XIII. When you make some speaking errors or mistakes, how often does your teacher correct them for you?

- a. always
- b. very often
- c. often
- d. occasionally
- e. rarely

XIV. If you sometimes do not interact during a lesson, it is because-

- a. you feel you are not extrovert
- b. the classroom teaching learning environment is not supportive enough
- c. the lesson is not interesting and engaging.
- d. you feel that you lack enough language resource to speak

...Thanks for your all out cooperation...

Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Teachers

Interview Questions for Teachers

(The information collected will be kept confidential)

Name: **Designation:**

Institution:

You are humbly requested to answer the following questions:

1. Would you mind introducing yourself in brief?
2. How long have you been teaching English?
3. How much are you enjoying teaching English? You can share some of your classroom experiences with us.
4. Which language do you use for classroom instructions? Why?
5. What type of interactive activities do you use in the classroom?
6. How do these activities help you and your students develop both of your English skills?
7. What are the interaction patterns you usually apply/find in the classroom?
8. Do you think students learn better if they work in pair/group? Why or why not?
9. What are the aspects that impede classroom interaction? How do you overcome them?
10. Do you think classroom interaction is a meaningful way to develop our learners' speaking abilities?
11. If you have anything more to say (please add):

...Thanks a lot for all your cooperation...

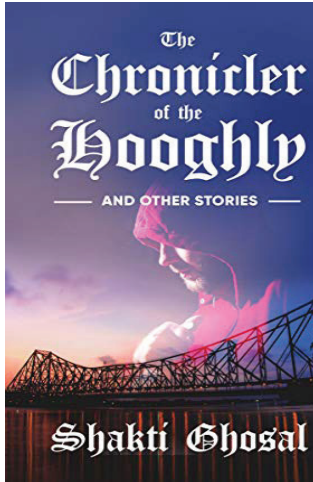
Book Reviews

The Chronicler of the Hooghly and Other Stories

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The Chronicler of the Hooghly and Other Stories **Shakti Ghosal**

New Delhi: Half Baked Beans Publishing, 2020.

190 pp.

ASIN: B08XMBRP4K

The Chronicler of the Hooghly and Other Stories by Shakti Ghosal (Half Baked Beans Literature, New Delhi, 2020) is a collection of stories. A versatile personality, Ghosal has worked in the corporate world for decades, and now has come up with his first book of fiction. But his captivating style of narrating tales bears testimony to the fact that he is an accomplished writer of prose. According to the author, these four stories are inspired

by his personal experiences. However, he has woven these stories into a multi-hued fabric of history and societal norms prevailing at that time and linking Bengali culture to modern times. The prominent aspect of the book is that readers get a taste of both the ancient and the modern times, and the switchover is amazing.

The title story, “The Chronicler of the Hooghly,” which appears as the fourth and final story in the book, has its beginning in the year 1756, one year prior to the eventful Battle of Plassey which completely changed the political scenario of not only Bengal but the whole of India too. By winning this battle, the British, through East India Company, successfully laid the foundation for British rule in India, subjecting her people to the yoke of ignominious foreign rule for about two centuries. This story highlights the unfortunate actions of self-interested power-seekers who played treacherous and deceitful games to further their own petty interests. In the process, they even compromised the independence of their kingdoms by their shameful betrayal to the British authorities. Omichand, Nabakrishna Deb, and other characters in the story are representative of such a phenomenon with which the annals of Indian history are replete. Sowing the seeds of discontent among the local chieftains, significant persons in the establishment, the servants, and petty officials had been the winning strategy of the British authorities in India. Ghosal, in this story, has sculpted such characters with finesse and authenticity which successfully

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evoke the reader's interest. He has narrated this story through a stranger who has linked the history of Bengal, the development of modern Kolkata, and the making of British rule in India via Bengal to the saga of the pious Hooghly River. This part of the story is a unique feature. Civilizations usually grow around the banks of rivers and vanish in due course. But the river remains standing as the real chronicler of the events occurring in different regimes at different times. Lastly, the author has laced the narrative with the anecdote of a pearl necklace which touches the chord of spiritualism and moral beliefs of the people.

Going backwards through the book's contents, the third story "Fault Lines" deals with a unique psychological idea. The story's message is that, despite our day-to-day conquests, it is our alter ego that decides the final results. Sometimes, we weave a web around our thinking faculty which makes us believe that we are doing the right thing but this may not always be the case. There is someone, our alter ego, who reminds us of or shows us our fault lines, at least once in our life. Set in Muscat, Oman, this is a story of two close friends who are diametrically opposite in temperament and approach towards life. They are destined to woo the same girl. But this time, the slow-moving tortoise loses the race to the guile of his worldly wise and fastmoving friend. The loser quits the field. However, one day the girl, now married to the winning friend, finds an unopened envelope from the loser friend and ultimately discovers the truth. Her inner self rebels and she leaves her husband's place loaded with a heavy sense of remorse. This way, she inflicts punishment on her husband for his immoral act. The story has been narrated in fluent style, as is noticeable in all of Ghosal's stories, primarily because of the author's familiarity with the places and incidents which adds to the natural flow of the narrative.

"Pandemic" is the second story of this collection. Ghosal has picked the threads of this story from the Spanish flu pandemic of 1919, and the setting is old Calcutta. He has taken the narrative to its logical end by linking it to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, nothing has changed in essence. We were as ignorant about the disease then as we are of the disease today. At that time too, there were no specific medical prescriptions or safe vaccination regime. The condition is the same today, even though science and technology have made tremendous strides. But the most interesting aspect is that human nature has not changed. The central character of this story, a woman of insatiable thirst for male company, remains oblivious of the dreaded impact of the novel coronavirus of the present times and constantly seeks the presence of her one-time beau, the hero of this story. However, everything ends quietly. The lives of many are safeguarded, particularly of the hero's family, and the story comes to a happy ending for the hero. The narrator ends by commenting, "Which pandemic was going to leave a more lasting impact, the one inside his head or the one outside, Indranil remained unsure." By doing this, the author has equated

the present corona epidemic with the immoral thoughts taking control of the hero's mind. Not everyone, of course, is or can be exposed to such immoral thoughts and there is no such virus as yet which can mentally pollute an entire society at any time. But "Pandemic" does not meet the readers' expectations that the story would end with something related to the corona pandemic. Maybe, the author was driven by a larger social perspective where morality of conduct means successfully turning the wheels of civilization. Aside from this oversight, the author's detailed description of the life and times of Calcutta of yore and the Gurugram of the present is to be commended.

Finally, we come to the first story of this collection, "Ashtami," which, simply put, is superb. Ghosal has raised a very socially relevant historical issue, a signature of his writing focus. Starting from the infamous partition of Bengal in 1905, masterminded by the staunch imperialist Governor-General, Lord Curzon, Ghosal ends the story in the backdrop of the communal frenzy in the wake of India's freedom in 1947. In both the settings, there were people's protests culminating in deadly communal riots. But in between and in troubled times, the chanting of Durga Saptashati slokas, the widely resonating sounds of dhaks, and the auspicious puja of Maha Ashtami come alive in this story. In all his stories, Ghosal has successfully sprinkled an aroma of the Bengali culture and the Indian ethos with credibility. The end of this story comes to us as a brainstorming session. The message is loud and clear. We still lack a general understanding and overall empathy for special children who are still considered a burden on their families. Despite better awareness levels regarding the problem, we still treat our special children not as a gift from God but as a curse. The sudden downfall of Shanti, the protagonist of the story, becomes insignificant at the time of riots. The author has portrayed the nasty and heartrending picture of ensuing riots in Calcutta and New Delhi with rare sensitivity. Against this backdrop, he had chosen a very socially relevant theme, for which he deserves appreciation. It may be noted that the crux of the story is not the plight of a special child who suddenly finds himself in the vortex of harsh realities of life beyond his imagination. Factually, nobody seemed to think about this aspect. But the author is not to be blamed for this lacuna. Rather, he has portrayed honestly the society's approach and mindset regarding the condition of special children.

Though this is his first book of fiction, and he is not a professional writer, Ghosal's acumen and flair for writing are simply commendable. This is unputdownable book. The narration reminds us of rivers in the hilly terrain that, despite rugged interface with rocks and boulders, keep on flowing in a rhythm and reaching their destination without much ado. The readers must read this book as a trip down memory lane with regards to the forgotten annals of Indian history, particularly of Calcutta and Bengal. The most interesting aspect is that all the stories are centred

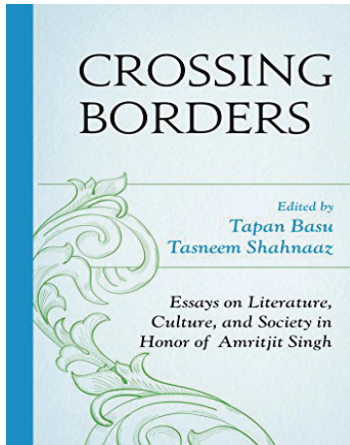
around the River Hooghly which sometimes appears to narrate its own story through the powerful quill of the author. Ghosal has done proper research to locate the required material for his stories. At the end of the book, he has added a couple of pages of Acknowledgements and References that reflect his sincerity and keenness for details. This brilliant debut collection marks Ghosal's entry as an author in the Indo-English literary firmament of India.

Of Walls That Cannot Be Mended

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Crossing Borders: Essays on Literature, Culture, and Society in Honor of Amritjit Singh
Edited by Tapan Basu and Tasneem Shahnaaz.
Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan, 2017. 376 pp.
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I do not know if the Festschrift as a genre has received extended critical attention. If not, it would certainly deserve such attention. For the time being, the academically minded reader has to be content with an interesting albeit brief Wikipedia entry, and hope that a graduate student keen to find a novel topic for a dissertation will spot this lacuna in literary studies.

The genre (unsurprisingly) is German in origin, and antedates the First World War. Scholars fleeing the Nazis introduced it to America, from where it spread worldwide. By now there must be hundreds, if not thousands, of Festschriften honoring eminent scholars, scientists, writers, and artists. A celebrity may be honored by more than one Festschrift; and though a single celebratory volume is the norm, there are instances of multi-volume Festschriften as well. The Germans, who have a well-deserved reputation for scholarly overkill, probably hold the record in this field. A Festschrift to mark the 75th birthday of historian Joseph Voigt in 1972, initially planned as a four-volume tribute, has burgeoned into 89 volumes, with more likely to come.

The Festschrift under consideration is of the standard single-volume variety, sturdily bound, and substantial in the number, and wide in the range, of scholarly contributions. In addition, as an “Epilogue,” subtitled “Amritjit Singh: Reflections and Stories,” is a feature not found in all Festschriften, a *Tabula Glaturatoria* (literally, a list of congratulations) containing brief messages from friends and colleagues, thirty-six in all. These will afford a pleasant respite to readers who tire easily of heavy-footed academic prose, and together with the immediately preceding interview conducted by Nibir Ghosh, sketch an engaging portrait of Professor Singh the scholar and Amritjit the person.

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From his youthful years as an assistant lecturer in a Delhi college, Singh has been an intellectual adventurer, an enthusiastic organizer of conferences, a tireless academic networker ever ready to take on organizational responsibilities. As a Fulbright graduate student in America, his reading of Richard Wright's *Native Son* proved to be a life changer. He made African American literature, still a novelty in academic studies, his chief specialty. The spin-off from his doctoral dissertation, *The Novels of the Harlem Renaissance* (1976), is considered a seminal contribution to the field. Back in India, Amritjit, now Dr. Singh, spent eight productive years divided among three institutions, the American Studies Research Center, Osmania University, and the University of Rajasthan (where, at 33, he was the youngest full professor in the country), before he made his permanent home in America in 1984. He taught at Hofstra University and Rhode Island College before taking up the prestigious Langston Hughes Chair in American Literature at Ohio University, from where he retired recently.

It is worth noting that there was an existential reason behind Amritjit Singh's choice of research area. Being a Sikh, which identified him as a member of a minority community in his native land, he felt he had a natural affinity with African-Americans. Born in 1945 in Rawalpindi, he is profoundly aware of the dislocation and violence that attended Partition. His heightened awareness of the problems faced by minorities, and of the special significance attaching to their cultural productions, led to involvement with organizations dedicated to the study of minority literatures in America. He is a founding member of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS), and served a term as its President. He played a key role in the formation of the European and Indian chapters of MELUS. In time, these took on a life of their own, rechristening themselves as, respectively, MESEA (Society for Multi-Ethnic Studies: Europe and America) and MELUS-MELOW (the latter half of the hyphenated compound standing for Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World). Fittingly, Singh was honored with a MELUS Lifetime Achievement Award. Together with Professor K. D. Verma, he was instrumental in setting up the South Asian Literary Association (SALA), and put in a stint as its President. He was also founder President of US-ACLALS, the American chapter of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. Among his many editorial positions is that of Senior Editor of MELA, a series of books on the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of America published by Rutgers University Press.

Lest readers accuse me of overloading a short review of a Festschrift with biographical information on the honoree, let me turn to the numerous and weighty essays that make up its bulk. Though varied in the specific subjects covered, they are thematically linked to Professor Singh's lifelong concerns. As the editorial preface notes, "we decided that it would be appropriate to honor Professor Singh

by bringing out a volume of essays on the idea of crossing borders in life, literature, and culture.” Borders are a feature of the modern world, and crossing borders in this world, whether legally, bureaucratically sanctioned by the issuance of passports and visas, or illegally, maybe to escape an intolerable situation and seek a better life, or perhaps with sinister intent, is an activity marked by a discursive character peculiar to our times. This is borne out by the plethora of terms relating to the phenomenon that have been thrown up in recent years: Diaspora, Migrancy, Transnationalism, Translingualism, Transculturalism, Hybridity, In-betweenness, Globalization, Multiculturalism, etc.

The 20 essays are divided into groups of three or four, under six thematic parts. Part I, “Multiculturalism and its Discontents,” ranges from the 19th century to the 21st, interrogating a number of inter-ethnic texts to disabuse any cozy ideological formulation. Silvia Schultersmandl’s “Out of Line: Shifting Border Paradigms in Cooper, Morrison and Yamashita” examines the different kinds of boundaries, civilizational, racial, national, and geopolitical, that feature in three novels. Interestingly, the essay begins with an apt reference to Frost’s poem “Mending Wall.” Significantly, the walls he and others throughout the book deal with are never complete, cannot be completely destroyed, or properly mended. Peter Schmidt’s “Wave or Particle?: Crossing Borders in Ruth Ozeki’s novel *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013),” brings out the novel’s particular relevance to contemporary ecological issues. Martha J. Cutter’s “Translating across the Borders” has the explanatory subtitle, “Sui Sin Far and Other Interethnic/Interstitial Asian American Subjects.” Foregrounding the pioneering work of the daughter of a British father and a Chinese mother who migrates in 1870 to North America, the essay introduces and explores “the literary trope of the ‘tragic Eurasian.’” In the final essay in this section, Fred Gardaphé’s “Dancing with Italians,” explanatorily subtitled “Chicago’s Italians in Fact, and in the Fiction of Willard Motley,” we are brought to realize that a black novelist need not be limited to racially defined themes to create fiction that reveals significant aspects of the racial situation.

In Part II, “Nation and Sub-Nation,” Robin E. Field’s “Creating Kashmir: Gender, Politics, and Violence in Meena Arora Nayak’s *Endless Rain*,” and Zubeda Jalalzai’s “Drawing the Durand Line: Pakistani Afghans, Borders, and Transnational Insecurity,” the lingering problems of what has been dubbed “the Long Partition,” are painfully elaborated. Catherine Rottenberg’s “Teaching *Giovanni’s Room* in the Shadow of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” is the story of her discovery in the classroom in a fraught geopolitical situation how this famous novel gives us “crucial insights into how privilege operates.” Part III, “Diaspora and Trans-Nation,” opens with Nalini Iyer’s highlight on two crucial texts of “Diasporic Subjectivity.” One is the autobiography *Caste and Outcast* by Dhan Gopal Mukerji (1923); the other, Sadhu

Singh Dhami's semi-autobiographical coming-of-age novel set in 1920s Canada, *Maluka* (1978). Rahul K. Gairola's "A Partition without Borders" gives "Diasporic Readings of *Clear Light of Day* and *Train to Pakistan*." Auritro Majumdar's "Caste, Race, and Intellectual History," is a wide-ranging theoretical excursus on the concept of "singular modernity." Part IV, "Gendered Identities," is a welcome corrective to distortions wrought by gender hegemony. Cheryl A. Wall writes on "Jessie Fauset and the Historiography of the Harlem Renaissance"; Thadious M. Davis on Nella Larsen; Ayesha K. Hardison on Felice Swados's *House of Fury*. Part V, "Art: Between the Popular and the Populist," Arnold Rampersad explores the subject through an examination of Langston Hughes in relation to Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and others. Jasbir Jain's "Orality, History, Tradition," brings Indian aesthetics to bear on several socially conscious contemporary texts. Robert B. Stepto focuses on *Lil' Dan the Drummer Boy* (1983), Romare Bearden's illustrated children's book about black Union soldiers in the Civil War. The last section of essays, "Journeys across Art and Life," ends with the interview with Amritjit Singh, and begins with Werner Sollor's engaging "Literary Stroll" through "'Heritage' in America," Charles Johnson's insightful "Retrospective View" of Ralph Ellison, and Lynda Ng's useful examination of "Race and Gender in Elleke Boehmer's Fiction."

Researchers reading this book will be able to discover many points of entry into interesting and important topics. It is worth mentioning that these essays are informed by a salutary sense of social commitment without which literary studies is liable to become divorced from the highly problematic "real" world. The editorial introduction effectively highlights this point: "The essays gathered in *Crossing Borders* will enliven and enrich debates about the self and the other in the spheres of philosophy, politics, and literature, while also potentially facilitating a reexamination of laws and policies governing migration across borders, challenging the often fraught relationship between the global North and South."

Taking a cue from the book, I should like to end with a note on my own relationship with Amritjit. I remember meeting him in the company of our mutual friend, the late lamented Jaysinh Birjepatil, and R. Parthasarathy, at the 1986 MLA convention in Manhattan. Some years back we established e-contact, and he invited me to contribute an essay on the Bangladeshi literary response to the Partition for the anthology, *Revisiting India's Partition* (2016) that he co-edited with Nalini Iyer and Rahul Gairola. Then, in January 2019, at the 19th SALA conference he was instrumental in getting me the Distinguished Achievement Award for Creative Writing. I should also add that my former student, sometime colleague, and friend, Dr. Afrin Zinat, put in a word for me at an opportune moment. In the lively small talk at the conference dinner, I discovered that Amritjit had been a fellow at the American Studies Research Center (ASRC) at Hyderabad. It so happened that in

1977, after a month in Madras doing a course on American Literature of the 1920s organized by the US Educational Foundation in India (USEFI), I enjoyed a week-long research visit to the ASRC in the company of a new friend, the poet and academic Rupendra Guha Majumdar. We exchanged a few words with the late Professor Sequoira and a young and lively Sardarji who was indefatigable in offering advice to several seemingly clueless research students. The Sardarji was, of course, Amritjit. We go back a long way indeed.

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- All figures, graphs, and pictures must be in black and white.
- Abstract should be 150–200 words
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- Use American spelling
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