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SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE: "Dealing with Precarity"
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Purpose of Intent

The Journal of Alterity Studies and World Literature is an Australian peer-reviewed journal that focuses on identity and otherness in literature, art, film, television, theatre and philosophy. We welcome articles from world literature, postcolonial, queer and feminist subjects and their intersections which provide a way to interpret literary and cultural productions. Alterity was integrated into philosophy by Emmanuel Levinas who gave the term an existential and phenomenological dimension. Identity in relation to limitedness and limitlessness extends beyond philosophy with its implicitly metaphysical categories. Edward Said's analysis on Orientalism reveals that the West's conception of selfhood was founded on the idea of an Other and this selfhood and identity manifests in literature. He views alterity as a part of the literary imaginary that sustains illusory binaries. Judith Butler argues that norms are not normal but rather constructed and performed. Identity is based on activity and open to interpretation and reinterpretation. Binaries used to sustain identity also thereby sustain oppression. Yet such a view is sustained by a binary logic that comes close to Hegel's framing of the master–slave dynamic and dialectic. Indeed, such a framing was adopted by Simone de Beauvoir in her existential feminist analysis of woman as the second sex. The problem of identity and oppression is thereby complex. Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak has written about the difficulties of framing the subaltern in relation to identity and oppression. Such ideas form the basis of this journal, namely that identity is existential, cultural, complicated and performative. As such, this journal seeks to unearth alterity within a variety of texts, art, films, television and theatre seeking to find the identity of otherness and the otherness of identity. This journal aspires toward similar procedures of suggesting that alterity is always present.

Preface

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Creative Section

Preface

We would like to acknowledge the editorial contributions of Janet Wilson and Peter Arnds with respect to helping curate this special issue of the journal. The focus of this issue is on Precarity. Fittingly then the issue is bookended by two sociological studies, one by Miranda Imperial and the other by Souradip Bhattacharyya. Given the spread of precarity and the emergence of a global consciousness surrounding precarity in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, this issue is especially timely.

Miranda Imperial provides a powerful analysis of the way post-truth reigns surrounding the Khmer Rouge's genocide and Western complicity. Binayak Roy's careful reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* also draws attention to repressed legacies of colonialism and how the legacies of colonial imperialism continue to induce precarious conditions.

Of course, any exploration of precarity would be incomplete without analyzing neoliberalism. But as Alessandra Consolaro notes, in framing her sensitive analysis of Uday Prakash's short stories, "This narrative passes over the reality that precarity has always been a feature of capitalist societies and that historically Fordist stability is the exception, while precarity is the norm./ Precarity has permanently characterized working people's lives, especially in the Global South." Narratives and their ability to convey the horrors of neoliberal precarity are nevertheless important as Suchismita Ghosh demonstrates in her analysis of literary depictions of precarious childhoods.

Sadly, this is the last issue of the journal that will have Rachel Franks as Reviews editor. She sourced the excellent review of *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature (2015) by Rebecca L. Walkowitz* written by Ella Collins-White.

We are delighted by the expansion of our poetry section and would like to thank the contributing poets, Mona Zahra Attamimi, Erin Shiel and Simeon Kronenburg for their wonderful contributions. We would like also to acknowledge Tegan Jane Schetrumpf and her assistant Richard Bui for their work bringing these extraordinary poems to print.

Tracing Post-Truth in Recent Cambodian History: The Practice of Life Without A Past

By Miranda Imperial

Abstract

Forty years after the Cambodian genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge, Cambodians are still trying to deal with their history, where memory and the 'raw data' of the past are always already politicised. In this essay I argue that one can speak of Cambodia as having a 'post-factual' political culture, since neither its government, nor, for a long time, the international community were interested in getting any facts straight. It is clear that the judicial treatment of the Cambodian genocide has been slow, complicated and limited, and because of all these shortcomings, less useful in providing reparations, even moral ones, to the victims. In my analysis, I will assess both the internal and external (international powers supporting the Khmer Rouge against Vietnam) factors which have contributed to the current situation in Cambodia and produced a history fraught with lacunae, inconsistencies, omissions and unverified facts.

Keywords

We seem to have entered a new era in the domain of politics and political communication, a time in which the appeal to truth, accountability and responsibility for actions which have crucial repercussions in people's, human groups' and nations' destinies are no longer ever empirically certain and grounded on a verifiable reality. The time for post-truth and its appeal to emotion, spontaneous responses and impulsive behaviour, is dangerously brought to us in political campaigns, press releases and social media. In any event, this post-truth stage produced by global media can be traced back to a long trajectory in the history of the twentieth century. The Cambodian genocide is a milestone along this trajectory.

In this article, I will attempt to analytically approach the current state of affairs regarding the Cambodian genocide and what appears to be its everlasting aftermath, which produces a traumatic culture of transgenerational haunting.[1] It is my contention that it is possible to speak of Cambodia as having a 'post-factual' political culture, since neither its government nor the international community were ever interested in getting any facts surrounding this major cataclysm straight. In order to develop my analysis, I will first briefly discuss current ideas on the role of post-truth

in politics, I will describe the Democratic Kampuchea period where the 'Cambodian genocide' took place, and then proceed to review events leading to the advent of Democratic Kampuchea, its downfall and immediate aftermath, and, finally the attempts to bring justice and closure to these events, all as viewed from a post-truth standpoint.

Framing Post-Truth

The idea of post-truth has lately gained widespread acceptance in public life and within several academic domains due to its quick entrance in major political events which have been globally covered by the news, such as Brexit and the 2016 presidential election in the US. The Oxford Dictionaries defined 'post-truth' as their word of the year 2016 as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'.[2]

Whereas truth and truth-telling are considered a precondition for the foundation of human sociality, lying has damaging effects and involves a violation of trust.[3] Hannah Arendt's classical reflection on lying in politics, based on the disclosure and wide news coverage of the 'Pentagon Papers'—known as the 'History of US Decision-Making Process on Vietnam Policy'—in 1971 and the fact that these papers 'tell different stories, teach different lessons to different readers', whose bottom line is 'deception' addresses these issues from her theories on action.[4] This 'credibility gap' that in Arendt's word 'opened up into an abyss' is not new, since secrecy and deception have proliferated, and 'the deliberate falsehood and the outright lie used as legitimate means to achieve political ends' have been all too frequent in history.[5]

In Arendt's account, '[t]he deliberate denial of factual truth –the ability to lie and the capacity to change facts –the ability to act– are interconnected; they owe their existence to the same source: imagination'.[6] In Arendt's view, facts need testimony to be remembered and trustworthy witnesses to be established.[7] Addressing totalitarian regimes, 'in their ability, for instance, to rewrite history again and again to adapt the past to the 'political line' of the present moment or to eliminate data that did not fit their ideology', Arendt states lying and deception in public life is easy 'up to a point' and does not necessarily come into conflict with truth because facts can always be otherwise.[8]

In his lectures given at Berkeley in 1983, Michel Foucault speaks of 'parrhesia', the activity in which the parrhesiastes (subject of the enunciation) knows and says what is true and 'there is always an exact coincidence between belief and truth'.[9] This person has the moral qualities which are required in order to know the truth and to convey such truth to others. What is remarkable from the Foucaultian account is the emphasis the French philosopher places in the fact that the parrhesiastes deserves such a 'function' 'only if there is a risk or danger for him or her in telling the truth', and truth-telling is a practice 'which shaped the specific relations that individuals have to themselves'.[10]

A major consideration in current debates on the rapid transition to 'post-truth' seems to lie in the enormous potential to spread news of the social media coming from a heterogeneous variety of unidentified sources. The challenge to free, ethical thinking is certainly at stake. In philosopher Lee McIntyre's caveat, '[a]s presented in current political debate, [i]t is an expression of concern by those who care about the concept of truth and feel that it is under attack'.11 Only engaging to truth-seeking as constitutive of the human, can one remain cognizant of reality. The notion of facts and evidence in a post-truth environment strongly affects politics and civic life and becomes a burning issue for democratic and peaceful co-existence at all levels.

There have been some important historical precursors on the path that leads to the current post-truth crisis. The context for this paper, situated in the political landscape of the mid 1970s, surrounds the events of the Cambodian genocide, which continue to have an impact on current generations of Cambodians. Due to the prior colonial situation in the country, to its difficult geopolitical position between Vietnam and Thailand, and to the social and political terror and chaos derived from the Democratic Kampuchea Khmer Rouge period, I hold that Cambodian recent history clearly shows a 'post-truth' state of events *avant la lettre*. This can be assessed in several domains, namely, a) the lack of a verified account of how the genocide took place and who the victims were, other than the 'official' version (what Michael Vickery has aptly named as the Standard Total View or STV),12 coexisting along several other versions; b) the lack of a satisfactory narrative which differentiates victims from perpetrators, interprets history, and suggests a political agenda of reconciliation;13and c) the urgent necessity to organize acts and to set up memorials to commemorate and remember the dead.14 One should argue that apart from the circulation of various foreign historical and social accounts, mostly in the hands of U.S. and British, among other Western scholars, there has never been any proper Cambodian report which historicizes the Khmer Rouge regime, clarifies the missing and unknown pieces of information on its actions and consequences, and works restoratively to heal the traumatic effects it produced. Where there was no truth, one can barely hold that a regime of post-truth superseded, except in the sense that by displacing any truth and enforcing silence and obedience upon the traumatized the new political authorities end up in tacit complicitness with the past. As Dacia Viejo-Rose has noted, imposed state narratives "rarely manage to impose amnesia."15 This is certainly the case with other 20th century cases of genocide and crimes against humanity such as Armenia, the Ukranian Holodomor, Chile, northern Iraq (Kurds), Rwanda or Srebrenica, among others.

The Cambodian Genocide

Through the widely acclaimed *The Killing Fields*, a 1984 film directed by Roland Joffé, the world at large was exposed to a raw and shocking account of the widespread, wanton killings and atrocities that occurred in Cambodia after the Communist Party of Kampuchea (also known as the Khmer Rouge) obtained military victory in their war against the pro-U.S. Kampuchea Republic of Lon Nol, and inaugurated their Democratic Kampuchea regime in 1975. Over the short duration of Democratic Kampuchea, less than four years (April 17, 1975 through January 6, 1979), a huge number of Cambodians lost their lives, through government action or inaction, with some four hundred thousand being directly killed as enemies of the revolution.[16] These killings, perpetrated by the Democratic Kampuchea government on its own people, and on a scale probably unprecedented, are known as the Cambodian genocide.[17]

Different estimates have been offered, but most scholars agree that one-fifth to one-fourth of a Cambodian population of between 6 and 8 million perished.[18] These people died from overworking as a result of forced labour, from neglect or mistreatment of the sick, the young and the old, from starvation, or as a result of direct punitive killings.[19] The Khmer Rouge policies that brought about these atrocities can be summarised as follows:

a) Total evacuation of cities and rural forced labour of city dwellers (Chandler 2008, 260; Kiernan 2008, 458).

b) Purging of all educated people.[20]

c) Lack of response to epidemics that decimated the undernourished, overworked popularion.[21]

d) Specific targeting of minority ethnic groups. The heavily nationalistic Khmer Rouge specifically targeted the Islamic Cham and the Vietnamese. The Cham, of Hindu origin and of Muslim religion, settled and developed a kingdom in historical times in the coastal areas of what is now Southern Vietnam. They were conquered by the Northern Viets during their Southern and Southwestern expansion in the mid 1800s and live presently as a minority group in Southern Vietnam and Cambodia, where they maintain their language and culture. As for Cambodians of Vietnamese origin, their widespread prosecution and killing increased rapidly with the deterioration of relations between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam.

e) Political prosecution. All individuals deemed to be enemies of the state were imprisoned, tortured in order to extract confessions, and killed. Their children, including infants, were also killed, so as to avoid them from seeking revenge in the

future. The Khmer Rouge set up extermination prisons throughout the country, most notably the S-21 prison at Tuol Sleng, whose Chairman Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, was sentenced to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Convention in Case 001 of the ECCC (2019).

David Chandler masterfully summarized the outcome of the Khmer Rouge revolution as follows:

> The bitter-tasting revolution that DK sponsored swept through the country like a forest fire or a typhoon, and its spokesmen claimed after the military victory that 'over two thousand years of Cambodia history' had ended. So had money, markets, formal education, Buddhism, books, private property, diverse clothing styles, and freedom of movement. No Cambodian government had ever tried to change so many things so rapidly, none had been so relentlessly oriented toward the future or so biased in favour of the poor.[22]

These and other actions were undertaken by the Khmer Rouge in their quest for a radical transformation of Cambodia into a Communist country where the dispossessed peasant majority would finally govern their destiny. In the utopian views of Pol Pot and the other Democratic Kampuchea leaders,[23] after elimination of all enemies of the Revolution, the Cambodian people as a whole, including the 'New people'[24] would inaugurate a new agrarian socialism.[25] All these factors plunged DK into an agrarian economic system of perfect autarky that fuelled and extended the genocide.

Events Leading to the Cambodian Genocide: Post-Truth Politics in Indochina
While researching historical events that led to the Khmer Rouge period, one learns that Cambodia's existence as an independent country has been, for centuries, the result of a balancing act whereby its rulers tried to leverage the rivalry of the two hegemonic powers in the region, Thailand and Vietnam. Although wars with Siam were responsible for the fall of the Cambodian Angkor Empire in the 15th century (Chandler 2008, ch.5, 92-96), it was with Vietnam that Cambodia held its more recent and continued confrontations,[26] and the most relevant for contemporary history, in view of the overriding effects of the Vietnam War and its aftermath on the rise to power of the Khmer Rouge and on their ensuing demise. As for the

remaining neighbour of the Khmer, the Lao people, isolated in their remote and land-locked land, never played any major role in local geo-politics or in the genocide.27

This long history of dependence and confrontation had caused the development of a very strong nationalist sentiment among the Khmer (Cambodian) people, as well as deep-rooted distrust and antagonistic feelings towards their Thai and Viet neighbours.28 This is puzzling. How could an exacerbated nationalist sentiment, shared by the Khmer Rouge, develop, not into an aggression against foreign enemies ('the other'), but against their own people, within their own borders? Benedict Anderson's classic *Imagined Communities* (1991) provides a clearer understanding of the process that had fuelled the Khmer's fierce nationalist feelings, but few clues as to why this could have led to genocide.29 One certainly should read specific literature on the 'traditional' animosity between the Khmer and the Thai,30 or, especially, the Viets.31 If not an explanation for the genocide at large, exacerbated nationalist tendencies and rampant anti-Vietnamese feelings could have explained the decimation of Cambodian people of Vietnamese origin ('the enemy within') and of the Muslim Cham minority ('the other'), two important components of the Cambodian genocide. As it turned out, the Khmer Rouge found many more 'enemies within' and 'others': the Khmer city dwellers, their 'New people', who stood in the way of their utopian agrarianism, as well as all the educated people, who represented a link with a past they wanted to erase.

One should turn next to research the Vietnam War, in which Cambodia was officially neutral, but which took place in its borders, at first, and within its territory later. From early in the War,32 North Vietnam had used the Ho Chi Minh trail, an 'elaborate communications network that cut through Laos and Cambodia' to gain a backdoor access to the highlands of South Vietnam.33 It allowed a continuous supply of arms, munitions, cadres and soldiers to fuel the Vietcong insurgence, and its importance escalated after the direct involvement of the U.S.34 Soon after he took office, President Nixon, who was decided to look for an 'honourable' end to U.S. involvement in Vietnam,35 decided to bomb the Cambodian sections of the trail in retaliation for a renewed offensive against South Vietnam, and in an attempt to force the Communist to negotiate.36 Operation Menu, initially planned as a short-term operation, developed into a major war effort with important consequences for Cambodia.37 This operation was carried out with total secrecy,38 in view of Nixon and Kissinger's fears of negative international and national reactions at severe air bombings of a neutral country. It was precisely Hannah Arendt who, after the release of the Pentagon Papers, dedicated a grim meditation to the sense of betrayal that citizens feel when confronted with the tortuous arguments and disputable directions they get from political leaders. In what she terms the 'second new variety

of the art of lying'[39] (after public relations managers) involves the great "problem-solvers"[40] whose integrity was ironically 'beyond doubt'[41] and who 'lied perhaps out of a mistaken patriotism ….they lied not so much for their country –certainly not for their country's survival, which was never at stake– as for its "image"'.[42] Arendt shrewdly addresses those 'aspects of deception, self-deception, image-making and defactualization'[43] featured in the current post-truth political climate of the times.

William Shawcross (1979) is highly critical against the Nixon administration's decision to engage in massive carpet-bombing of Cambodia.[44] In his view, a view that has been later supported by other analysts,[45] the bombings decisively boosted support for the fighting guerrilla of the Khmer Rouge in the bombed areas of Cambodian countryside. These allegations were strongly denied by Henry Kissinger in his memories.[46]

Post-truth in the Aftermath of the Cambodian Genocide

Soon enough, the Kampuchea Republic fell, the Khmer Rouge gained control over Cambodia, and set up their Democratic Kampuchea and a plan of 'social reforms' that resulted in their genocidal actions. However, when, four years later, on January 7, 1979 ('prampi makara'), after a swift and complete military defeat, the last Democratic Kampuchea cadres were leaving Phnom Penh and the Vietnamese army was occupying the capital city, the Khmer Rouge were not finished. Both Nayan Chanda (1986) and David Chandler (2008) have described in detail the situation in Cambodia after invading Vietnamese troops expelled the Khmer Rouge from power in 1979.

Many of their main leaders and cadres took refuge across the border with Thailand, while Vietnam set up a puppet government in Phnom Penh (the People's Republic of Kampuchea), backed by its occupation troops. The international community met the Vietnamese occupation with outrage. As a result, the deposed Khmer Rouge continued to be recognized as the legitimate government of Cambodia by most countries, and were also allowed to keep Cambodia's seat in the UN. China, the Khmer Rouge's traditional ally, continued providing their help and support. Thailand guaranteed a safe haven, and Thai troops actively engaged the Vietnamese whenever they attempted to pursue the Khmer Rouge in their territory. The United States, just defeated by Vietnam, was extremely critical of Vietnam's expansionism and led the international reaction against the invasion. It denied any legitimacy of the pro-Vietnamese government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea, and favoured the Khmer Rouge. At the national level, many Cambodians resented the Vietnamese occupation and viewed the Khmer Rouge as the nationalist opponents of the invaders. As a result of all

these factors, the Khmer Rouge soon reappeared as a large, well-supplied guerrilla that effectively sustained a long-term Civil War conflict against the People's Republic of Kampuchea.[47] News of the atrocious deeds and genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge during the Democratic Kampuchea period began reaching the outside world soon after the Vietnamese troops entered Phnom Penh. The veracity, validity and extent of the news were questioned for years, mainly for political reasons, in an effort spearheaded by China, the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, by Thailand. A regime of post-truth politics dominated the national scene with a substantial transnational geopolitical impact. Only these efforts can explain the situation of privilege in the international community maintained, for many years, by the Khmer Rouge,[48] up to the point of being a participant and signatory party in the Paris Peace Agreements of 1991 that put an end to the Civil War. In fact, the Agreements could only be reached after all parties involved agreed not to include any reference to genocide to define the Democratic Kampuchea period (1975-1979). The agreements provided for a United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC) and general elections, that were held in 1993. Monarchy was restored, and Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge, has been in power ever since. A large number of Khmer Rouge cadres defected to the new government, received pardon and reached positions of responsibility. The Communist Party of Kampuchea –the Khmer Rouge– was outlawed in 1994 and effectively disintegrated into small bands in 1996. Their leader, Pol Pot, staunchly refused to negotiate with the government and was finally arrested by members of his own faction in 1997. He died in captivity in 1998 under unclear circumstances.

In view of the above course of events, it is not surprising that, for a long time, no legal actions were undertaken against the Khmer Rouge for their genocidal actions during the Democratic Kampuchea period. In 1979 the DK leaders were judged *in absentia* by the pro-Vietnamese People's Republic of Kampuchea regime in a show trial. They were found guilty of genocide and condemned, but little international credit was given to these procedures or to the claims of genocide. Ben Kiernan (1999) has summarized the main factors for the delay in prosecuting the Khmer Rouge's criminal actions during the 1979-1994 period: 1) Thailand's help and protection; 2) The media's sympathetic portrayal of the Khmer Rouge (probably influenced by other actors); 3) Chinese and U.S. anti-Vietnam, and hence pro-Khmer Rouge, policies; and 4) The need to get an end to Cambodia's civil war and a positive outcome from the Paris Agreements, to which the Khmer Rouge were a part. Over the years, continued support for the Khmer Rouge guerrilla became a growing embarrassment for the United Nations first, and for the rest of their supporting countries later on. Eventually, they lost their

United Nations seat (1992), they were forced into uncomfortable alliances with other forces opposing the People's Republic of Kampuchea, and were finally outlawed.

Post-Truth Politics in the Delivery of Justice

In 1994, in view of the mounting evidence, U.S. Congress passed the Cambodian Genocide Justice Act, establishing as U.S. policy the prosecution of its perpetrators. In 1997, the Cambodian government requested the United Nations to establish a tribunal to judge these crimes. An investigation by the United Nations resulted in a General Assembly resolution condemning the Khmer Rouge genocide, and a United Nations-appointed Group of Experts recommended, in 1999, the establishment of an international tribunal outside Cambodia, where it would be shielded from Cambodian politic stresses. At this point, all the Khmer Rouge leaders were either dead, or captured, or had surrendered. The Cambodian government refused this recommendation, favouring instead a mixed tribunal within Cambodia, with international and Cambodian intervention. The Group of Experts lacked confidence in the Cambodian frail legal system, while the Cambodian government did not trust a completely independent international tribunal. After all, many of the government's officials had been, at one point or another, Khmer Rouge cadres, and argued that the need to bring the Khmer Rouge to justice had to be reconciled with the need of the Cambodian people for peace and national reconciliation. A prolonged period of negotiations ensued and an agreement was eventually reached, signed in 2003, and ratified in 2004, for the creation of a joint Court, in Cambodia, with a limited mandate to judge exclusively the main leaders of the Khmer Rouge for acts committed during the 1975-1979 Democratic Kampuchea period.[49] This court, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), started operations near Phnom Penh in 2006.[50] Its progress has been difficult due to the following shortcomings: i) the complicated and arduous investigative process, in view of the large number of victims and families seeking reparation; ii) advanced age, frail health and death of some of the defendants; iii) disagreements between Cambodian and International judges; iv) limitations in the international funding provided to ECCC.[51] As a result, its activity has been limited to just four cases, Cases 001 through 004. The first subject of debate was whether these atrocities can be considered genocide.[52] According to the strict terms of the UN Genocide Convention (1948)[53] as applied by the ECCC[54] the vast majority of the deaths of Cambodian nationals during the tenure of the Khmer Rouge, no matter how atrocious and widespread may have been, do not qualify as genocide. Rather, they fall under the more general term of 'crimes against humanity', and these are the crimes ECCC is prosecuting in all the four cases it has undertaken.[55] There

are two exceptions to this, the killings of Islamic Cham[56] and Vietnamese[57] minorities by the Democratic Kampuchea regime. These arguments have been taken up by the ECCC in its case 002/02, where the two remaining Khmer Rouge leaders, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, have been charged with genocide inflicted against the Cham and Vietnamese minorities in Cambodia (ECCC 2019b). Cases 001 and 002 are finished down to firm, condemnatory sentences.[58] Cases 003 and 004 have lagged behind and have been the object of much debate within ECCC and outside.[59] It is clear that the judicial treatment of the Cambodian genocide has been slow, complicated and limited, and because of all these shortcomings, less useful in providing reparations, even moral ones, to the victims. A legacy of post-truth politics seems to be deeply ingrained in institutions and in the political leaders elite. As Gay Alcorn has remarked, 'facts are futile' and 'we're in the era of post-truth politics, when facts don't matter, when evidence doesn't matter. But without these things, there can be no trust at all...'.[60]

This contrasts painfully with international actions in other recent cases of genocide, such as that in Rwanda, where swift actions were undertaken. An International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was created by the United Nations in 1994,[61] immediately after the genocide took place (Von Glahn and Taulbee 2013, 656-657), and finished proceedings at the end of 2015, with 93 individuals indicted and 62 sentenced for committing genocide and recognising, for the first time, rape as a means of perpetrating genocide (ICTR 2016). The stark contrast between the Rwanda and the Cambodia cases speaks to multiple conflicting interests in Cambodia. On the one hand, the Hun Sen government, in power since 1985 after the UNTAC-sponsored elections, has held on to power until today through a combination of faintly democratic and plainly dictatorial actions (Strangio 2014; HRW 2019; Freedom House 2019) has staunchly held on to the Standard Total View (Vickery 1984, 39; Tyner 2017, 69) whereby the Cambodian genocide was exclusively due to the design and actions of the 'Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique' and that it 'operated independently and received minimal support from Vietnam, China, or even the United States'.[62] On the other hand, at different points in time, many of these international actors (including the UN, see above) have underwritten the STV narrative.

Conclusion

Atrocities committed during the Democratic Kampuchea period were solely the decision and responsibility of the Khmer Rouge, whose cadres were set on a delusional course of implantation of a murderous, utopian agrarianism at any cost. They emptied their cities, forced their inhabitants to work in the fields, and massacred the representatives of the former order. It

was their imprinted distrust for the Viets that made them massacre the Cambodian Vietnamese minority and even purge their own ranks of anyone remotely suspicious of having links or sympathy towards Vietnam. It was also a mixture of ancestral feelings against 'the other' that made them commit genocide against the Islamic Cham people.

Over twenty-eight years passed before any of the Khmer Rouge started being brought to trial as authors or instigators of the genocide. Quite often, the only moral reparation that can be offered to victims and their families is a trial in a Court of Justice, where the crimes committed are recognized and judged. Why was then reparation delayed and denied to the victims? Historical evidence and political analyses presented in this work suggest that political interests were at play, that national and foreign powers had been complicit in the Cambodian situation, not only over the genocide itself at the time, but over its acknowledgment and recognition, and in the delays in bringing its perpetrators to justice. In Lee McIntyre's formulation, this was a clear example of post-truth *avant-la-lettre:*

> Deniers and other ideologues routinely embrace an obscene high standard of doubt towards facts that they don't want to believe, alongside complete credulity towards any facts that fit with their agenda. The main criterion is what favors their preexisting beliefs. This is not the abandonment of facts, but a corruption of the process by which facts are credibly gathered and reliably used to shape one's beliefs about reality.[63]

As in many occasions throughout its history, Cambodia had been a middle ground where other powers fought their wars. Foreign countries were instrumental in the events that allowed the Khmer Rouge to seize power, to maintain their influence after they were overthrown, and to silence their atrocities for years. It was through the help of Vietnam and China that the Khmer Rouge seized power. China needed an ideological ally to compensate the bias of Vietnam towards the Soviet Union, and Vietnam needed unimpeded use of Cambodian territory in their fight against pro-U.S. and U.S. forces in the South. Only after the Vietnam War was won, realizing that the Democratic Kampuchea regime posed a threat to the newly reunited Vietnam, did the Vietnamese army fight and defeat the Khmer Rouge. Far from finishing them, the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia resulted in widespread international support for what was left of the Khmer Rouge.

After the Vietnamese invasion, Realpolitik dictated support for the Khmer Rouge. Efforts by the pro-Vietnam People's Republic of Kampuchea to make the crimes of the Khmer Rouge known were, for a long time, considered to be nothing but interested propaganda by the

U.S., China, and other powers in the United Nations. The fact that these involvements and the intricacies of what really happened in Democratic Kampuchea have not been internationally recognised, in the 'search for truth' that is the *raison d'être* of International Tribunals, means that the world lives on in a 'post-truth' state regarding the atrocities committed. As Lee McIntyre adeptly remarks,

> what is striking about the idea of post-truth is not just that truth is being challenged, but that it is being challenged as a mechanism for asserting political dominance. And that is why one cannot shy away from politics if we are going to understand what we must 'essentially know' about the idea of post-truth.64

Our current vision of a 'post-truth' world should be a serious matter of concern for all democracies, because 'post-truth is not so much a claim that truth does not exist as that facts are subordinate to our political point of view'.65 In a public culture that is becoming accustomed to find out more about what is embedded in political lies through the free press and the impact of the social media networks, all this poses to us a serious question that moves dangerously from who may want to conceal the truth and for what purpose, to who can tell the truth, and how? And what is more, in an age of social media and indiscriminate information overload who –or what institution– is eligible to sanction the truth or non-truth of any current event or historical fact. This goes from current election campaigns to past (and current) 'crimes against humanity'. If, as it has been widely acknowledged, there is a 'growing conviction that there is no non-ideological standpoint from which to view events, and hence no ideology-neutral truths either,66 it is becoming clear that in this post-truth political era, all of us living in well-established democracies should become more engaged than ever before in supporting a politics of truth. Only by upholding a politics of truth can one look forward to the possibility of a distinctly moral way to live. Speaking and living the truth is the ground for all other action and returns us to our essential human selves. Therefore, a politics of truth, morality and civility would reconcile us with the necessary respect for human rights, and with our moral obligations as humans and citizens.

Facing the current state of affairs in Cambodia, one can still hold the country remains in the aftermath of a post-truth political culture. Whereas a much-needed truth and reconciliation commission which may bring justice and reparation to victims of the DK genocide has not materialized, the politicization of remembrance is an unavoidable reality. National, communal and individual experiences of trauma usually acquire a large social and

political significance. In the midst of an unresolved trauma culture,[67] Cambodia and its people, both at home and abroad, still suffer from an alleged immaturity which relegates them to an inferior position in need of assistance and guidance. After the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement, Cambodia was under the aegis of UN until September 1993, when a democratically elected parliament and government took over. However, far from maturing into an established democratic system, Cambodia has become a pseudo-democracy. According to the Freedom in the World Report,

> Cambodia's political system has been dominated by Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP) for more than three decades. The country has conducted semicompetitive elections in the past, but the 2018 polls were held in a severely repressive environment that offered voters no meaningful choice. The main opposition party was banned, opposition leaders were in jail or exiled, and independent media and civil society outlets were curtailed. The CPP won every seat in the lower house for the first time since the end of the Cambodian Civil War, as well as every elected seat in the upper house in indirect elections held earlier in the year.[68]

Under this dictatorship, Cambodia has remained living either without a past where a truthful account of the facts of history is preserved, or the possibility of a free future contemplated. As far too often observed, those in power have imposed public memory in the form of government-sponsored narratives that select the preferred story and its closure. At present, Cambodia remains under a regime of post-truth that illustrates the dystopian domain of post-politics where, by the imposition of amnesia and the exclusion and distortion of individual stories, power exploits new forms of governance and control. The current Cambodian government continues to rely on the evils of the Khmer Rouge narrative as a distraction from current problems (but a new generation of the Cambodian diaspora, is giving voice to both those who were deprived of agency, tortured and killed, and those remaining.[69] Remapping the terrain of national memory to counter an amnesic politics in order to articulate resistance, a new Cambodian generation who no longer accepts to live without a past in a post-truth milieu, reimagines, via the work of culture, other spaces for healing, and the possibility of justice.

Notes

1 In Abraham's formulation, '[T]he theme of the dead –who, having suffered repression by their family or society, cannot enjoy, even in death, a state of authenticity– appears to be omnipresent (whether overtly expressed or disguised) on the fringes of religions and, failing that, in rational systems.' See, Nicolas Abraham, 'Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology,' *Critical Inquiry* 13.2 (1987): 287.
2 Oxford Dictionaries, 'Word of the Year 2016,' Online: https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016. Last accessed December 7, 2019.
3 James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 7th edition. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 43.
4 Hanna Arendt, 'Lying in Politics. Reflections on the Pentagon Papers', in *Crises of the Republic* (New York, NY: Harvest, 1971), 3.
5 Ibid., 4.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 6.
8 Ibid., 7.
9 Michel Foucault, 'The Meaning and Evolution of the Word "Parrhesia"', Part I of 'Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia', six lectures given at the University of California at Berkeley, Oct-Nov. 1983. Online (1999): https://foucault.info/parrhesia/foucault.DT1.wordParrhesia.en/. Last accessed December 7, 2019.
10 Ibid.
11 Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press., 2018), 6.
12 Michael Vickery, *Cambodia, 1975–1982* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm, 1984), 39.
13 Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra Hinchman, eds. *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press 1997), xv.
14 Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums. The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 8.
15 Dacia Viejo-Rose, 'Memorial functions: Intent, impact and the right to remember'. *Memory Studies* 4. 4 (2011): 473.
16 David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 4th ed (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008), 259. ECCC. 2014. *ECCC at A Glance*. http://www.eccc.gov.kh/sites/default/files/ECCC%20at%20a%20Glance%20-%20EN%20-%20April%202014_FINAL.pdf. Last accessed December 7, 2019.
17 Ibid., 260.
18 Different estimates of victims have been presented, and they vary depending on the methods used for estimation. See Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008) 456-463; Francis Pike, *Empires at War: A Short History of Modern Asia since World War II* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 514; Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting Away with Genocide?: Elusive Justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London, Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2004), 3). Authorities such as Kiernan have presented estimates at or above 1.7 million (458). These are also the official estimates available from the Extended Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC 2014). Kiernan (458) estimated this number as 21% of the total population, a percentage that increased to 29% when 'New people' (the urban population that was forced to massively leave their homes to work in the fields) are considered.
19 David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 259.
20 See Damien De Walque's (2004) analysis for the World Bank for statistical evidence ('The long-term legacy of the Khmer Rouge period in Cambodia'. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3446, https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-3446), and both Chandler (2008, 263) and Pike (2010, ch. 42) for an explanation of the ideology behind.
21 Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 264-265; Francis Pike, *Empires at War: A Short History of Modern Asia since World War II* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 515–516.
22 Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 255.
23 See Chandler, *A History of Cambodia,* 247, but especially Pike *Empires at War*, 507-508 and Karl D. Jackson, *Cambodia, 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984) 288 for discussions on Pol Pot's ideologies.
24 In Democratic Kampuchea, city dwellers were considered 'New people,' as opposed to the 'Old people,' the peasants and the rural, uneducated population. This division was roughly coincident with that of people living in areas controlled by the defeated Lon Nol Regime (the cities) and those living in remote areas, long under control of the Khmer Rouge guerrillas. New people had essentially no rights, other than being moved around to the agriculturally productive zones, with no belongings, to undergo re-education through forced labour in the fields. Their lives had no value, as they were constantly reminded: 'To keep you is no benefit. To destroy you is no

loss', see Dith Pran, *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs by Survivors* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 13, 131.

25 By hard and dedicated labour they would increase rice production throughout the country in order to create a surplus that could be traded. Other crops would follow, and benefits from their surplus would join rice as the bases for establishment of a light industry that in turn would give rise to a heavy industry, as stated in their four-year plan (Chandler, 262–265).

26 Starting in the 17th century (Chandler, 112), throughout the 19th century (Chandler, 112, 121, 139, 149) and into the French protectorate (Chandler, 165-227), a period in which Cambodia was seen as an extension of Vietnam, according to both Chandler (176–185) and Anderson (1991, 129–130).

27 Some conflicts, such as the Vietnam War, spilled over to Laos, and their Southernmost regions were alternatively plundered or annexed by the local powers, the Thai and the Viet.

28 According to Chandler (2008, 139), Thailand and Vietnam had traditionally considered the Khmers as their inferiors. For Vietnam, Cambodia was a buffer state that gave them some distance from their Thai opponents and a land for their expansion. For Thailand, Cambodia was little more than a minor sister kingdom, inhabited by fellow Buddhists that could be nothing but loyal to their interests.

29 Except for the long-held animosity of the Khmer against the Viets (Anderson 1991, 131).

30 Charnvit Kasetsiri, 'Thailand and Cambodia: A Love-Hate Relationship'. *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 3 (March, 2003). 'Nations and Other Stories.' https://kyotoreview.org/issue-3-nations-and-stories/a-love-hate-relationship/. Last accessed December 7, 2019.

31 Shawn McHale, 'Ethnicity, Violence, and Khmer-Vietnamese Relations: The Significance of the Lower Mekong Delta, 1757–1954'. *Journal of Asian Studies* 72.2 (2013): 367–390.

32 Much before March 1965, when the first U.S. marines landed in Danang, regular North Vietnam had used the Ho Chi Minh trail for the direct –but secret– engagement of regular North Vietnamese troops in the conflict (Karnow 1997, 331).

33 Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam, A History*. 2nd rev. and updated ed. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1997), 330.

34 By 1964, the North Vietnam government had decided that only through an all-out participation of their army could they hope to win the war, and thus started developing the existing network of jungle trails into a major logistic system able to handle heavy traffic (Karnow, 332). By 1967, the trail was transporting over twenty thousand soldiers per month

35 Ibid., 588.

36 Ibid., 591.

37 Operation Menu consisted of a series of covert bombings of Vietnamese military targets in Cambodian territory carried out by long range U.S. B-52 bombers between 1969 and 1970. It was followed by Operation Freedom Deal, from 1970 to 1973. Initially centered on objectives close to the border, the operations gained on intensity after King Sihanouk was overthrown and Lon Nol's Kampuchea Republic was established. With U.S. support, banking on traditional anti-Vietnamese sentiments among the Khmer people, and in retaliation for countrywide revolts by Sihanouk's followers, now allied to the Vietnamese, the Kampuchea Republic government launched a large-scale repression operation on Vietnamese immigrants, followed by two successive military operations, Chenla I (1970) and Chenla II (1971) against the combined Vietcong, North Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge troops in the East. Although Chenla I had limited support from South Vietnam troops, it resulted in a major defeat for the Kampuchea Republic, which lost control over the East and South parts of the country to the combined Communist forces. Chenla II, although with heavy U.S. air support, resulted in the almost complete destruction of the Cambodian army and on the loss of any initiative on the part of the Kampuchea Republic government. See Taylor Owen and Bern Kiernan, 'Bombs over Cambodia: New Light on U.S. Air War', *The Walrus (Canada)* October 2006: 62–69.

38 Karnow, *Vietnam,* 592.

39 Hannah Arendt, 'Lying in Politics. Reflections on the Pentagon Papers', in *Crises of the Republic* (New York, NY: Harvest, 1971), 7.

40 Ibid., 9.

41 Ibid., 10.

42 Ibid., 11.

43 Ibid., 44.

44 William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

45 Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*; Francis Pike, *Empires at War: A Short History of Modern Asia since World War II* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), chapter 37; Ben Kiernan *How Pol Pot Came to Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press: 2004), 349–357.

46 Henry Kissinger and Clare Boothe Luce, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979): ch. VIII, X, XII.

47 Through international pressure from their allies, all the groups opposing the Vietnamese-controlled People's Republic of Kampuchea joined forces to form the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea in 1981,

including the Khmer Rouge, who –at least in theory– had abandoned their Communist ideals (Chandler 2008, 283). A civil war stalemate was achieved that lasted for several years. In 1989 the Vietnamese finally bowed to international pressure and withdrew from Cambodia. This brought about a new stalemate, where the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea controlled large parts of the countryside. Eventually, the U.S. and China started diminishing their support for the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea in the hopes of forcing a resolution of the conflict, ideally mediated by the United Nations (Chandler 2008, 286).

48 Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting Away with Genocide?: Elusive Justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (London, Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2004).

49 These negotiations have been documented at length by Fawthrop and Jarvis (2004, chs. 7–10).

50 Arrests of the main defendants took place during 2007 and the first case started in 2009.

51 ECCC. 2014. *ECCC at A Glance.* http://www.eccc.gov.kh/sites/default/files/ECCC%20at%20a%20Glance%20-%20EN%20-%20April%202014_FINAL.pdf. Last accessed December 7, 2019.

52 See Fawthrop and Jarvis, *Getting Away with Genocide,* and references therein.

53 As legally explained by Von Glahn and Taulbee (2013, 442–446).

54 Ibid.

55 ECCC, 2014.

56 Ben Kiernan has presented convincing evidence of genocide against the Cham, who were forced to eat pork, whose language was forbidden, and who were killed in large numbers (90,000 out of 250,000). See, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge* (2008, 460–463).

57 Evidence has also been presented (Kiernan 2008, 460 and references therein) that the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia was systematically exterminated by the Khmer Rouge.

58 Case 001 resulted in the conviction of Duch, director of the former Tuol Seng (S-21) prison to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity. Case 002, initially involving the foremost remaining Khmer Rouge leaders, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirth, was later restricted to the first two after the death of Ieng Sary and the ruling of his wife Ieng Thirth as unfit to stand trial. Both parts of Case 002 have been finalized. In Case 002/01 both defendants were convicted to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity resulting from the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh. In Case 002/02, involving charges of genocide committed against the Cham and Vietnamese minorities, both defendants received the same conviction. Nuon Chea died in captivity on August 4, 2019.

59 These cases involve lower rank Khmer Rouge cadres who ran labour camps or oversaw massacres. There have been allegations of political interference on the part of the Cambodian government to close them (Un 2013). This controversy continues today, and has seen several resignations of judges and prosecutors, as well as a clear confrontation between national and international co-investigators (ECCC 2019).

60 Gay Alcorn, 'Facts are futile in an era of post-truth politics,' *The Age*, February 28, 2014. Online: https://www.theage.com.au/opinion/facts-are-futile-in-an-era-of-posttruth-politics-20140227-33m70.html. Last accessed December 7, 2019.

61 Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

62 James A. Tyner, *Landscape, memory, and post-violence in Cambodia* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 69.

63 McIntyre, *Post-Truth,* 11.

64 Ibid., xiv.

65 Ibid., 11.

66 Ulf Zackariasson, 'Engaging Relativism and Post-Truth' in *Relativism and Post-truth in Contemporary Society: Possibilities and Challenges*, eds Mikael Stenmark, Steve Fuller, and Ulf Zackariasson (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 14.

67 Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012).

68 Freedom House. 'Cambodia'. Freedom in the World Report (2019). Online: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/cambodia. Last accessed December 7, 2019.

69 Tyner, *Landscape, memory, and post-violence.*

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Exception, Precarity and the Possibility of Art Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*

By Binayak Roy

Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's The Glass Palace represents how colonial discourses (primarily the military discourse) have moulded native identity and resulted in severe vulnerability and existential crisis. It interrogates both the grounds and the production of historical knowledge by reading between the lines of the imperial archives and emerging as alternative discourses for expressing the subaltern past. The liberation struggle of the Indian National Army serves as an instrument of cultural resistance for these automata against a racist colonial discourse. Popular or insurgent nationalism thus reclaims or imagines forms of community and challenges colonial rule giving shape to a collective political identity. The article also attempts to trace the failures of Burmese nationalism after a series of insurrections on ethnic grounds belied the aspirations of the post-colonial nation state.

Keywords

Vulnerability; hegemony; ideology; capitalism; anticolonialism.

"A novel examines not reality but existence. And existence is not what has occurred, existence is the realm of human possibilities, everything that man can become, everything he's capable of." ― Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*.

"Violence is to be found in any action in which one acts as if one were alone to act […]. Violence is consequently also any action which we endure without at every point collaborating in it". ―Emmanuel Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essay on Judaism*.

[I]

Amitav Ghosh's specialty lies in his deft handling of political and philosophical issues without sacrificing the graces of art. Exhibiting a profound sense of history and space, his novels explore the human drama amidst the broad sweep of political and historical events. He has a personal stance on such controversial issues as postcoloniality, postmodernity, subjectivity, subalternity; he interweaves them in a complex pattern in his works, which themselves are generic amalgams. This generic multiplicity stems from an inherent interdisciplinarity within postmodernism which is part of its assault upon the Enlightenment. It also entails the deployment of "metafiction" wherein the text is constantly aware of its own status as a text. In Ghosh's oeuvre, a self-reflexive narrator often introduces metafictional meditations on the value and purpose of his narrative. Ghosh looks up to the novel as a "meta-form that transcends the boundaries that circumscribe other kinds of writing, rendering meaningless the usual workaday distinctions between historian, journalist, anthropologist, etc."[1] There are no limits

to the novel as a form. For the eclectic Ghosh, it is not necessarily fictional; rather "it overarches fiction, and non-fiction, and history, the present, the past."[2] The novel's generic heterogeneity, or discursive inventiveness, enables Ghosh to retain sensitivity to various kinds of discourses, voices and agents, while narrating into existence unforeseen connections between them. Ghosh's generic mixtures are ethically aware in that they break and re-construct pre-existing generic formations, thereby changing their political implications. The self/other relationship is also narrated ethically as a reciprocal relationship, in which neither is reduced to a passive target of scrutiny; both appear as active agents in a relationship with a voice of their own. Contemporary ethical criticism examines in the main questions of how to represent otherness in a text, how to respond to the other and how to bring the concept of otherness to bear on the experience of reading and writing. Ghosh's writings concentrate on interpersonal relationships, emphasizing the need for solidarity across ontological and epistemological divides, while retaining the ultimate alterity of the other.

One of the reasons why Ghosh is considered an important writer is that his narratives do not occupy a "neutral" zone. Rather, they offer a sensitive and multifaceted view on the contemporary problems of the worlds he writes about. Ghosh seems to be intent on moving his readers through his narratives beyond the aesthetic of indifference. Ghosh's first commitment is to his art. The question that has engaged him a lot is whether this commitment excludes all other commitments. He has to admit that "a writer is also a citizen, not just of a country but of the world."[3] Whether a writer should be a responsible citizen or an insouciant aesthete is the issue that occupies him in the essay "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi." His point of departure is Dzevad Karahasan's essay "Literature and War," which touches on the relation between modern literary aestheticism and the contemporary world's indifference to violence. Karahasan holds that "[t]he decision to perceive literally everything as an aesthetic phenomenon—completely sidestepping questions about goodness and truth—is an artistic decision. That decision started in the realm of art, and went on to become characteristic of the contemporary world".[4] Ghosh abhors Karahasan's brand of aestheticism, and plumps for moral activism:

> Writers don't join crowds—Naipaul and so many others teach us that. But what do you do when the constitutional authority fails to act? You join and in joining bear all the responsibilities and obligations and guilt that joining represents. My experience of the violence was overwhelmingly and memorably of the resistance to it.[5]

By advocating resistance to violence and rejecting the "aesthetic of indifference," Ghosh is squarely denouncing the postmodernist dogma of pan-aestheticization as enunciated by Patricia Waugh: "Postmodern theory can be seen and understood as the latest version of a long-standing attempt to address social and political issues through an aestheticised view of the world, though it may be more thoroughly aestheticising than any previous body of thought".6 For Ghosh, it is "the affirmation of humanity" that is more important, "the risks that perfectly ordinary people are willing to take for one another".7 Ghosh thus straddles the currents of both modernism and postmodernism. Meenakshi Mukherjee underscores Ghosh's refusal to be categorized, but she does so with respect to Ghosh's rebellion against the templates of genre.8 Ghosh is too eclectic to embrace a particular *ism* and in the process stifle all his innate dynamism. Ghosh's works occupy a critical juncture between postmodern and postcolonial perspectives, exploring the potentialities and limits of postcolonialism as also evading any strategic alliance with postmodernism. He is rather an intellectual amphibian, partaking of all ideas and isms that are congenial and pertinent to his artistic pursuit.

Ghosh's keen interest in the predicament of individuals pitted against historical forces enables him to explore the depths of fundamental human experiences and emotions. In delineating his characters, Ghosh jettisons conventional postcolonial discourse which promotes racial and ethnic differences. He instead displays his characters on the level of a kind of transcendent universal humanity, or experience. His characters are socioculturally specific. He never dispenses with diversity and particularity in his writings. The stories his characters tell locate each teller in the material domain and promote particularism. But ethnic or racial differences, religious and communal separatist tendencies, although acknowledged, are of little relevance. These characters are not cocooned within their separate and local identities because the emotions and passions explored are related to humanity as such. What Ghosh endeavours to create is connections between various socio-cultural and historical discourses which smother diversity and various particularities. Ghosh thus veers away from constructionist discursive epistemology. Conversely, his celebration of the transcendent ethical universal experience connecting people is at odds with the Eurocentric mode of narrating, or constructing, the world. Accordingly Ghosh's narration is akin to what Patrick Colm Hogan has named—"particularist universalism"),9 which can be characterized as simultaneous universalism and cultural particularism.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* explores alternative ways of constructing the world based on connections that dismantle the rigid binaries and empiricism of colonization and Western modernity. It interrogates both the grounds and the production of historical knowledge

by reading between the lines of the imperial archives and emerging as alternative discourses for expressing the subaltern past. Ghosh's novel transforms the discourses of Western modernity, be they scientific or novelistic, by producing an ethically informed narrative that subverts the discursive knowledge production strategies that originally produced those discourses. Radhakrishnan, who, like Ghosh, is engaged in a project of dismantling the hegemonic position of a Western-originated discourse (the discourse of postmodernism, in his case), maintains that for genuine transcultural readings to become possible, other realities will have to be "recognized not merely as *other histories* but as *other knowledges*" (italics in the original).[10] To transcend the incommensurability in worldviews, the participants would have to imagine their own "discursive-epistemic space[s] as a form of openness to one another's persuasion".[11] Ghosh's narratives consistently explore this ethical imperative to keep the channels of communication between the self and its other open, so that one might "hear that which [one] do[es] not already understand".[12] Jean-Luc Nancy is suggestive in this context. Being-in-common, he maintains in *The Inoperative Community*, "does not mean a higher form of substance or subject taking charge of the limits of separate individualities".[13] Nor does it obtain its genesis "from out of or as an effect of […] a process that emerges from a ground [fond] or from a fund [fonds] of some kind […]. It is a groundless 'ground', less in the sense that it opens up the gaping chasm of an abyss than that it is made up only of the network, the interweaving, and the sharing of singularities").[14] Neither a settled arrangement from above nor one from below, the axes of utopic community is horizontal and latitudinal, seeking cohesion in what Nancy identifies as a process of "compearance." Compearance, asserts Nancy,

> does not set itself up, it does not establish itself, it does not emerge among already given subjects (objects). It consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us) — a formula in which the *and* does not imply juxtaposition, but exposition. What is exposed in compearance is the following, and we must learn to read it in all its possible combinations: 'you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I' […]. Or again, more simply: *you shares me* […].[15]

An open and hospitable community is a countermand against social exclusion. As the marker of direct affective singularity "between you *and* I" the ethics of compearance defiantly resists the instruments of power, colonial or otherwise, to orchestrate divisions and exclusions through its politics of immediate conjunction, conjuncture, coalition and collaboration. Furthermore, as

"the appearance of the *between* as such", compearance impels its agents a qualifying ethico-existential capacity for the radical expropriation of identity in face of the other — a capacity for self-othering. Nancy is apposite again: "singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing; they are distributed and placed, or rather *spaced*, by the sharing that makes them *others*".[16] This creates the shape of what we might call an "affective cosmopolitanism".

[II]

Reading *The Glass Palace*

Ghosh's "most commercially successful"[17] novel has had a diverse critical reception. While Rakhee Moral straitjackets the novel as a "postcolonial narrative",[18] Anshuman A. Mondal categorises it as a "grand historical romance".[19] For Rukmini Bhaya Nair the novel is "condemned to record the exit-ential dilemma – wherein the subject is necessarily partitioned, a bewildered immigrant never quite in focus nor contained within the frame".[20] In a similar vein, Rakhi Nara and G.A. Ghanashyam interpret the novel as "an elegy for the diasporic condition".[21] In stark contrast to all these views, N.K. Rajalakshmi believes that the novel "disclose(s) the undercurrents of power discourse in everyday existence of human life".[22] In a comprehensive analysis of the "histories of migration and transnational flows that began several centuries ago"[23] in Ghosh's rich oeuvre, Anjali Gera Roy concentrates on the movements of the marginalized like Rajkumar "who have figured as an absence in histories of nations or diasporas".[24] Given the substantial nature of the work it comes as no surprise that *The Glass Palace* should receive such a wide range of critical interpretations.

The transformation of literature from its ambivalent "original" state into an instrument of ideology is well enunciated by Terry Eagleton in his contention that literature degenerates into "a vital instrument for the insertion of individuals into the perceptual and symbolic forms of the dominant ideological formation." "What is finally at stake is not literary texts," continues Eagleton "but Literature – the ideological significance of that process whereby certain historical texts are severed from their social formations, defined as 'literature' and bound and ranked together to constitute a series of 'literary traditions' and interrogated to yield a set of ideological presupposed responses".[25] A vital if subtle connection exists between a discourse in which those who are to be educated are represented as morally and intellectually deficient, and the attribution of moral and intellectual values to the literary works they are assigned to read. *The Glass Palace* represents how colonial discourses (primarily the military discourse) have moulded native identity and resulted in severe alienation and precarity. Self-alienation is apparent in the characters of the Collector, a Britain-trained colonial administrator and the

soldier, Arjun, who has been transformed into a war-machine in the hands of British military discourse. Both these characters are destroyed; they end up in a dead end in their existential moorings and kill themselves. Arjun, the more prominent of these figures, can initially express himself only within the discourse of the military culture. As he finally realizes his condition as a puppet of this colonial discourse and manages to create some distance from it, he is left with nothing. He has nowhere to place his allegiances, so to speak, no language that would help him build a new self with other affiliations. In the colonial context, the subjectivity problematic is both urgent and morbid: people have to adopt an alien epistemology to develop a self-understanding. Further, the discursively colonized people are alienated from their prerogative to make truth claims: their truth claims inevitably come from the Self of the dominant West.

For the psychologically colonized Arjun, the British stand for the epitome of civilization, but the perceptive Dinu pierces through the façade of Arjun and his colleagues in the "fantastic bestiary of their table-talk": "their assessments were so exaggerated that they seemed to be inventing versions of themselves for collective consumption".[26] Like the Collector, Arjun too is not unaware of the racism that pervades the colonial Indian army. The British Indian army stands on the edifice that "'there was to be a separation between Indians and Britishers'": "'On the surface everything in the army appears to be ruled by manuals, regulations, procedures: it seems very cut and dried. But actually, underneath there are all these murky shadows that you can never quite see: prejudice, distrust, suspicion'".[27] But in spite of this vital realization, Arjun's loyalty to the institution remains unshaken and he unquestioningly admires the superiority of the British. To Arjun "modern" and "western" are synonymous. To be a "modern Indian" he is prepared to erase all traces of being Indian: discard his past and embrace western habits of thought in its totality. At this stage, he does not realise the cost he would be paying to be accepted as a member of the elitist class, the ruling class. When Bela, his sister, wants to know people's perceptions of him, Kishan Singh, an NCO says, "He's a good officer…. Of all the Indians in our battalion, he's the one who's the most English. We call him the 'Angrez'".[28]

Arjun receives the first shock of his life when he attends his sister's wedding. Some Burmese student activists and Congress party workers berate him for serving in an occupying army. On this auspicious occasion he manages to keep his temper and replies, "We aren't occupying the country…. We are here to defend you".[29] The rejoinder of the activists is quick: "From whom are you defending us? From ourselves? From other Indians? It's your masters from whom the country needs to be defended".[30] Arjun, however, remains unshaken by these arguments. One of the demonstrators in an anti-war march drops a pamphlet through his car

window. Arjun reads some quotations from Mahatma Gandhi and a passage that says, "Why should India, in the name of freedom, come to the defence of this Satanic Empire which is itself the greatest menace to liberty that the world had ever known?" Arjun is extremely irritated by this time, and cannot control his anger: "Idiots…. I wish I could stuff this down their throats. You'd think they'd have better things to do than march about in the hot sun".31 Obviously, Arjun has become totally servile at this point. He does not question even once why the British Empire should hold India. As Gauri Viswanathan points out, "[w]ithout submission of the individual to moral law or the authority or God, the control they were able to secure over the lower classes in their own country would elude them in India".32 The education machinery was geared up to make the people of India believe that the British were their "rightful" masters; by following them, they would elevate and uplift their manner, morals and behaviour. This would ensure eternal maintenance of the colonial hegemony. Arjun's behaviour shows success achieved in this direction.

Unlike the self-alienated Arjun, his colleague Hardayal alias Hardy has no illusions whatsoever about the duplicitous nature of the colonial institution. Thoroughly aware of an Indian soldier's subordinate position in an army functioning on racism, he interrogates the divisions which have remained unquestioned. Reminding Arjun about the inscription at the Military Academy in Dehra Dun – "*The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time. The honour, welfare and comfort of the men you command come next….*" (italics original) – he unravels their unenviable double allegiance and the schizophrenic division within:

> "… this country whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time – what is it? Where is this country? The fact is that you and I don't have a country – so where is this place whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time? And why was it that when we took our oath it wasn't to a country but to the King Emperor – to defend the Empire?"33

Such is the extent of the corrosive nature of colonial ideology that they – the mere pawns in the hands of an ever-expanding Empire – have been robbed of their convictions and are mere mercenaries whose "'hands obey someone else's head; those two parts of his body have no connection with each other'".34 This is the "intimate enemy" position which reduces a colonised subject to a mere automaton. Gradually awakening to a new reality, the pride Arjun felt as a well-placed officer in the Indian army begins to evaporate. The "stories" of Colonel

Buckland about "the mutual loyalties of Indian soldier and English officer… that… could be understood only as a kind of love"35 seems to Arjun an Orientalist representation which he contests: "It seemed that in these stories" the men "figured only as abstractions, a faceless collectivity imprisoned in a permanent childhood – moody, unpredictable, fantastically brave, desperately loyal, prone to extraordinary excesses of emotion".36 The "powerful and… inexplicable" love which the European Colonel speaks of seems to be epitomised in a lowly placed Indian batman intimately associated with Arjun. What Kishan Singh is to Arjun, Arjun is to the British Officer, accepting subjugation unquestioningly: "Kishan Singh, in his very individuality, had become more than himself – a village, a country, a history, a mirror for Arjun to see refractions of himself".37

It is Hardy's strong contention that Indians demeaned themselves to the extent of being imprisoned by the idea of having masters to govern them. The British have, as Hardy rightly points out, made sheep out of their "pet dogs," which would always be ready to be led, not lead themselves. Indians constantly looked towards their masters and thus demeaned themselves. Hardayal, who is referred to as Hardy by his British colleagues, does not mind being addressed thus in the beginning. He considers being addressed as "Hardy" a great privilege. But later, it occurs to him that the distortion of his name is a way of robbing his identity and he is hurt by it. Arjun also witnesses an incident of racial discrimination when, during wartime, he along with his Indian friends jumps into a swimming pool in Singapore where many Europeans are taking a dip. They leave as soon as they see the Indians entering the pool. Arjun's friend Kumar cannot restrain himself from commenting, "We're meant to die for this colony – but we can't use the pools".38 While in Malaya, Arjun is shocked to see the rubber plantation workers, mostly Indians, living in abject, grinding poverty. In civilian clothes, he is mistaken for a "coolie"/labourer and is called "Kling".39 "Mercenary" was another tag used for Indian soldiers when they reached Malaya because the local Indians believed that they were "not real soldiers, they were just hired killers, mercenaries".40

While taking position in the trenches at Jitra in Malaya, Hardy recognises that they, the Indian soldiers, are risking their lives for a cause which is not theirs. He acknowledges to Arjun that so thorough is the penetration of the ideological network of the colonial masters into his psyche that he is "just a tool, an instrument" in their hands with the connection between the mind and the body severed:

"… knowing that you had to fight and knowing at the same time that it wasn't really your fight – knowing that whether you won or lost, neither the blame nor the credit

would be yours. Knowing that you'nre risking everything to defend a way of life that pushes you to the sidelines. It's almost as if you're fighting against yourself."[41]

It is Alison who enlightens Arjun about his fragility: "'… you're not in charge of what you do; you're a toy, a manufactured thing, a weapon in someone else's hands. Your mind doesn't inhabit your body'".[42] Kishan Singh's selfless service to Arjun makes him introspective about their subordination. Kishan Singh's family has served the British army for generations unquestioningly because of the fear injected into their minds during the Mutiny by the brutal killing of the rebel soldiers whose bodies had been impaled on sharpened stakes. The Englishmen's craze for order arranged the stakes in straight lines all the way to the city. The distinction between fear and anxiety is of some importance in the given context. Fear for Kierkegaard refers to "something definite".[43] A threat is detrimental by its very nature; the fear it inspires has its definitiveness rooted both in the character of the region from which the threat originates and in the entity marked out for harming. Furthermore, "the situation of inching closer without being within striking distance heightens the effect by a degree of uncertainty on the part of the frightened".[44] Confronted with an emptiness beyond limit, an incomprehensible scale of things beyond measure, the linguist Kanai in *The Hungry Tide* feels emptied of language because the "sounds and signs that had served, in combination, as the sluices between his mind and his senses, had collapsed: his mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation".[45] Such nothing and nowhere, a phenomenon characterized by total indefiniteness, indicate, according to Heidegger, "that the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety".[46] "To be in such a world", contends Ranajit Guha, "is not to be at home in one's environment".[47] Almost on the verge of breaking point, Arjun becomes precariously aware of the "terror that made you remould yourself, that made you change your idea of your place in the world – to the point where you lost your awareness of the fear that had formed you".[48] Confronted with his "formlessness," Arjun realizes that he has never acted on his own volition. Ironically, the uneducated Kishan Singh is more aware of the past than Arjun himself. Under Hardy's tutelage – "'This is the first time in our lives that we're trying to make up our own minds – not taking orders'"– Arjun, awakening to his true consciousness, shrugs off his misplaced loyalties to the Empire:[49]

> The old loyalties of India, the ancient ones – they'd been destroyed long ago; the British had built their Empire by effacing them. But the Empire was dead now – he

knew this because he had felt it die within himself, where it had held its strongest dominion – and with whom was he now to keep faith?[50]

This disillusionment of the Indian soldiers with the racist policies in the British Indian Army, promising liberty but practicing oppression, is well enunciated by Amitav Ghosh in his essay "India's Untold War of Independence":

> The discovery of invisible barriers and ceilings disillusioned them with their immediate superiors, but it did not make them hostile to Western institutions. Rather, these encounters with racism served to convince them – as they had an entire generation of Westernized Indians – that the British colonial regime was not Western *enough*, not progressive *enough*.[51]

As a colonized subject, Arjun saw himself through the lens of the white European. His decolonized mind liberates him from his vacillations and calls for direct action. It is with this spirit of resistance that he asserts to Dinu: "'[W]e rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives; coloured everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge, indelible stain which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves'" (*GP* 518). Arjun's anti-colonial resistance and rebellion emerged out of his first hand experiences of these ideological contradictions, an ideology that spoke in dual registers, promising freedom on the one hand while denying it on the other. The outcome of this antagonistic exchange, in which those addressed challenge their interlocutors, is that the dominant discourse is ultimately abandoned as scorched earth when a different discourse, forged in the process of disobedience and combat, and prefiguring other relationships, values and aspirations, is enunciated. At a time when dialectical thinking is not the rage amongst colonial discourse theorists, it is instructive to recall how Fanon's interrogation of European power and native insurrection reconstructs a process of cultural resistance and cultural disruption, participates in writing a text that can answer colonialism back, and anticipates a condition beyond imperialism:

> "Face to face with the white man, the Negro has a past to legitimate, a vengeance to extract…. In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself a man of the past…. I am not a prisoner of history… it is only by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom". [52]

Hardayal joins the Indian National Army and fights for the Japanese. Arjun also joins the Indian National Army and becomes the voice of resistance against the British Empire. For him, the feeling of patriotism and loyalty to the Empire become antithetical to one another. Arjun feels for a while that hope lies with the British but finally protests against the Empire to guard the interests of the natives. Towards the end, the loyalty conflict in Arjun is over; he dies and seeks his own identity in the signifying process of history. In Arjun the novel shows how the Indian consciousness and psyche struggled into awakening from the euphoric adoption of English attitudes and came into the authentic Indian selves. The true crisis in the novel is when the old self breaks open giving birth to the new. For Hardy, who is always drawn to Indian food in the army mess and makes no bones about his preference, the decision making becomes relatively easy and he is the first one to quit the British army. But it is hard on Arjun. Hardy says he is a simple soldier and for him it is a question of right and wrong – what is worth fighting for and what is not. A spectator to the shifting allegiance from the British to the Japanese by the Indian soldiers as a result of Hardy's impassioned speech, Arjun wonders: "Was this how a mutiny was sparked? In a moment of heedlessness, so that one became a stranger to the person one had been a moment before? Or was it the other way round? That this was when one recognized the stranger that one had always been to oneself; that all one's loyalties and beliefs had been misplaced?".[53] This is the crucial question for Arjun. The colonialist use of the Indian army produces in him a negation and self-alienation which gradually results in remonstrance, protest and finally defiance. Colonel Buckland is shocked by Arjun's decision to desert the army: "You, I never took for a turncoat" and "you don't have the look of a traitor".[54] Arjun reminds him of General Munro's observation which he quoted during the teaching sessions at the academy: "The spirit of independence will spring up in this army long before it is even thought of among the people".[55] Arjun's disidentification with the British discursive strategies is thus an illustration of Michel Pecheux's "discourse-against" in which the subject of enunciation takes up a position of separation with respect to what "the universal subject" gives him to think, "distantiation, doubt, interrogation, challenge, revolt… a struggle against ideological evidentness on the terrain of that evidentness, an evidentness with a negative sign, reversed on its own terrain".[56]

The production of "human waste" — wasted lives, the "superfluous" populations of migrants, refugees and other outcasts — is an inevitable outcome of modernization. It is an unavoidable side-effect of economic progress and the quest for order which is characteristic of modernity. Bauman argues that the waste of globalized production is not only material but also

human. Inside the "developed" world this "human waste" takes the form of "redundant" people — those who are easily disposable in an economic model which is no longer based on "jobs for life". "To be declared redundant means to have been disposed of because of being disposable — just like the empty non-refundable plastic bottle or the once used syringe".[57] The world today is full (there is nowhere unexplored, or uninhabited which is habitable) and so there is nowhere to transport this excessive, redundant population – as there would have been in colonial times.[58] Outside the "developed" world there are millions of people who are on the move in the liquid world – put into movement for economic or political reasons. Bauman focuses on the experience of the refugee — someone whose experience is the epitome of loss (of land, house, family, work) but who is given no "useful function in the land of arrival or assimilation". In effect, from their present place – the dumping site — "there is no return and no road forward".[59] The state almost always portrays its use of force as an attempt to maintain "law and order". It thus projects itself as the instrument of desirable order in conflict with a naturally unruly, unpredictable, potentially or actually violent populace.

Migrant workers play an increasing role in Asia, where they are "remarkably mobile" and "labor in a largely disorganized and vulnerable state".[60] The workers' position leaves them disempowered within the workplace; it also leaves them vulnerable without. In this sense, migrant workers lead lives that are "hyper-precarious".[61] "Precarity describes the rise of casual, flexible, sub-contracted, temporary, contingent and part-time work in a neoliberal economy" believes Lewis and Waite which explains labour market processes that are conducive to the production of forced/migrant labour. "Precariousness", they further argue "is also understood as a condition or experience of (ontological) insecurity and as a platform to mobilize against insecurity".[62] Chin deduces the modes by which the lives of these migrant labourers become precarious. First, "these workers are not offered any path to permanent residency and citizenship thereby emtrenching their disempowerment." Second, "unlike local workers, migrant workers lack the basic rights of political participation and representation".[63] Hence, they are relatively powerless to challenge their labour conditions through collective means. Economically insecure and socially marginalized, the lives of these workers become precarious because they are vulnerable at the hands of the employers who provide them with contracts and wages as well as the intermediaries who recruit and sub-contract them. Workers also become less involved in determining their own labour conditions because they have "fewer resources to contest work and resist".[64]

Arjun's disillusionment with the ethos of the British Indian Army couples with his awakening to "the racial mythologies of the old mercenary army".[65] Recruitment to the army

was ruled by the old imperial notions of racism which excluded the Tamils on the ground that "they were racially unfit for soldiering".66 The Tamil plantation workers in Malaya who voluntarily join the Indian National Army turn out to be stronger and more dedicated than the professional soldiers. These plantation workers have been so ruthlessly exploited by the capital-intensive economy of the British to the extent that they are reduced to a machine: "having your mind taken away and replaced by a clockwork mechanism".67 Mechanization of man is a form of dehumanizing slavery. The liberation struggle of the Indian National Army serves as an instrument of cultural resistance for these automata against a racist colonial discourse. Their native country India exists for them not as a reality but as an idea: "India was the shining mountain beyond the horizon, a sacrament of redemption – a metaphor for freedom in the same way that slavery was a metaphor for the plantation".68 Popular or insurgent nationalism thus reclaims or imagines forms of community and challenges colonial rule giving shape to a collective political identity. Waging a desperate battle for nationalist liberation and also for self-realization, Arjun dies a heroic death in central Burma in the final days of the Second World War. An affirmed nationalist and completely free from self-contradictions, Hardy becomes "a national figure," an "ambassador and high-ranking official of the Indian Government".69 An embodiment of switched identities, Arjun finds redemption in his glorious death. The novel thus reveals Ghosh's sympathies with anti-colonial nationalism as an emancipatory force in the decolonization of the mind.

Arjun's schizophrenic split and the resulting precarity can explained in the light of Freud's observations on mourning and melancholy. Freud's definition of mourning is very broad, comprising, aside from the reaction to the loss of a loved one, reactions to any substituted abstraction (father-land, freedom, ideal). This conception, which is connected with that of abandonment being sublimated as an abstract idea, introduces sociopolitical perspectives of considerable importance. Freud stressed an economic definition of mourning (loss of interest in the outside world) and the work of grieving as it acts on the binding of painful memories, an ego activity quite unrelated to the attenuation stemming from the forgetfulness associated with the passage of time. He immediately discusses the similarities with, and above all the differences from, melancholia, which is characterized by an apparently unjustified loss of self-esteem:

> In mourning it is the world which has become impoverished and empty; in melancholia, it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless,

incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished."[70]

However, melancholic self-depreciation is actually directed at the love object itself. For this was the cause of disappointment for the subject, who, instead of withdrawing cathexis, unconsciously identifies with the now-hated object to which he remains ever more firmly attached. This pathological development stems on the one hand from the narcissistic nature of the initial object choice, which by its nature promotes narcissistic regression, and on the other hand from the ambivalence of the choice and the predominance in it of the sadistic impulse, which here assumes masochistic form, while directly tormenting the patient's entourage. This helps explain suicide as a redirection toward the self of a murderous impulse originally directed at others. Reversion to mania is likewise explained, in economic terms, as a sudden release from the psychic charge maintained by melancholia.

Freud elaborates on the self-accusation and self-criticism that the melancholic is faced with. It appears that the accuser is an external independent agency. This independent part of the ego is controlling and dictating the rest of the ego. The ego is being dominated by a split off part of the ego which criticizes and dehumanizes its counterpart as a foreign bad ego. This independent split off agency is referred to as the "ego ideal", which constantly watches over the ego and censors its decisions. The process of censure is referred to as the conscience. This is similar to the pathological condition of paranoia where the individual hears others telling him what to do. So the ego is divided and one part work against the other. The ego ideal works against the ordinary ego. The narrative foregrounds the fragility of Arjun's alienated identity which constantly shifts terrains. Arjun feels that he and the likes of him must die in order to completely destroy the Empire. For Dinu, "Arjun chooses the stand where —in resisting the powers that form us, we allow them to gain control of all meaning; this is their moment of victory: it is in this way that they inflict their final and most terrible defeat".[71] This reflects Ghosh's view on language and discourse as dangerous at large: they define their objects in certain ways, and their ingenuous processes of definition and knowledge production are very difficult to escape from. Scrutinizing his own unenviable position from the perspective of Rajan and his patriotic plantation workers turned soldiers

Arjun began to see himself through their eyes — a professional, a mercenary, who would never be able to slough off the taint of his past and the cynicism that came with it, the nihilism. He saw why they might think of him with contempt — as an enemy

even — for it was true in the end, that he was not fighting their war; that he did not believe as they believed; that he did not dream their dreams.[72]

[III]

Agamben defines sovereignty primarily in terms of exclusion or exception. Sovereignty constitutes the state and statist politics by deciding who is to be incorporated into it.[73] This decision is grounded on a fundamental exclusion of what is to remain outside. It is the sovereign who decides where and whether law applies. Politics is instead grounded on rendering people vulnerable and abject, on subjection to a power so total that it can command life and death. The state is authoritarian command and imposes vulnerability as a condition of participation in public or political life. The rise of exceptionalist policies explains the practices of dehumanization of the other that are currently being employed in postcolonial countries, both by the West and by local governments. Walker affirms, that "exceptions may be enacted as a claim about inhumanity",[74] that is, all individuals not belonging or conforming to such a paradigm are considered as not being human beings, but rather as pre-human or inhuman persons, to which the legal juridical order that sustains the international, i.e. the regime of human rights, does not apply. Such "wasted lives", as Bauman has labelled them, are then excluded by the community of humans and treated as human waste, disposable lives that are superfluous, not necessary to the current order but at the same time part of it: they are "the waste of order-building combined into the main preoccupation and metafunction of the state, as well as providing the foundation for its claim to authority".[75]

In the current political situation, argues Butler, the law becomes an instrument of power to be deployed by the state. Law is no longer that which creates the state, nor that which constrains it; rather, it is one more tool for the state to use. The fact that "managerial officials decide who will be detained indefinitely" and who will be "reviewed for the possibility of a trial with questionable legitimacy", implies that "a parallel exercise of "illegitimate decision is exercised within the field of governmentality".[76] The law could have a meaningful and important role in negotiating what it is to be human, and therefore to have a liveable and grieveable life. When norms and the law are collapsed together then trials and legal interventions are an important site for securing precarious lives: "[t]he law […] is now expressly understood as an instrument, an instrumentality of power, one that can be applied and suspended at will".[77]

Dinu's discourse articulates the failures of Burmese nationalism after the assassination of Aung San. A series of insurrections on ethnic grounds have belied the aspirations of the post-colonial nation state. Before long, the old imperial British government finds its legacy in the regressive post-colonial order of the Burmese military regime which "'use the past to justify the present. And they themselves are much worse than the colonialists'".[78] Despite its show of military power and extreme control over both the public and the personal sectors, the regime does not have the ideological and epistemological depth and power of the British colonial machinery. A new censorship was enforced which restricted the freedom of writers as a result of which Dinu's Burmese wife Ma Thin Thin Aye finds herself languishing in prison. Occupying a very narrow discursive-ideological space, the representatives of the government discourse are not interested in finding out about things that are beyond them. Queen Supayalat's prophecy about the destitute condition of Burma comes true as Dinu reveals "'you know how poor we are in our Myanmar'".[79] The Burmese junta decides to shut Burma off exclusively from the world outside: "It was because of the imperialists that Burma had to be shut off from the world; the country had to be defended against neo-colonialism and foreign aggression".[80] "Neo-nationalism will always suppress art in the avant-garde tradition", contends Pascal Gielen, "because it undermines the alleged foundation of a stable national culture from within".[81] In his collection of prose pieces *Dancing in Cambodia; At Large in Burma*, Ghosh dismantles the exclusivist ideology of the nation-state "In a region as heterogeneous as South-East Asia, any boundary is sure to be arbitrary. On balance, Burma's best hopes for peace lie in maintaining intact the larger and more inclusive entity that history, albeit absent-mindedly, bequeathed to its population almost half a century ago".[82] It is this notion of compositeness and inclusiveness that Dinu thrusts on his writer wife: "'We are a universe on our own […]. Look at all our people […] Karen, Kayah, Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Wa, Pa-O, Chin, Mon […]. Wouldn't it be wonderful if your stories could contain each language, each dialect?'".[83] It is this concept of syncretism, of a national reconciliation of all opposing ethnic insurrections that is the liberating idea in a crumbling nation. This ideal is expressed both by Dinu and by the democratic voice of Aung San Suu Kyi who realizes that although "politics has invaded everything, spared nothing […] religion, art, family", "it cannot be allowed to cannibalize all of life, all of existence".[84] It is this voice of repose that symbolizes the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people against the oppressing menace of the military junta.

Like the secretive cult in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the people at the meetings Dinu arranges in his studio communicate outside the discursive world of the regime which even the spies sent to the meetings cannot figure out. In both cases, then, subaltern agency exists, and

can only exist, in an ethical dimension outside the discursive reality of the hegemonic group. In a bid to avoid a brutal military regime which has turned everything into politics, they nurture a discourse very much different from that of the regime: "'we talk only of ideas".85 Dinu uses the language of photography and of the image as a representative system into which the spies sent by the regime have no access: "'Today for example, I was talking about Edward Weston's theory of pre-visualisation … that you must see the truth of your subject in your mind … after that the camera is incidental, unimportant … If you know the truth of what you see, the rest is mere execution. […]Here in the Glass Palace photography too is a secret language'".86 Dinu's ethical call for personal truths of the mind, achieved through imaginary constructions and not filtered through the censorship system and narrow political epistemology of the regime must be of paramount importance for the citizens of Myanmar.

Community is neither a productive project of becoming nor is it a social contract produced by citizens. It is a sharing of singularities who are together unbecoming and unbinding in their sharing and social binding. This unworking is the refusal of unity. It is resistance to totalizing communion. Nancy suggests that fascism annihilates community by destroying difference but that there is always a resistance to this destruction. "[T]he fas- cist masses," Nancy writes, "tend to annihilate community in the delirium of an incarnated communion.... [C]ommunity never ceases to resist this will. Community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence".87 In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* Ghosh laments the equation of the novel in the Western tradition with what John Updike terms the "individual moral adventure" at the expense of the collective. The celebration of the collective, the "men in the aggregate"88 has been a recurrent trope in Ghosh's oeuvre initiated in his debut novel *The Circle of Reason* itself. The community of the disillusioned soldiers of the British Indian army presented in *The Glass Palace* is one that challenges, provokes, threatens, but also enlivens, is a community of disagreement, dissonance, and resistance. The narrative explores the heterogeneity of exploitative labor conditions, their situatedness as well as their "lived experiences" documenting the variegated landscape of neo-slavery for vulnerable migrant workers. The perspective of precarity provides the potential to link actions to tackle forced labour with the broader struggle for (migrant) workers' rights. The recognition and inclusion of migrants as transnational actors and activists must be central to this work. The fact that Amitav Ghosh was able to explore these issues decades ago speaks about his farsightedness as well as the relevance of *The Glass Palace* in contemporary academic engagement.

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Broken bodies, spectral persons, fake truths. Precarious lives in globalized India through the prism of Uday Prakash's short stories

By Alessandra Consolaro

Abstract

Judith Butler stated that "there are ways of distributing vulnerability, differential forms of allocation that make some populations more subject to arbitrary violence than others," asking "what form political reflection and deliberation ought to take if we take injurability and aggression as two points of departure for political life" (Butler 2004, xii). With much political fervour, Hindi writer Uday Prakash investigates the fundamental dependency on anonymous others that involves everybody's life in the gritty, rapidly urbanizing India, where the price of human life is inhumanly low. He draws his narratives from the marginalized lives that India's economic liberalization has pushed even further to the margins, and from the insecurity of lower middle classes, whose dependency on both private and governmental rich and corrupt powers is unavoidable. He talks of "a different kind of globalisation, one so stealthy and so secret that not a single sociologist in the whole wide world knows a thing about it" (Prakash 2016, 11). In this paper I will discuss how Uday Prakash represents the experiences of vulnerability and loss and the individual struggles for survival against a backdrop of societal corruption. Introducing precarity as a condition where the individuals feel that there are others out there on whom their life depends – people they do not know and may never know, – the writer takes the reader to the bowels of globalization from below while representing at the same time globalization from above. I will highlight some narrative strategies and stylistic tools utilized by Uday Prakash in order to convey the sense of precarity, such as metafictional narrative techniques that blur the boundaries between 'real' and fictional life narratives.

Keywords

सर्वस्तरतु दुर्गाणि सर्वो भद्राणि पश्यतु ।
सर्व कामनावाप्नोतु सर्वः सर्वत्र नन्दतु ।

May all conquer difficulties!
May all think of the wellbeing of all!
May all achieve their wishes!
May all rejoice everywhere!
Vikramōrvaśīyam 5.25, 1 1

Precarity, precariousness.

In this article, I discuss how Hindi writer Uday Prakash's literary work represents the experiences of vulnerability and loss and the individual struggles for survival against a backdrop of societal corruption. In his literary production, Uday Prakash investigates with much political fervour the fundamental dependency on anonymous others that involves everybody's life in the gritty, rapidly urbanizing India, where the price of human life is inhumanly low. He draws his narratives from the marginalized lives that India's economic liberalization has pushed even further to the margins, and from the insecurity of lower middle classes, whose dependency on both private and governmental rich and corrupt powers is unavoidable. He talks of 'a different kind of globalisation, one so stealthy and so secret that not a single sociologist in the whole wide world knows a thing about it.'[2]

In the twenty-first century, while international policymakers were proclaiming that insecure, unprotected employment was the solution to problems of economic growth, the so-called West realized that the outcome of flexibilization was jobless growth and higher profits for capital. This prompted political mobilizations against growing insecurity of work conditions, unemployment, the weakened position of labour, and social exclusion, by consequence of the neoliberal state polities that facilitated privatizations, public-sector cutbacks and deregulated, mobile capital. The mainstream academic world discovered informal labour and started focusing on precarity and other associated notions, such as precarious, precariousness, precaritisation and 'the precariat',[3] making these phenomena more visible.

Yet, the emphasis on the notion that in the present time temporary and informal work in its manifold manifestations is the predominant mode of livelihood,[4] tends to support the predicament that precarity is a new phenomenon, and that it manifests a distinctive phase of capitalist development associated with the late capitalist political-economic landscape and with the new geographies that it delineates.[5] This narrative passes over the reality that precarity has always been a feature of capitalist societies and that historically Fordist stability is the exception, while precarity is the norm.[6]

Precarity has permanently characterized working people's lives, especially in the Global South. For most of the global population, informal labour has regularly been the norm not only for men and women, but also for children and the elderly, since survival can be guaranteed only by the contribution, though irregular, of the whole household. As Jan Breman has documented in his half century study of labour and work in India,[7] the most generalized form of employment has historically been precarious and irregular. Even today, more than 90 per cent of the half-billion workforce must seek their livelihood in the informal economy. The

very terms 'work', 'worker' and 'workforce' have different meanings in these vast informal sectors and informality is a multi-class phenomenon, structured by multiple levels of exploitation. Moreover, recent anthropological research has shown that, even as market transactions break in, kin-based economies, tributary, and feudal arrangements continued: the persistence of inequality in the Indian context is not merely a consequence of the false promise of development but, more crucially, of "the continuities of inherited inequalities of power" along the lines of tribe and caste.8 Nativist, racist, anti-immigrant movements and populist parties that mobilize precarious people now exert their influence in countries across the globe. In India as well, Hindu nationalist, casteist, and anti-Muslim parties such as the BJP or the Shiv Sena in Mumbai have won support among the poor by offering services to un/underemployed workers who were cast out of stable, union jobs.9

Precariousness is the term used to define another important aspect connected to the condition of precarity, pointing to an inherent state of vulnerability and dependence resulting from the relational structure of society. It emphasizes not the forms of economic or political insecurity connected to the transformation of capitalism or class relations, but rather a more existential, experiential, and transhistorical perspective, a general, ubiquitous ontological condition of vulnerability, displacement, and insecurity that shapes up to be a biopolitics of the self. This has been analysed by Butler, who defined precariousness as a quality of human condition, deriving from the fact that all humans are interdependent on each other and therefore all are vulnerable. In her reading, precariousness is different from precarity, as "there are ways of distributing vulnerability, differential forms of allocation that make some populations more subject to arbitrary violence than others".10 While precariousness is generalized, precarity is described as a political condition that is the consequence of uneven power relations, and refers to the exacerbation of the precariousness of some subjects as compared to others. As such, it is unequally distributed and it affects mostly people who are exposed to economic insecurity, injury, violence, and forced migration. The result is that some lives and bodies have a social value, while the bodies of the marginalized, poor, and disenfranchised are expendable. These inequalities are made even more acute by neoliberalism, war, and climate crises. Even if precarity creates subjects who are at the mercy of marginality, anxiety, and paranoia,11 in Butler's view, injurability and aggression can be taken as points of departure for political life, and an egalitarian precariousness for all can be as a potential for emancipation.12

Precarity has primarily been investigated in the context of the Global North, linked to the breakup of security within labour markets13 and in the aftermath of the 2008 recession and consequent culture of austerity.14 Less attention has been paid to the fact that the reproduction

of precarious conditions is a cultural reproduction, operating through imaginaries of and assumptions about how day to day life is, and should be, lived. In one word, the notion of 'everyday' that is generally understood as the series of social patterns and the routines of household, community, and work that are at the heart of the concept of culture. Even if in the context of poverty, political disempowerment, and violence, there is little regularity,[15] 'in this uncertainty of time, where everyday efforts don't align with a teleology of progressive betterment, living can be often just that. Not leading particularly anywhere, lives get lived nonetheless'[16]

In the next sections, I will introduce some fiction by Uday Prakash, a much-translated Hindi writer, focusing on different aspects of precariousness and precarity as they appear through the prism of literature. I will read some of his short/long stories dealing with precarity and precariousness both in pre-liberalization time and in the present globalized India. I will highlight some narrative strategies and stylistic tools utilized by Uday Prakash in order to convey the sense of precarity, such as metafictional narrative techniques that blur the boundaries between 'real' and fictional life narratives. In its exploration of precarious life, Uday Prakash is strongly preoccupied with ideas of wreckage, scattered traces and fragments. His narrative space is often drafted from rotting and broken structures. In some cases, it is fragmentary also at the formal level, switching between different chronological levels or following narrative detours. At the level of character, Uday Prakash skilfully sets up affective identifications for his readers, which then he proceeds to manipulate and subvert to interesting effect. His texts are rich in metafictional wits and at the same time explore the aural, evocative and emotive possibilities of language.

Uday Prakash's writing in the Hindi literary field

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Hindi literature has adopted a realist approach focusing on the representation of the life of destitute and marginalized people, with much focus on precariousness and precarity. Premchand, the father of the modern Hindi fiction, raised the novel from the level of entertainment and moral teaching to the depiction of contemporary reality, addressing issues such as the exploitation of peasants by feudal lords and bureaucrats, poverty, illiteracy, superstition, the condition of women in the home and in society, the lives of widows and prostitutes, untouchability, as well as the frustrations and neuroses of the middle classes in a changing country. Urban degradation and the depressing living conditions of the slums of Lahore, Kanpur, and other industrial centres, are dealt with in major Hindi novels of

the pre- and post-Independence period. Problems of mass unemployment, made even worse by a deregulated industrialization process, create a picture of poverty and exploitation where people live lives devastated by poverty and uncertainty. Precariousness is not only a fictional representation: the most famous literary figures of the first decades of the 20th century, such as Premchand, Pant, Bachchan, have in common an experience of poverty, insecure income, poor recognition and lack of social prestige. Belonging to the Hindi literary community in the decades between the 19th and 20th centuries did not mean being part of a group of celebrities, but rather sharing with other writers and writers poor pay and the struggle for recognition of copyright: the public was scarce, the illiterate masses ignored the Hindi literati and the cultural elite disliked them as a subculture.

After Independence, the process of urbanization and emigration from villages to the cities revealed new problems, related to the abandonment of the countryside, to the formation of an urban proletariat, characterized by uprooting and lack of integration. In Hindi literature, poverty is generally dealt with in the setting of a village, as a tool to express a critique of the pre-modern social structure. The survival of hunger and poverty even in modern India, the disturbing presence of multitudes of the homeless and beggars in the urban setting and in slums, remained almost ignored by a literature that was predominantly produced by exponents of the middle classes, who preferred to concentrate on bourgeois neighbourhoods and middle-class problems. Nevertheless, voicing the troubles of the deprived ones remained one of the goals of many Hindi writers, such as Ugr, Rahi Masoom Raza, Bhisham Sahni, Nagarjun, 'Shailesh' Matiyani, Krishna Baldev Vaid.

In the last part of the 20th century, India underwent a process of liberalization of the economy and is now ranked as one of the largest economies in the world, with a GDP of 1,644 billion US dollars. The country is home to fifty billionaires, yet two thirds of the population – around 800 million people – still survive on less than two dollars a day and, according to the UN Human Development index for measuring multidimensional poverty, eight Indian states have more poor people than twenty-six of Africa's poorest countries put together.[17] While GDP of some states in India is as high as some of the middle- and high-income countries, in terms of GDP per capita, they are comparable to some of the poorest countries.

Uday Prakash (b. 1952) is a much-acclaimed Hindi author. His novel *The Girl with the Golden Parasol* and his short stories have been trendsetters in Hindi literature, and he is one of the few regional language writers who has been widely translated into other regional and major foreign languages. He is at present a well-established writer, and he can count on a steady and enthusiastic readership both in India and internationally. Many younger Hindi writers claim

they have been inspired by him. Yet, he likes to define himself as "most un-beloved by the power centres but most popular amongst people living in margins and edges of 'shining India'" (http://udayprakash05.blogspot.com/; his Hindi blog is uday-prakash.blogspot.com.). Uday Prakash is an independent poet and fiction writer, who has never acquiesced to the conventions of the mainstream Hindi literary field. For a long time, he did not get recognition, particularly because many of his writings contain graphic passages or have a 'noir' setting that resulted disturbing to most Hindi literary critics. His harsh judgement on the Brahmanic hegemony in the Hindi sphere, which he defined as a "'holy colony' of priests and preachers", did not help in making him welcome among mainstream literati, critics and academics.18

Uday Prakash is often in Europe, also because one of his sons lives in Germany, and he seems to have recently chosen Turin as one of his favourite cities in Europe. In our conversations, he claims that he is feeling increasingly uncomfortable in his home country where the environment has become increasingly hostile to critically minded intellectuals, mainly due to the populist Hindu nationalism promoted by the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. It sounds deeply ironic that Prakash now says he does not even feel comfortable using Hindi any longer. Although he masters Hindi perfectly and uses it in a powerful and original way that defies all expectations and charms the readers, he claims that he does not feel at ease in this "Brahmanic language" that inherently serves the interests of the upper castes. In his writing, he often deals with the question of who owns language, the relationship between language and religion, politics and caste-based discrimination, the issue of power and control.

A natural-born storyteller, Uday Prakash writes about the social environments that trap poor people, keeping them marginalized and exploited. He creates sketches of contemporary India, a country where global and greedy neo-capitalism is imbued in centuries-old caste oppression, whose fixed power structures deny opportunities to masses of people. In his writing there is a constant attention to how people actually contend with situations of prolonged uncertainty that are defined as the precariousness and precarity endemic to contemporary societies. His characters are destitute and working poor, as well as the marginalized from any social class. His style has an urgency to narrate tales of endangered, resilient and rebellious people, framing both the external powers that push them into danger and uncertainty, and their inner lives, with a wry humour that conveys at the same time levity, empathy, and rage into dark portraits of exploitation and desperation. And he proudly uses his authorial hand, daring to digress and ramble, to leave the main narrative in order to follow minor characters and suddenly go back to the main plot, to create displacement in the reader introducing disjointed and circuitous voices.

Precariousness of the self in a world of precarity: *Mohan Das*

First published in the prestigious literary journal *Hans* in 2005, *Mohan Das* is a long short story[19] that has been adapted to the stage (Press Trust of India 2010) and became the base of a Hindi screenplay for a movie titled *Mohan Das – A Man Lost in His Own Nation*, released in 2009.[20] In 2010, Uday Prakash received the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Mohan Das*, but he returned it in 2015 in disapproval of the national literary body's deafening silence over a series of attacks against intellectuals, writers and artists in India.

Set in "a time right after 9/11," this ingenious piece of literary imagination focuses not on the urban middle class, but on rural/rururban and subaltern India, which is part of the globalized world even if it may appear as crystallised in an immutable archaic time. Mohandas tells the story of a poor and young Dalit belonging to a little community of Kabirpanthi bamboo weavers in a rural district of central India, who manages to graduate from college with excellent grades, thus becoming eligible for a public-sector job reserved for 'Untouchables' like him. The family thinks he will now find a job and they will all escape the misery they live in. But that dream turns out to be an illusion. Each new opportunity falls to nepotism, bribery, and other forms of corruption.

With the passing of time, Mohan Das gets over the age limit for a government position.

Nevertheless, he keeps on struggling and he finally gets a job at a private mining company. When everything seems to be finally alright, in an audacious act of imagination Uday Prakash introduces a deep-rooted conspiracy: Mohandas is denied more than the professional career that his academic achievement should entitle him to. He is denied his very identity: unexpectedly, a scheming Brahmin steals Mohandas's name, caste, and educational certificates and takes the job for himself, leaving Mohandas in a downward spiral of poverty and hopelessness.

To recover his identity, the protagonist of the story launches a heroic struggle. When Mohandas moves to a semi-urban setting, he finds some helpers, who, in another act of imagination, are three great figures of Hindi literature from the past: a chief judicial magistrate named GM or Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, a District Senior Superintendent of Police called SB or Shamsher Bahadur Singh, and a public prosecutor designated HS or Hari Shankar Parsai. As I argued elsewhere,[21] Uday Prakash establishes an alternative Hindi canon in the margins of the mainstream canon, based on a firm non-conformism. With his authorial intervention and through this metanarrative move, Uday Prakāś gives literature the role of speaking truth in a

world where everything seems oriented around the triumph of untruthfulness, elevating the visionary, acidic, and sharp-witted committed writer to the only one capable of fighting for the eternal urge for justice, against the apparently unstoppable, overwhelming and overbearing power of market, capital, and politics.

Opposed to such evaluation of the role of writing, this contemporary story (and yet easily mistaken for a tale from another era) offers a general critique of representational democracy. The Dalit hero, whose markers of personal identity exhibit a clear resemblance with Gandhi, is as well an exposure of the failure of the Gandhian plans. Considering the famous contraposition between Gandhi and Ambedkar, the literary construction of a sort of postcolonial version of Gandhi as a Dalit in the character of Mohan Das is a daring act. Yet, even while expressing a deep sympathy for Gandhian thought, the text makes no allowance for any sympathetic argument about whatever is left of the Gandhian project in the contemporary world. This Dalit avatar of Gandhi finds himself again and again in a helpless situation, yet not even a single Gandhian activist or organization is made available in the story to help him get over the precarity of his situation.

At the same time, the reader is immediately reminded of Ambedkar by the very presence of a protagonist who is an educated Dalit fighting for his 'reserved seat' in government jobs. In a counter-narrative to the mainstream Dalit discourse based on Ambedkar and his iconography of Dalit emancipation, Uday Prakash chooses not to introduce him as Mohan Das's co-fighter and/or helper, thus refusing to adhere to the discourse of the politicized Dalit masses. The meta-discourse of Dalit unity is challenged by the insurrection of little selves. Ambedkar's invisibility exposes the limits of Ambedkar's modernization project. The oppression of Dalits has been going on for ages, but Mohan Das's story is the product of a distinct modernity (or postmodernity?). Mohan Das's story does not limit itself to confronting the reader with the precarious existence of a Dalit, but is also set against an extremely gloomy scenario, representing the collapse of institutional egalitarianism and the resultant failure of the entire civilization.

Through his experimental style and a deceptively simple narrative, Uday Prakash's story gives a representation of a Hindu society going through a political and social flux. In fact, the story also portrays political and social change affecting contemporary Hindu society. In a rural and semi-urban setting, a young Brahmin usurps a constitutionally mediated scheduled caste identity, reserved for ex-untouchables, and while doing so neither he nor his family show any hesitation out of fear of ritualistic pollution. How can such change take place in the midst of the Hindutva discourse? One possible answer is that the secular-bureaucratic structure of

this constitutional identity is sufficient to guarantee them safety. The relation between this character and other upper-caste characters is founded on a shared middle-class identity, giving the fake Mohan Das, who in any case is not expelled from his caste and maintains his biradari links, a sort of 'neo-Brahmin' status. Significantly, this is not perceived as a threat by the uppercaste characters. Mohan Dās is denied justice, and he complains about that. But his lament stresses the fact that his constitutional identity has been stolen only because his biradari is not represented in key positions of power: no one from his community has yet obtained any high governmental or political position. This literary representation of Ambedkar therefore represents the tragic story of a small community excluded from its rightful place in the ranks of the emerging Dalit political community because it is too weak in the numbers game of politics. This is not a disadvantage inflicted upon Dalits by tradition: it is the result of the violence of a hierarchical modernity. It represents a larger problem of modernity (or postmodernity?) and it poses the problem of a post-Ambedkar rethinking of the Dalit issue, launching an incisive critique of the variants of new and old Indian modernities, distrusting them, and opening new ground for exploration. Mohan Das is totally ignored by the political community, and his experiences are so confusing and disabling that the iconography of Dalit emancipation does not work any longer. The political rise of the Dalits in North India has, in fact, coincided with the strengthening of caste and identity politics. The formation of Dalit political communities with their own power structures is a major contribution of Ambedkar's discourse, and has had a radical effect on the process of social development and on liberal democratic values.

The broken Dalit hero of the story cannot regain his stolen identity and Mohan Das closes recording not only the precarity of the socio-economic life of the protagonist, but also the precariousness of his whole self.

Pre-neoliberal precarity and precariousness: *A Day in the Life of the Indian Ivan Denisovič*

At least three characteristics that can be traced in Mohan Das are shared by both postmodern and postcolonial novels, and may serve as the grounds for the claim that the postcolonial can be considered in some way a branch of the postmodern: first of all, the interest in metanarration, the narration of stories about writers, the musing on the act of writing; secondly, the rethinking of history, with the production of an alternative history, written from the point of view of those who are generally excluded from historiographic texts: marginal people, the defeated, the

formerly colonized, proletarians, women, the 'others;' and third, the re-writing of famous works of the literary canons.

Yet, there is a major difference. Far from being a ghost, the writer introduces a physical, fleshy, and embodied kind of imagination in a narrative with a strong choral and dialectic connotation. The reader, in a position of displacement, like Brecht's estrangement, is invited to take an ideological position. Precarity and precariousness are also expressed through a rich meta-textual play, which is explicitly stated by the narrator/writer himself. In this regard, I will proceed focusing on another short story: *Hindustānī Ivān Denīsovic kī zindagī kā ek din* (A Day in the Life of the Indian Ivan Denisovič). First published in 1987 and included in *Tirich*, a successful collection of stories appeared in 1989.[22]

The title is a clear reference to Alexander Solženicyn novel about the Gulag experiences. The overtly controlling narrator states that the protagonist Ram Sahay Srivastav has no connection whatsoever with Solženicyn and any of his stories, yet he keeps on calling him 'Ivan' and 'Ivan Denisovič, or Ram Sahay', repeatedly adding "whichever name you wish to use", problematizing the subjectivity of both characters in a typical postmodern way.

Unfolding at the onset of 1985, in what is "a special day" that will turn out devastating for him, the story describes a few hours from the life of Ram Sahay Srivastav. He struggles for survival in a suburban district of Delhi where he lives with the other five members of his family. The reader follows him as he tries to make his life stable among detailed 'routine' troubles, that cause him constant stress. He is worried about trivial things such as water supply, electricity, kerosene, food and diseases, and is unaware of the events in the larger world.

Interestingly enough, the chronological setting is long before the late 20th century economic boom. Moreover, the protagonist, who works as a proof-reader in a newspaper office, is a member of the lower middle class, technically belonging to the 'above poverty line' category of Indian citizens, who have "food seven days a week, a roof over their heads, and clothes to cover themselves. The children were going to school, and both the husband and wife were employed." This prompts an expectation for a certain security in his life: his wife too works as an "ayah in a rustic private school", the eldest son goes to school in the same school where his mother works. Yet, as the story unfolds, the reader finds out a very gloomy situation: Ram Sahay Srivastav is not a salaried worker, but he works for daily wages. And even if both husband and wife toil strenuously, the lack of a regular and fair income makes them unable to get a decent lifestyle. Their whole life is a series of ailments and pains. Ram Sahay Srivastav and his wife Vimalaji are both described as prematurely aged: they cannot afford enough food and healthcare, and this impacts on their children as well. In fact, apart from the eldest son, all

other children suffer from some ailment that seems to derive from lack of hygiene and malnourishment: the middle one is dumb and semi paralyzed, the youngest son suffers from chronic dysentery, and the two-year-old girl is so severely undernourished that she has no teeth and cannot even crawl.

In another metatextual twist Uday Prakash's "smallest people in Indian society" are drawn from the Russian model of the *malenkij čelovek*, or "little man," a concept first used in mid 19th century in connection to Gogol's destitute and miserable characters, that later became one of the iconic categories of classical Russian literature.23 The Indian Ivan Denisovič, or Ram Sahay's life is vulnerable because he – together with his family and the millions insignificant people like himself – is subjected to the everyday violence of the institutions. In fact, even if he is apparently not deprived of personal freedom, his life is made precarious and unstable as he is humiliated by poverty, and faces growing hopelessness, isolation, and feelings of not belonging. State violence is signalled by the casual references to the general socio-political frame: following Indira Gandhi's murder, the official election results were being announced on January 1, 1985 and the new leader, Rajiv Gandhi, was coming to power. At the micro level, this means that the whole city is going to be paralyzed by political rallies and police blocks and this causes a lot of trouble for Ram Sahay, who gets stuck away from home with his handicapped son in a desperate need of food and money. In a desperate attempt to find a solution, he resorts to an unexpected move and gets to a hospital where he receives money and food in exchange for a vasectomy. This casual hint to mass sterilization, that has become the symbol of state violence during the Emergency, frames precariousness/precarity as an ontological condition, focusing attention on social marginality and vulnerable lives. Of course, this violence is more evident when it takes the form, for example, of police tactics that target the marginal or vulnerable, including racialized populations and immigrants, but in this case the readers can see its more subtle and gruesome face.

The fading out of reality and unreality, the mixing of truth and falseness in this short story is different from the postmodern solipsism and, in the search for literary labels, it could be defined as postrealism. Postrealist narrative has been described as the technique of grounding a contemporary literary text in both an empirical past and a literary one.24 I will return to this concept in the next section, where I focus on another short story, *Dillī kī divār*.

The common man's precarious life in globalized India: *Dillī kī divār*

Like the Indian Ivan Denisovič, the majority of Indian – and we may say of contemporary global – population hangs on in quiet desperation (to say it with Thoreau), unnoticed by almost everyone around and so insignificant that, as it happens to Mohan Das, they themselves often doubt the reality of their existence. In a collection of life fragments in Delhi at the start of the 21st century titled *Dattātrey ke duḥkh* (*Dattatreya's woes*, first published 2002), Uday Prakash introduces another character, Vinayak Dattatreya, who wonderfully represents this majority: [25]

Dattatreya's woes

The number of universes is endless.

Each universe has 10^{11} (meaning 10 followed by 11 zeroes: 10,00000000000) galaxies.

Each galaxy has 10^{11} planets and stars.

Each planet has 10^{11} Vinayak Dattatreyas.

And each Vinayak Dattatreya has 10^{11} woes.

Vinayak Dattatreya is a composite character. He is the contemporary avatar of the middle-class type that was abundant in Hindi literature in the first post-independence decades: honest government servant, unsuccessful Hindi poet, benevolent colony uncle, lowly research scholar recently turned unemployed, etcetera. This sort of erratic hero and literary everyman is bemused, long-suffering, and usually impoverished. He spends his days at the chai-paan shop on the corner and listens to neighborhood rumors and gossip, that he eventually tells the reader as a rambling sutradhaar – the anchor, who talks or narrates the story or some part of story to the audience.

The character of Vinayak Dattatreya is also present in a long short story titled *Dillī kī divār*,[26] which became very popular beyond the Indian subcontinent thanks to the English translation by Jason Grunenbaum titled *The walls of Delhi*.[27] Here, Vinayak Dattatreya tells the story of missing Ramnivas, a sanitation worker from Samaipur Badli – an extensive industrial area in Northern Delhi – who has found a wall stuffed with a hoard of black money while cleaning a gym in Saket – an upmarket residential colony in South Delhi. Ramnivas's adventures, which are summarized in the blurb as "a street sweeper discovers a cache of black-market money and escapes to see the Taj Mahal with his underage mistress," is a parable on

precarity and precariousness, and invites the reader to reflect on many aspects of contemporary life.

Dattatreya's account has its flaws: he rambles and rants with some redundancy, and the reader is left with some doubts about the reliance of such a narrator. He states that his situation is supposedly better than Ramnivas's, as he is part of the middle class, even if at a very low level. Yet, he claims that himself could disappear one day without any apparent reason, as the unseen powers governing politics, economics and society, control the lives of all people. Through the eyes of Vinayak telling Ramnivas's story we roam through a post-globalisation Delhi, where an autorickshaw ride through the commercial neighbourhood of Karol Bagh propels its postproletarian passengers into a dream-world of luxury and wish-fulfilment. Yet, in the real world lies and liars triumph in the limelight, while unacceptable truths stay in the dark.

Vinayak exposes the surreality of Delhi's politico-cultural establishment, and shows to the reader the entrance to an invisible tunnel through which "another citizenry" – an unending line of dispossessed "broken, maimed, crippled, halfway-human beings" – is spreading slowly out below the city's surface. These unrecorded zombie-like beings are not the slum dwellers, who "form their own constituency- one that's got bigger after Independence." They are the uttermost destitute, the homeless, the living embodiment of precariousness and precarity, whose number is globally growing in the late capitalist world and are like "the tears of an ill-fated fakir, leaving only the tiniest trace of moisture on the ground after he's got up and gone. The damp spot on the ground from his spit and silent tears serves as a protest against the injustice of his time."

In the first section of the short story, Uday Prakash investigates what it means to make a living, and to make life livable, in precarious conditions. He concentrates on the role and logic of habits in precarisation, creating microstories about characters that show precarisation as a mode of agency. Their life is fundamentally destabilized, insecure and discontinuous, yet it is lived as everyday life and habitual processes, which generally remain invisible. Precarious everyday agency also involves floating, being ready to move and turn – and, above all, being able to endure disorientation. In a precarious situation, the temporality of the present is important.[28] As Virno has argued, one of the principal requirements of today's worker is to develop the habit of not developing habits.[29]

Uday Prakash gives a name and a story to some of the people who get a shelter among the scattered ruins in Coronation Park, people who appear from nowhere, stay for a while and then disappear. Yet, in the present, they form the "little crowd that hangs out at the shop or stall

or cart" mere steps from the respectable people's houses, and they negotiate some - legal or illegal - ways to survive.

Using what Williams-Wanquet (2006) defined a postrealist narrative strategy, Uday Prakash is able to maintain a realistic style even while detaching from the realistic model that was fixed for the Hindi canon by Premchand at the beginning of the 20th century. Postrealist narrative is neither fully mimetic (aiming to recreate "reality") nor postmodern (creating its own autonomous reality) but rather a narrative practice that "re-emplots facts that have been severed from the world, only to send them back into the world with new meaning".[30]

Using a technique that Laura Brueck (2017) has analysed in *Mohandas*, in *Dillī kī divār* as well the narrator self-consciously establishes a metafictional engagement with his audience, challenging the readers' expectations of realism, metaphor, and allegory. He states at the very beginning that the story is "just a front of the secret I want to tell you," that whatever we can get is rumours, "disguised as facts, but nothing but rumours." Yet, the same narrator repeatedly invites the reader to believe him, and to follow him in the unbelievable reality of Ramnivas's story. Uday Prakash does not aim at challenging the foundations of "reality" like many postmodernist writers do, but he rather wants the readers to recognize the reality of marginalization and exploitation that is characteristic of the contemporary world, where a tiny minority of affluent and powerful people forces the majority to live precarious lives. And in order to convey this reality in its starkest terms, Prakash relies not only on "realistic" description and detail but makes effective use of metaphor, symbol, and allegory, integrating Indian myth, philosophy, a political sensibility, and his wide reading of world literature.

Literature does not only represent reality; it creates worlds through imagination and Dattatreya's narrative shows the reader that the route to a ruthless realism often lies by way of the imaginary. Uday Prakash's authorial intrusions are forceful, often bringing in his take on political news, or locating himself in the story as a full-fledged character. Even more than the "I" he has a striking use of a stylistic device like second person address. He summons reader involvement through direct address, and the concluding sentence "If you want to get lucky, come to Delhi right away – it's not far at all. Forget about being a millionaire; coming to Delhi is the only way left to scrape by" conjures up a community of readers who share both newspapers and hopes. It gives a global twist to this geographically very localized story.

Conclusion

The world of *Dillī kī divār* and *Mohandas* is an age of no absolute truths, of fragmentation, and even of post truth, thus suggesting a postmodern setting. It is also a time when richness is more and more concentrated and the destitute and 'small people' seem doomed to suffering injustice and violence. A sense of dismemberment and confusion is present also in *Hindustānī Ivān Denīsovic kī zindagī kā ek din*, set in a pre-liberalization era but showing the devastating effects of the power system on individuals. Nevertheless, in his whole literary production, Uday Prakash maintains an abiding wish for truth, togetherness and holism, that is achieved through the very act of narration.

Though accepting that we live in the era of irony, ambiguity and relativity, Uday Prakash strives to overcome the uneasy feelings of existentialism, nihilism and solipsism that this brought about and that are part of so much postmodern literature. Integrating Indian myth, philosophy, a political sensibility, and his wide reading of world literature, he introduces an honest and sincere narrator who does not ignore the tenets of the linguistic turn and postmodernism that spoke (and still speak) of a fragmented and fragmenting reality constructed via language, and the impossibility of ultimate knowledge or unmediated self-identity. Nevertheless, he continues to embrace ethical, political, social and environmental commitments, addressing human connectedness in the globalizing world, stressing relationality and consequently our ethical obligations to each other. In a move that is both epistemologically and ethically relevant, the narration acquires a possible universalizing mission in the use of intertextual reference as a means to widen the individual character's personal condition into a manifestation of a general, and enduring, human state of affairs.

Uday Prakash's literary works make a point about the value and necessity of stories to promote our self-awareness and our understanding of the others. This idea of literature fosters the values of social participation, political openness, and linguistic clarity. With his storyteller's craft, Uday Prakash represents the experiences of vulnerability and loss and the individual struggles for survival against a backdrop of societal corruption. Introducing precarity as a condition where the individuals feel that there are others out there on whom their life depends – people they do not know and may never know, – the writer takes the reader to the bowels of globalization from below while representing at the same time globalization from above, promoting the cultivation of a political acuity that allows to navigate the intertwined worlds of the private and the public, the local and the national, the domestic and the international.

1 I hail from a country where every day a Catholic saint is celebrated, and in 2004 a new saint was born: San Precario. Created by Italian activists for the EuroMayDay, the 1st May event that every year sees demonstrations of European precarious workers, he is to act as the patron saint of all persons affected by precarity and precariousness (Tarì and Vanni 2005). San Precario has since become widely known, and his images are now shown in social protests across Europe (http://kit.sanprecario.info). San Precario protects his devotees and makes their exploiters quiver. I put the epigraph, a much-quoted Indian prayer, as an invocation for his protection and for the welfare – in every sense – of all sentient beings.

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Politics of Precarious Childhood of Marginalised Children in Neoliberal India

By Suchismita Ghosh

Abstract

With the neo-liberal economic reforms of 1991, and the consequent structural adjustment of the economy, the Indian state made a transition from the state-led, bureaucratic, welfare-oriented economic paradigm to a free market driven, entrepreneurial, neoliberal state, whereby ideologies of empowerment and self-governance came to displace discursive formations of the welfare state. Along with economic liberalization, the question of social sustainability is more at stake, especially for children, who are doubly marginalized, both in terms of their age and their economic viability. Now, with austerity programmes and privatization, empowerment has come to be a preferred tool to construct self-governing, self-caring, consuming entrepreneurial subjects in the broader rubric of the neoliberal Indian de-welfarised state that in recent years has shown an overtly urban, consumerist and middle class bias. This neoliberal emphasis on "free choice" fails to take into account that to choose among available consumer products, one must first have to be able to live.

In the given context, the plight of the street children, who occupy the lowest rung in the pyramid of power, becomes dire. The neoliberal tendency to emphasize individual liberty and reject any concerted effort to foster collective well-being exonerates individuals of social responsibility and renders vulnerable street-children to an all-time low. In an attempt to critically debunk the notion of neoliberal hope for the marginal subject, the street children in this case, this paper will undertake to present analyses of Tarun J. Tejpal's novel The Story of My Assassins (2010), particularly his ruthless portrayal of Kaaliya and Chini, and Vikas Swarup's Q and A (2005). In trying to address the critical interface of neoliberal discourses informing the restructured nation state and the deplorable street child, the paper seeks to find out how the street child has to suffer politics of representation, social exclusion, precarity of childhood and lacuna of support.

Keywords

In critical human geography, neoliberalism refers to a family of ideas associated with the revival of a strand of 18th and 19th century economic liberalism in the mid-twentieth century. This is taken to include the school of Austrian economies associated with Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek, and Joseph Schumpeter, as well as the Chicago School of Milton Freidman. Susan Smith et al enlists the following characteristics of neoliberalism:

- "a strong commitment to methodological individualism"
- "an antipathy towards centralised state planning"
- " commitment to principles of private property"
- "a distinctive anti-rationalist epistemology"
- "The central dogma of neoliberalism is economic growth"
- and "it operates by: deregulation of social welfare, health, labour and environmental laws"
- "opening domestic markets to foreign competition"
- "limiting the role of the state by privatisation of state assets"

- "liberalization of economic policies"
- "increasing corporate influence and investment and involvement in governance"[1]

Since all these characteristics are discernible in India's New Economic Policy formulated in 1991 by the then Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh, it can be said that the economic policy has been markedly neoliberal in its IMF-WB orchestrated economic reforms that included structural adjustment to encourage foreign investment. However, in the decades following, the reported effects of neoliberal policies in India have been: debt crises, severe environmental degradation and crashing economies, currency collapse, rising unemployment, rising food and fuel prices and falling wages.[2] And according to Arundhati Roy, neoliberal capitalism has resulted in the polarisation of a society between a narrow class of the super-rich and the millions of apparently superfluous, certainly denigrated, poor.[3]

Also neoliberalism has, over time, been transformed from an ideology into hegemonic common-sense[4] and this hegemonic ideology has been so normalised in the context of the Indian nation state that it has been imbibed to inform renewed notions of subjectivity, questions of national identity, culture and cityscape as also that of inclusion/exclusion. Under the aegis of neoliberal governmentality, to take the critical coinage of Michel Foucault, citizenship is now reframed and the focus is on the configuration of a "depoliticized existence and disciplined, consuming, individuated civic actors."[5] In fact, neoliberal discourses of rationality, consumerism, autonomy, responsibility, entrepreneurship, positivity and self-confidence constitute the neoliberal Indian subject in ways consonant with neoliberal governmentality; problems are construed as ones with market solutions; the focus is on profit and productivity.[6] The neoliberal self is connected to a generational structure of feeling; a selfhood counter-posed to the old pre-liberalization, social-democratic self, involved in intense brand-conscious commodity fetishism, pivoted to self-care and money-generation and comfortable with debt. Future-oriented, they are selfishly resourceful, competitive, calculating and bent on becoming human capital. The new Indian middle class is thus seen to premise its subjectivity on the hegemonic ideals of neoliberalism. However, in this context, it is intriguing to ask: how exactly it looks like when the neoliberal subject is a child—and that too—a street child?

Thus, we see that the very predicament of the street child problematizes both the loud claims of neoliberal governmentality and the question of neoliberal subjectivity; it also causes unease. Rendered almost invisible to the self-deluded middle class, these marginal children alone have the potential to unsettle the precarious world of neoliberal make-believe by

questioning the possibility of their assuming subjectivity in the aegis of neoliberal governmentality. Marginalised both in terms of their age and economic viability, the street children occupy the lowest rung in the social pyramid of power. They have no recourse to the requisite cultural capital. Thus, having neither language, education, knowledge, contacts, money nor protection of the state, they have no means to harp on the neoliberal hope of material success.

To add to this, theirs is a domain of childhood that is largely threatened, invaded and corrupted by the adult world. Their experience of childhood is markedly precarious. In fact, UNESCO (2008) defines street children thus:

> Being a street child means going hungry, sleeping in insalubrious places, facing up to violence and sometimes becoming an expiatory victim; it means growing up without companionship, love and protection; it means not having access to education or medical services; it means losing all dignity and becoming an adult before even having been a child.[7]

According to Human Rights Watch, ―the term 'street child' refers to children for whom the street more than their family has become their real home. It includes children who might not necessarily be homeless or without families, but who live in situations where there is no protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults.[8] Street children are among the most physically visible of all children, living and working on the roads and public squares of cities all over the world. Yet, paradoxically, they are also among the most 'invisible' and therefore hardest children to reach with vital services such as education and health-care, and the most difficult to protect.[9] They are pushed into theft, prostitution gambling etc. for economic survival. These children leave their homes for a number of reasons such as their parent's abusive behaviour, alcoholism, poverty and joblessness. Some children leave home to enjoy the glamour and charm of the big cities. Whatever the reasons of being on street and whatever these street children practise, they have few things in common—

- no participation or access to employment and services
- lack of parental care
- inability to deal with personal crises
- having nobody to listen to their pleas

In other words they are not socially included in the society to which they belong. Also, by creating a different category for these children, there is an attempt to exclude them from the mainstream dialogue of the child and childhood.

Aptekar (1988) points out that the term 'street children' tends to carry very strong emotional overtones, because every aspect of their lives is exposed to the public gaze—their physical appearance, their way of life and their behaviour.[10] Hence, they evoke conflicting emotions of pity, disgust, horror and disapproval among the public. Symonds (1993) found that such children indulge themselves more often in delinquent behaviour; they become withdrawn or distractible or hyperactive.[11] Sometimes they exhibit a mixture of submissiveness, aggressiveness, insecurity, sadistic tendencies, shyness, stubbornness and non-compliance.

Francise Remington (1993)[12] while reporting that over 120 million children live in the cities and towns of South Asia, also note that growing up in crowded slums and shanties, competing with adults for their share of crumbling urban services and leaving school early in order to help their families and themselves, to fight the pressures of extreme poverty, these children have become victims of the urban cash economy and its individualism. Many of these children spend a significant part of their time away from home and school, and many are engaged on the streets and marketplaces without support or protection. Based on the UNICEF sponsored research studies in seven major cities and their practical experiences of working with street children, Asha Rane and Neela Shroff (1994) in their paper, report that the major problems encountered by street children in India include harassment by the municipal authorities and the police, exploitation by employers, and a general lack of recreational facilities.[13] Satya Prakash and Lata Singh (2011) identify that several of runaway children come to cities mostly through railways.[14] Therefore, they note that the need for special safeguards and care for children around railway stations is important. This is the point where they can be contacted, treated with respect and their rights to protection and development guaranteed lest they join the huge numbers of invisible and vulnerable children.

S.H. Koller and C.S. Hutz (2001) observe that though living on the streets leads to the exposure to addictions, violence, and exploitation, the street allows for cumulative experiences, which promote a healthy development.[15] Recently, researchers conducting systematic studies on the emotional, cognitive, and social development of street children have found that, although these children are exposed to stressful situations and to great personal and social risks, they develop coping skills that allow them to overcome the hazards of life on the streets. They master strategies to establish social groups that increase safety and improve the odds of surviving. Sergio Luiz de Moura (2001) argues that the discourses on street children naturalize

social deprivation and stigmatize poor families and children.[16] Street life is presented as the outcome of an organic and linear chain of adverse factors including migration, economic hardship, family dysfunction and child abuse. Street children and their families are portrayed as displaying socially unacceptable attributes which place them outside mainstream society. It is also argued that the social construction of street children prompts interventions which sustain the status quo of social inequalities.

Now, the thesis of this paper lies in looking at the critical interface between the neoliberal governmentality of the nation state and the crucial position of the street child. By looking at this interface, the paper would try to analyse the deeply political ways in which the street child is now defined, seen as a site that necessitates reform and aid, and how s/he is being represented in both media and fiction. The paper would attempt to look at these measures of representation, which though are apparently cloaked in morality, seem to be covert measures of reinventing neoliberalism. And if the representation of the poor Indian street child is mired in politics to justify neoliberal ideologies, the paper would question if not the plight of such children is used to achieve ulterior aims and ask if the question of the children's suffering is at all addressed; it would look for an answer to the concern that despite show of help, if they are at all helped?

Now, childhood itself is a socially constructed concept, shaped by historical, social and cultural factors.[17] Also, children are not just passive objects of social processes and structure.[18] Even in situations of exploitation, children demonstrate agency, manoeuvring through the often contradictory nodes of discursive childhood categories that might otherwise serve to constrain them.[19] Seen from this perspective, this paper would try to postulate that neoliberalism conspires not only to accentuate the precarity of the very concept of childhood for children in general and that of the marginal street children in particular, for whom the experience of childhood is always already compromised, but rather that it connives to subject them to newer forms of exploitation by making them speak for its covert agendas.

Now, we might ask as to how precisely the working child on the street and slum suffers in India now in the current era of neoliberalism, marked by the restructuring of the government and the evasion of welfare measures. Lack of social responsibility and evisceration of welfare provision of the state makes the condition of the street child miserable; neoliberal economy exhilarates in looking at the vulnerable street child as an exploitable labour resource. To add to this, the neoliberal Indian city is a highly contested space, as Leela Fernandes clarifies, marked by the politics of 'spatial purification', which focuses on middle class claims over public spaces and a corresponding movement towards cleansing of such spaces of the poor and

the working classes. The transformation of the city from a social space to that of consumption is predicated on the primacy of the ethical and the clean, and hence, the poor, especially the hapless street children are rendered 'unclean' and hence undesirable.

A nation with conspicuous presence of disadvantaged children on streets is not 'developed' in the neoliberal understanding of development. Such an understanding has the potential to legitimise international interventions in the form of both aid and technical assistance. This is extremely political as doing so would distract attention from on-going inequalities and dispossessions perpetuated by other aspects of neoliberal development. Thus the precarity of the marginal street/slum child and their dwelling in challenging circumstances have been mired within new cultural assertions of the politics of state modernization and neoliberal consumption.

As Sarada Balagopalan says, "Coinciding with its emergence as an important force in the global scale of things, the Indian nation state has felt an enormous compulsion to recalibrate the lives of poor children in order to prove its claim to globality."[20] Consequently, the street/slum child is not only summarily excluded from the national cultural representation complicit with dominant elite modernity, s/he is further exploited to propagate the propagandist agenda of the neoliberal ideology, as now the marginal child is susceptible of becoming the new scapegoat of fantastic fictional representation. Also decontextualized images of suffering marginal children are used in the media to garner donations and fuel charity as also question the notion of development and drive home surreptitious messages bearing the purport of neoliberalism.

It is against this notion of the new globalised era that Spivak theorizes on the new subaltern, whose body is rendered data and sought after as intellectual property.[21] Interestingly, Roy (2010) refers to the power to produce authoritative knowledge about poverty and its alleviation as "poverty capital".[22] And neoliberalism conspires to build such knowledge of poverty by separating it from the processes of accumulation and distribution of wealth in a bid to depoliticize such processes. According to David Harvey, since neo-liberalization is understood to be an accumulation strategy aimed at restoring class power, neoliberalism, with its seductive rhetoric of freedom has primarily worked as a system of justification and legitimation for whatever needed to achieve this goal.[23] To counter such totalising discourse then, it now becomes imperative, as Sheshadri Crooks argues, to look from the point of view of the margin (as the excluded and the limit) (qtd in Nandi 66).[24] As such, we can trace the rise of the post-liberalized social realism fiction that, besides capturing the loud contrast between the old stagnant India of license Raj decay and the new hopeful India after the opening up of

the economy post 1991 reflect on contemporary India, interestingly, through the perspective of the precariat—the wronged marginal characters, thereby drawing attention to social injustice and disparity in the wake of economic prosperity. Therefore, coming to the question of fictional representation, the paper will present an analysis of the trope of the street child in the Indian neoliberal context by undertaking a comparative study of the portrayal of the marginal street/slum child in two such fiction: Vikas Swarup's *Q and A* (2005)[25] and Tarun J. Tejpal's *The Story of My Assassins* (2010).[26]

Tarun J Tejpal's The Story of My Assassins (2010) is about the attempted murder of the unnamed narrator, a journalist. It explores the interface between the elite narrator and the pathetic five men, who are supposed to be his assassins. As the novel proceeds to unravel the stories of the "assassins"— these are all stories of men from the lower fringes of society; stories from the rural hinterlands of new India, replete with unimaginable violence, horror, torture of landlords and kin and the police, sexual abuse, child abuse, sex trafficking, vengeance, rape and gruesome murders. The difficult lives of these men from the underclass continue, parallel to the astronomic progress of India, post neoliberal globalisation. Kaaliya and Chini are two of the labelled antagonists, who grow up in the sinewy, filthy back alleys and shadowy platforms of the Paharganj railway station. Abandoned in the Delhi bound Guwahati Express, six year old little Lhungdim from North-East India ends up in the Paharganj railway station, where he is rechristened Chini to do justice to his snub-nosed Chinese features. He immediately forms a bond with the wiry, slightly older Kaaliya, the dark child of the itinerant snake-charmer. Kaaliya had decided that his father's life cannot be his when he has only been eight. He had run away to Delhi in the neoliberal hope of becoming a self-made man.

When Chini arrives, Kaaliya brings him in Dhaka's gang of station rats. His motherly instincts are aroused. He nurtures and protects Chini and also gradually initiates him into the hardened ways of living the life of a station rat, where unprotected, sniffing glue and watching sleazy pornography are the only ways of making the pain bearable. Philip Mizen and Yaw Ofosu-Kusi, in their article "Asking, giving, receiving: Friendship as Survival Strategy among Accra's street children" argue that friendship is a neglected element of research, yet cooperation, mutuality and exchange between friends are essential to street children's survival.[27] Sarada Balagopalan, in her exploratory work, *Inhabiting 'Childhood': Children, Labour and Schooling in Postcolonial India* asserts on this aspect of street children, as she discerns in them this remarkably high paradoxical capacity for hope, resilience and mutual generosity.[28] Though most street children perish unreported on their way to adulthood, the novel tracks their precarious survival and assumption of adulthood amidst gruesome stories of

innocent children being killed in accident on tracks, by drug abuse, gang rivalry, sexual abuse, trafficking, and police atrocity. From being engaged in dainty crimes of swindling, stealing and pick-pocketing, Kaaliya and Chini move on to work for "the hell boys of the peepul tree", descending eventually into a life of conning, drug-dealing, pornography and sex-trafficking.

The protagonist of Vikas Swarup's *Q and A*, Ram Mohammad Thomas begins his life in an orphanage; so can he be technically termed a street child? Now UNICEF provides three categories of street children that relates essentially to the third world.

> A. "candidates for the street", that is children working on the streets but living with their families.
>
> B. "children on the street", with 'inadequate and/or sporadic family support
>
> C. "children of the street", those who are 'functionally without family support'

Thus left alone in this world and left to his own wits to fend for himself, Ram's precarious condition surely mirrors the plight of a child forced on streets like Chini and Kaaliya in Tejpal's *The Story of My Assassins.* Interestingly, the unique name of Ram, devoid of historical specificity of caste, religion or ethnic identity renders him a generic and essentially denotative common Indian man status and thus his narrative aspires to be that of an everyman,: his story of survival and possibility of success connives to inform the story of the neoliberal Indian street child, lured with visibility of material resplendence.

In the eighteen years of his life, Ram sees and experiences things that no child under normal circumstances, would or should have experienced. However his difficult life meets with a surprising turn-around when he participates in a reality television show 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' and wins a million rupees by answering all the questions correctly. The novel however begins with the arrest of Ram by the police from Dharavi on the pretext of suspicion by the producers of the quiz show that he must have cheated. As such, the novel traces the loci of the marginal child/adult's life to delve into the genesis of the answers in the trivia. The secret of his knowledge of the difficult questions lies in the precarious life he has lived. In this case, according to Nandini Gooptu, what works for Ram is a continuous deliberate revaluing of his background as 'knowledge'.[29]

In *Q and A*, we thus see an attempt at championing the story of possibility of material success of a slum child alone in neoliberal India, provided he has the cultural capital of excellent spoken English. The novel goes on to promote a hypothetical situation of Ram in fictional representation where it appears that it is precisely his lack of institutional education and precarious unsettled life that invests in him to win the prize money in the trivia that is to change his life and status. According to Swaralipi Nandi, *Q&A* projects a neoliberal premise

of social mobility by banking on one of the most revolutionary aspects of reality TV, that is, its focus on the 'ordinary' man. Marking a major shift from the scripted sitcom narratives and professional actors, reality TV had turned the spotlight to the common man.[30] As Bourdieu points out: "the power of neoliberal hegemony is based on a new form of social Darwinism: In the words of Harvard 'the best and the most remarkable win the race'";[31] the ideal subject of neoliberalism is therefore someone with exemplary survival skills, like Ram. It is only by his survival skills that Ram becomes materially successful, hence visible; though his story brings to light the significant amount of violence that is exercised over this class of society, subjected as they are to economic and political exclusion, it celebrates the experience of precarity as a resource one can bank upon to be materially successful and included in society.

In an attempt to make an appraisal of the case of the Indian street child as to what keeps him/her invisible and difficult to be accessed for help, I would like to bring to focus the stake of the debt-ridden third-world nation (in this case, India), pressed with directives of austerity adjustments, export-based national economics and also that of poverty reduction through the imperative of economic growth. Such neoliberal imperatives on the nation state lead to cuts in social welfare programmes and disruptions in local support networks. Also this discourages developing countries like India from pursuing genuinely alternative national development strategies to address issues of indigenous street children amidst others.

World Bank reports rarely (if at all) consider histories and geographies of power, exclusion, or redistribution as either causes of, or solutions to, poverty, and never as produced through international interconnections of political and socio-economic processes.[32] Nevertheless, an emphasis on poverty serves to combat disenchantment with the Bretton Woods institutions and re-establish international legitimacy,[33] while the same organizations continue to promote economic policies that simultaneously exacerbate poverty. Also when it comes to issues related to child labor and poverty, advisory organizations inadvertently speak out against child labour but are not willing to address the international inequalities that contribute to exploitation or children's need to work in the first place.

Thus till date, no assured data has been reached on the present number of street children, living in the neoliberal metropolises of India; also there is no programme of the state directly targeting street children. And though the country, nonetheless, has to incorporate recommendations of the UN Conventions on child rights, it is as late as in 2015 in the revised Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act that the sub-clause on street children is added to the definition of what it means to be "child in need of care and protection": "(ii) who

is found working in contravention of labour laws for the time being in force or is found begging, or living on the street."[34]

Thus, left out of national consensus and constructive recuperative measures, increasing numbers of children live and work on the street in conditions of poverty, while media representations of ideal childhoods sharpen the experience of material poverty, as inner deprivation. Neoliberal governance of the poor focuses on teaching them to exercise self-help and entrepreneurship, and in doing so, masks the political-economic developments through which poverty is created and maintained. It also fosters distinctions between the entrepreneurial poor and the undeserving dependent poor, a binary, exemplified in the fictional representations of the poor marginal child in *Q and A* and *The Story of My Assassins* respectively.

Again, based on the Western notions of normal childhood and child development, the universal measures of eradicating the plight of these marginal children through rehabilitation, adoption and social integration appear estranged to the resilient Indian child on the street. Since the service of the social agencies is not customised to fit his/her cause, street children tend to refuse such help. It was in 1959 that the foundation for a global standard for children's rights was laid down, when the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. The Declaration specified a series of rights for children. However, it did not recognise that there might be cultural differences in what constitutes children's "best interests", or that children might have something important to say about the nature of these interests.[35]

Thus in Tejpal's novel, we see Dhaka unequivocally lay bare his distrust of juvenile homes and welfare services provided by NGOs. He clearly instructs his gang children to stay away from the hypocritical social activists. He condemns the social agencies as machinery for luring children off streets and putting them into soulless homes, for churning a continuous supply of myriad domestic help for the rich and the privileged upper middle class homes of new India. And Ram in Swarup's *Q and A* is immediately exposed to the ruthless predatory aspect of the adult world after being put in the juvenile home, where he no longer has any misgiving regarding how Gupta sexually abuses young boys. *Q and A* reveals street children in juvenile homes state how they would rather brave the street than be in juvenile home that provides them with nominal education and minimal clothes, food and medical supply. The juvenile home wrenches their free spirit by stifling them in claustrophobic spaces and summarily subjects them to verbal and physical abuse. Most studies attribute the reason of such plight on the lack of proper monitoring and rampant corruption, but that being said, it should also be noted that neither the juvenile homes nor the schools are set up on the basis of research on the needs of the Indian street children, whom Mira Nair depicts as the children who are

denied a childhood but who survive on the streets with resilience, humour, flamboyance and dignity in her documentary *Salaam Bombay!* (1988).

This explains why the Indian street children, in the context of neoliberalism, remain largely outside the iota of help. No wonder, they become an anomaly and question the limits of the normalising neoliberal discourses of entrepreneurship, empowerment, free choice, individualism and consumerism. Thus narratives championing neoliberal discourses conspire to co-opt the street child as its poster child and attempt to postulate as Swarup's *Q and A* does, that now neoliberalism has created a situation where even marginal individuals, notwithstanding poverty and socially compromised status, can respond to processes of economic restructuring through their entrepreneurial drive, personal strategies and acquisition of the requisite cultural capital. Such deeply problematic, political narratives also seem to build on an idea that life on the street better equips the child to don the entrepreneurial skills required for success in the era of neoliberalism.

However, such fascinating take on the neoliberal ethos of entrepreneurship and self-responsibility with the marginal child as the protagonist belies the struggles and suffering of little children forced to live/work on the street. Such assumption that even a street/slum child—if only he is smart and resourceful enough, he can make change happen in life—is deeply exploitative. Such false fictional representation in the service of hegemonic neoliberal ideologies as also mainstream media-generated discourse in which street children are linked with narratives of delinquency and substance abuse serves to position them as inherently outside the realm of 'normal' childhood. Vulnerable street-children are further pushed to invisibility owing to the neoliberal tendency that in emphasizing individual liberty and rejecting any concerted effort to foster collective well-being, exonerates individual members of society of social responsibility and empathy.

Thus the reality is that: the street children form a ubiquitous, yet invisible part of the neoliberal cities. Celebratory narratives of economic liberalization in India either gloss over their miserable faces or decontextualize and repackage their representation to serve the tailored needs of the hegemonic discourse. Pinky in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) runs over a street child in Delhi highway but no one has to suffer jail sentence as the case is not even reported.36 The poor, living on the streets are so disenfranchised that they do not have the courage or the moral support of the state to report a crime committed against them. Thus, given the context, where the state withdraws from its welfare potential, these poor street/slum children like Ram, Kaaliya and Chini, rather than becoming empowered, entrepreneurial actors in the neoliberal economy, are bound to dwindle to a state of insignificance and demolition or

they are bound to be exploited by the rich entrepreneurs to accumulate more profit and their background being compromised, are at risk of ending up in committing crime for survival. Thus due to neoliberalism, the poor in general and the precarious street children in particular are more at risk of being exploited, reified and criminalised. Their very survival and transition into healthy adulthood is increasingly rendered tenuous by the very processes of liberalization that have benefitted some.

The rhetoric of "*mai-baap*", that is, to look upon the state as their father and mother and expect the state to take care of them is replaced by that of self-responsibility that is intricately connected with the notion of controlling states. In India, the state is seen by the majority as 'mai-baap' (mother-father, all in all)—a syndrome that has its root in long-standing feudalism—and this spells out a paternalistic doling-out system in which the government usurps the responsibility of the governed, treating him/her like a child, who in turn is supposed to be content with little gifts and small inputs of living (like government subsidies, allwance for building home, bathroom,giving gas cylinders etc), now and then, keeping his/her eyes off the bigger picture. This contradicts with the neoliberal governance where citizens are supposed to assume self-responsibility. However, emphasizing personal responsibility serves to blame poverty on the poor themselves. Thus we find that the street children are exploited not only by not including them in the mainstream discourse of childhood and innocence but also by making them subject to politics of representation, in the context of neoliberalism. There is an important body of work within critical poverty studies that exposes the ways in which representations of poverty are intricately connected with the maintenance of that poverty. In this context, it is interesting to note that Tejpal's novel apparently seems to resist the use of the street child as a trope by trying to portray their lives as they are, thereby apparently championing for policies of help tailored to suit their plight, spirit and air of heroism. However, it is hard not to look at the representation of his antagonists from the perspective of failure to attain neoliberal subjectivity. With the lure of social climbing, attempting to inhabit the social space of the burgeoning middle class, these men seek to move from being invisible in the darker recesses of India to visible enlightened zones. But they lack the requisite factors. They even lack the rare cunning and unique entrepreneurial spunk of Balram Halwai of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. They are not white tigers. They are not resourceful. They are men, highly unfit for the neoliberal society. They are disposable poor men, made into pawns of conspiracy of the state and the stories of their lives attest so. Thus, the crucial question that Tejpal's *The Story of My Assassins* also poses is—how does neoliberalism fare for those who do not submit to its

required criteria of subjectivity and citizenship?[37] It asks if neoliberal society has any place for the marginal, the deviant, the non-consumerist and the (undeserving) poor.

Thus the question remains, where do the marginal street children stand, now, in the context of the changing faces of the state and governance in contemporary India? How does the neo-liberally imagined empowerment logic apply to these grass-root subalterns? In fact, how has the balance of who assumes the responsibility for poor children shifted under neoliberal development? How does the neoliberal idea of seeing poverty as a social aberration come in the way of addressing their plight? How do international championing of child rights and anti-child labour legislation impact these marginalised actors? As also how does blind adherence to Western models of aid without formulating aid tailored on the basis of independent indigenous research on culturally specific Indian street children affect the function and acceptability of such aid?

Therefore, going back to the initial premise of trying to address the critical interface between the neoliberal discourses of empowerment and self-responsibility and the representation of the street child, we can see how one problematizes the other. Question remains: how do the market mechanisms and the dialogic of free choice apply to street children? And paradoxically, one might also ask if it is the universally claimed children's rights that happen to provide an even more morally acceptable way with which to justify intervention and the spread of neoliberal forms of governance? Nevertheless, the crucial question that such paradoxical banter crucially leaves unaddressed is that: can such governance ensure for these street children their fundamental rights to health, shelter, education, standard of living, rights to freedom from violence and harassment, and most crucially, the most fundamental right of all, the right to life? However, rather than attempting an answer to this intriguing question, I would like to conclude this paper by drawing attention to the inherent fallacy in the very neoliberal emphasis on free choice that fails to take into account, that to be able to choose among available consumer products, one must first have to be able to live.

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Precarious Predicaments: A Reading of Ravi Subramanian's novel *Bankerupt*
By Monali Chatterjee

Abstract

The present world of turbulent times is marked with uncertainty, volatility and fragility. Each aspect of existence is in a state of flux this leads to a state of precariousness that is all pervasive, perennial and powerful. Literature often succeeds in representing a concrete manifestation of this continuous phenomenon of precariousness from abstract generalizations of anonymous accounts. Literature possesses the powerful channel through which such precariousness can be scrutinized and this helps to gain a comprehensive understanding of the real phenomenon being precariously placed in a world of fragility and uncertainty maybe best illustrated by literature particularly in the fiction centred on the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008.The universal predicament has been that of instability and precariousness of not only the political economic and social value but it has shaken the foundations of human conscience and existence. Ravi Subramanian's novel Bankerupt captures much of this precariousness through its dilemmas of political and economic power in this realistic novel. The plot of the novel represents some of the precarious predicaments of the day and depicts the consequent helplessness of human beings. This paper traces out the uncanny instances of greed, desire and ambition that plagues and infests the modern civilization even more conspicuously, as an aftermath of the economic recession. It scrutinizes the precarious consequences through which terror and anxiety emanate in all walks of life. Various elements of precariousness as depicted in the novel through a web of intricate instances in order to scrutinize how precarious situations govern human life have been brought out through this paper.

Keywords

Human life is perpetually affected by uncertainty and a consequent uneasiness. The fragility of human life is further aggravated by the continuously changing socio-political and economic conditions that, in turn, render human life ever more precarious, unsteady and vulnerable. In these turbulent times every aspect of the human condition is rendered vulnerable due to its state of flux. This precarious condition is all-pervasive, perennial and powerful. This unsteadiness and a continual predicament of precariousness of masses of people is often represented in literature as a concrete manifestations and hypothetical instances that represents reality. Literature can become a powerful channel through which such precarious conditions may be scrutinized for a better understanding of the fragility and uncertainty in the real world. Ravi Subramanian's novel *Bankerupt* best captures this precariousness through the dilemmas, trials and tribulations of political and economic powers in an interesting thriller. The novel represents some of the realistic precarious predicaments of the day and portrays greed, desire and ambition that infest the modern day world, more viciously, following the economic recession of 2008. Various elements of precarity as delineated in the novel have been scrutinized through the

intricate instances describes in the novel. The novel offers scope for elaborate deliberations of what can shake the foundations of the moral conscience of human beings.

Ravi Subramanian's novel *Bankerupt* documents how governments and official institutions that meant to protect against precarity often induce precarity. By examining the novel, it is possible to explore how corruption and lust for power engenders instability and precarity. Some of those who belong to the elite class often get so entangled in greed and corruption that they indulge in crimes like murder, heist, extorting and money laundering, hoping to get away unpunished. However, the story of the novel shows how such indulgences induce only an ephemeral sense of contentment leading such culprits to unscrupulous and hungering for more. This causes their own precarity and vulnerability. It may be essential to define the meaning of precarity here. According to Judith Butler,

> Precarity … describes a few different conditions that pertain to living beings. Anything living can be expunged at will or by accident; and its persistence is in no sense guaranteed. As a result, social and political institutions are designed in part to minimize conditions of precarity, especially within the nation-state, although, as you will see, I consider this restriction a problem.

Bankerupt has a contemporary theme, context and setting. The novel follows Cirisha Narayanan, a professor in MIT, Boston, who has risen meteorically and works feverishly to secure a stable job in her department, amid the bitter ego clashes of her supervisors, Deahl and Cardoza. Meanwhile her banker husband, Aditya Raisinghania, living in Mumbai, sets up a highly innovative financial hoax to sell Step Up Shoes (one of the most successful footwear brands in western India) to Snuggles. Aditya pesters Cirisha to return to Mumbai to save their marriage. Cirisha returns temporarily to India with a research project in Dharavi. She eventually discovers that Shivinder (of Step Up) has set up fake franchises of Snuggles involving child labour and was assisted by his friend Aditya. She also discovers that her colleague Richard Avendon in MIT had been killed by his supervisor, Deahl, during his appraisal interview, because Avendon refused to give him sexual favours or manipulate research-results to suit Deahl's personal interest. Other revelations include that her supervisor, Cardoza who presents as an honest person has in fact intricately conspired to become the provost of the University (she is eventually murdered by Cardoza, when she threatens to expose him).Cirisha's profiteering father harvests Australia's largest bird—the emu—in India and is heavily involved in money laundering. Set in Boston, Coimbatore and Mumbai, Ravi

Subramanian generates an immaculately explored domain where everyone has an intention to destroy to save one's own vested interest.

The 'neo-liberal' model of burgeoning labour market resilience has ushered a perennial condition fresh and uncertainty imposed on the lives of the workers and their families. This has affected workers of various professions from all walks of life.[1] In the novel, Subramanian depicts how people resort to criminal acts to evade this state of uncertainty and precarity without anticipating what could be consequences of such crime. In the novel, Cirisha Narayanan, a faculty member of Social Psychology at MIT, took note of the spectacular collapsesof Bear Stearns, the New York based global investment and bank securities trading and broking firm during the Global Financial Crisis. Its plummeting shares from a hundred and seventy-two to two dollars, revealed a "morbid tale of greed and lust for power which had to be led to the loss of livelihood and savings of hundreds ofpeople."[2]

The second story is about two prominent historians whose research had been retracted due to the conduct that was unbecoming of research faculty. One of them had plagiarized lengthy passages from other sources and the other had described fake experiences fraudulently posing them to be first hand experiences that the author had undergone.

> While the first incident shocked her about the greed of the nation she was working in, the latter left her distressed about the state of the profession that she had chosen to be in. How could people so reputed, so trusted in their professions, compromise the faith reposed in them by millions of people? More importantly, what were they thinking when they committed these professional indiscretions? Were they hoping never to be exposed?[3]

According to Butler's definition, social and political institutions can mitigate or induce the conditions of precarity. However, in the novel Subramanian affirms the way that institutions induce precarity. Institutions like Greater Boston Global Bank, MIT, and even the global giant Snuggles become the hub of moral depravity and corruption in the hands of characters like Aditya Raisinghania (a senior member of the investment banking team of Greater Boston Global Bank), and his friend Shivinder (the CEO of Step Up Shoes). This becomes evident when Shivinder struggles to sell Step Up Shoes to prospective buyers who do not find the deal attractive as Step Up Shoes quotes a very high price based on the prospective returns the company was likely to get in the next few years. After repetitive, futile attempts, when Aditya proposes that he can beef up the valuations to make the deal appear attractive, Shivinder

immediately concedes instead of discouraging Aditya to resort to unfair means. Shivinder agrees to show an annual turnover of Rs. 600 crores. Thus to evade the precarity of an existing business, Aditya and Shivinder take a deep plunge into the profound abysses of moral and material corruption. Almost every action, the two friends take, leads them closer to danger, greater vulnerability and retribution.

This paper touches upon instances of avarice, ambition and dire longing for power that pervades the present-day world even more obviously, as a repercussion of the economic recession of 2008. It examines the precarious situations through which fear and apprehension prevail in all walks of life. Numerous aspects of precariousness as recounted in the novel through a network of complex occurrences, in order to speculate on how precarious conditions shape human life, will be accentuated throughout this paper. This is the hypothesis of the paper. The paper also proposes to bring out possible solutions by which certain kinds of precarity may be safely avoided to some extent.

In his personal life, Aditya bribes a shopkeeper to get his whisky on a dry day and consequently peeves his newly married wife, Cirisha. This shadow of conquest and distrust prevents harmony and happiness in their conjugal life. Moreover, Cirisha's colleague Richard Avendon, who is nearing the age of forty years, has been rejected for associate professorship, implying a promotion from a tenured track to a tenured position. He is uncertain if his second application could be successful and proposes Cirisha for a collaborative research. This would be the last time he would be allowed to apply for tenured position and this situation threatened his sense of security in his career, particularly at MIT.

According to Barchiesi, "Precarity thus problematizes the centrality of work and its progressive promise under capitalism, rather than just providing a sociological problem resolvable through labour market and social policy adjustments".[4]It then infests the human psyche and instigates violence and murder. In this case, Richard, the precariat murders Ahmed Siddique, the Legal Head of MIT, by stabbing him multiple times as the latter had rejected his application for a tenured position. Barchiesi points out

> As an existential, not merely occupational, condition precarity debunks the assumption, central to the rationality of liberalism, that social integration has to rely on the maximization of a subject's human capital and that liberalized markets provide expanding opportunities for doing so, an imaginative framework that allows to cast those out of work or relying on social spending as 'atypical' and pathological exceptions.[5]

The precarious existence of Aditya and Shivinder becomes more pronounced as they await the annual audit with baited breath. Once they are able to pass through this audit without being caught they only grow unscrupulous. With the intention of putting the fake numbers in their balance sheets in order, Aditya helps Shivinder to open about three hundred fake franchises of Snuggles India Ltd, and book fraudulent sales. Just as they had planned all their accounts become squeaky clean and they are beyond the scope of being detected for fraud. Rupees sixty-five crores are duly credited to Greater Boston Global Bank (GB2) and Aditya and Shivinder receive their share in the money laundering. Subramanian points out, "A parallel infrastructure had been set up. The opportunity it offered them for making money was limitless. But the thing about greed is that once it gets you in its clutches, it doesn't let go. The battle that day was won by greed. The war too had to go its way."[6]

According to Simon During, "Precarity' …applies to those with unstable, or no, access to the institutions and communities best able to provide legitimacy, recognition and solidarity."[7]However, the novel shows the instability of intent and excessive ambition of characters like Aditya, Shivinder and Deven Khatri in Mumbai, India as well as James Deahl, Michael Cardoza and Richard Avendon in Boston.

Butler points out,

> Political orders, including economic and social institutions are to some extent designed to address those very needs, not only to make sure that housing and food are available, but that populations have the means available by which life can be secured. And yet, "precarity" designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection.[8]

In other words, Butler accentuates how institutions are meant to enable certain securities and protections. Yet she highlights how, ironically, often in neoliberal contexts, institutions either fail or are designed to create precarity.

In the novel, the delineation of the Dharavi slum area in Mumbai is a perfect example failing social and economic establishments. Gangu Tai, Cirisha's erstwhile household help, residing in the Dharavi slum area is a classic representation of this theme. Although she lives

in poverty, this adverse situation does not prevent her from setting up a start-up enterprise and leading a group of two hundred workers and arranging for their livelihood. Thus, she eliminates her own vulnerability by attempting to allay the vulnerability of those around her who are equally helpless, poor, starved and displaced. In the novel, precarity is called by the incongruities or alleged inconsistencies in one's own integrity and this is aptly brought out in the novel. For example, when Aditya was being terminated from GB2, the CEO's parting words had been, 'Integrity is a very potent skill. Try to build it in your repertoire.[9]

Precarious work, which since the 1970s has become nearly a universal phenomenon, is defined by Branch and Hanley as "employment that is 'uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker."[10]These has probably driven Cirisha towards MIT and divide her time between Boston and India. This eventually makes her marriage precarious and unstable. Opondo and Shapiro recognize this urge to look to better opportunities outside one's country as contemporary globalizing world that "has unleashed new flows of migrant labour".[11]

The greed of Naraynanan and his son in law Aditya is unknown to Cirisha, else she would have severed all ties with them. The risk of the uncertain is continually faced by Richard Avendon at MIT, either to quit his job as Asst. Professor or to keep his supervisor James Deahl contended with him through research manipulation and hold on to his job.

According to Butler precarity also refers to a politically instigated situation of the highest degree of vulnerability and—

exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection. So by precarity we may be talking about populations that starve or who near starvation, but we might also be talking about sex workers who have to defend themselves against both street violence and police harassment.[12]

The novel exposes this exposure bearing witness to the stark poverty, congestion and filth in Dharavi slums. Gangu Tai's daughter is harassed and the Police refuse to register a First Information Report, underscore street violence and police harassment. This is a demonstration of Butler's co-relation of precarity with gender norms, "since we know that those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment and violence."[13]Gender performativity in Butler's words is a certain kind of enactment; the

"appearance" of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other(usually within a strictly binary frame), and the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power; and finally, there is no gender without this reproduction ofnorms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, thus opening upthe possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines.[14]

The cases of molestation of Gangu Tai's daughter demonstrate Butler's notions of the relationship precarity shares with gender norms. Butler asserts:

Precarity is, of course, directly linked with gender norms, since we know thatthose who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment and violence. Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space; how and in what way the public and private are distinguished, and how that distinction is instrumentalized in the service of sexual politics; who will be criminalized on the basis of public appearance; who will fail to be protected by the law or, more specifically, the police, on the street, or on the job, or in the home.[15]

Guy Standing believed that members of the precariat do not share the same choice of political, cultural and economic rights as other citizens around them. They are treated as underclass, without rights or privileges which other members of the society lawfully enjoy.[16]

In the novel, despite her social security and abundant affluence, Cirisha faces a perpetual personal crisis. She can be seen torn between her ambition,that could be fulfilled as a faculty in MIT, Boston and her marriage, wherein her husband Aditya expects her to be by his side in Mumbai. He even accuses her:

We have been married for close to five years now and we live like nomads. I have been to the airport to pick you up more times than we have been to a movie together. We have not even thought about when we are going to start a family. We are not getting any younger. We are just living our lives independently, Cirisha. And somewhere our paths overlap, so we end up being together. This worries me.[17]

Aditya cannot reconcile between the expectations he has from his marriage and what he experienced in reality. This sense of uncertainty temporarily subsides when guilt ridden Aditya, after losing his job at GB2, is ready to move to Boston with Cirisha, in order to salvage his marriage. However, the marital discord surfaces again, on the night before Cirisha's murder when she expresses her determination to report to the Police about Shivinder's fraudulent activities and child labour in a manufacturing unit in Dharavi, that supplies shoes to Shivinder's company Snuggles India Ltd. Sensing this risk ahead, Aditya confesses to Cirisha about his involvement with Shivinder's manipulative undertakings and that he may be imprisoned. He genuinely regrets while saying:

> I had advised him on some of the things that he did. We manipulated the balance sheets of Step Up Shoes in order to make it attractive for Snuggles to buy. We set up a fraudulent franchisee network, inflated sales, collected payments from dealers which were routed out of the country through GB2. If he goes to jail, he will make sure that I too go with him.[18]

Though flabbergasted, Cirisha's sense of integrity overpowers her vulnerability and she declares, "I will tell the Mumbai Police everything that I know. I will not lie to them. Even if he exposes you as a result. My self-esteem and integrity are important to me. Probably more than they are for any man that I know."[19] This sense of integrity can be seen in Cirisha earlier in the novel, when she suspects that Aditya's friend Shivinder to be involved in dishonest means she warns Aditya to keep away from him: "He comes across as a con artist. You need to make a distinction between people who have a conscience and people who make con-a-science, Aditya. Mark my words; he will land you in trouble one day."[20]

Cirisha's supervisor at MIT also displays his integrity, when a representative from National Rifle Association wants him to conduct a research arguing against gun-control, offering a bribe of two million dollars for it, but Cardoza flagrantly refuses. Thus, the novel proposes the assertion of one's conscience and integrity as tool to combat one's vulnerability and its precarious consequences.

The novel arguably presents us with a fusion between Standing's and Butler's account of precarity. Shivinder finds it difficult to accept that his fraudulent undertakings have been discovered and reported to the Headquarters of Snuggles leading to a police investigation because of a woman—Cirisha. She stumbles upon his secret while conducting a research in Dharavi. She had engaged in the research to be by her husband, Aditya, in Mumbai more often,

to rescue the instability of her precarious marriage, adhering to the social norms of what her gender defines for her. In Butler's words:

> Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space; how and in what way the public and private are distinguished, and how that distinction is instrumentalized in the service of sexual politics; who will be criminalized on the basis of public appearance; who will fail to be protected by the law or, more specifically, the police, on the street, or on the job, or in the home. Who will be stigmatized; who will be the object of fascination and consumer pleasure?[21]

Cirisha's professional struggle in MIT clearly exemplifies this gendered dimension. Although she finds out that Richard has been killed, she had been silenced by the stalwarts of her department who draw a greater privilege due to their position at MIT. Although, she was never sexually exploited by her supervisor or other colleagues, she could not escape being vulnerable. When Cirisha confronts Cardoza with the prints of his compromising pictures with Richard, Cardoza's moral degeneracy knows no bounds. He feels threatened that Cirisha would divulge such confidential information and put his reputation as stake, just as he was on the verge of becoming the provost of MIT. He has been told that a provost should have an impeccable character. Similarly, as soon as she collapses while jogging, Cardoza starts to panic but senses an opportunity "He recollected Erica's research on suicides. It had listed air embolism as one of the common means of committing suicide. He ran to his car and pulled out the syringes and large needles".[22] He quickly thrusts an injection of 20–30 ml of air directly into the right ventricle of her heart, thrice, to ensure that it would be fatal for her.

However, in terms of credulity it raises suspicions, since no one seems to have noticed him doing so since this occurs in a public garden under the wide view of many passers-by and joggers.

It is starkly ironical that the large needled syringe that Cardoza fetches from his car was meant for treating his ailing Dobermann he loves dearly. It is even more ironical that minutes later he reports the sad news of Cirisha's death to Aditya, due to exhaustion from jogging, and thereby escapes all suspicions of becoming a possible suspect of Cirisha's murder. This may be viewed as a heinous impairing of virtues and moral principles. It further exemplifies Butler's proposition that "After all, power cannot stay in power without reproducing itself." While Butler's point pertains to systems, and one may be tempted to read Cardoza's actions as personal failings, the novel makes the structural issues clear. Nevertheless, this may appear

obscured by the way that Subramanian delivers poetic justice to all the characters in the novel. The court convicts Cardoza:

> for the ghastly murders of Richard Avendon, Henry Liddell, Sandy Gustavo and Frederick Lobo, and awarded him a thirty-five-year sentence. He knew that he wouldn't survive long enough to outlive his sentence and was destined to spend the rest of his life in prison. Consequently, he cracked and confessed. His life now is truly Staring Down the Barrel.[23]

Similarly, while Aditya accumulates his ill gotten money, he loses the person he loves the most in his life--Cirisha, his wife and Narayanan loses his only child. Even though this construction of a moral narrative arguably undermines the political critique, the suffering and punishment nevertheless underscore the systemic issues at play.

Instead of being just a philosophical abstraction precarity is an actually existing discursive state of existence that operates in politics in recent years.[24]Fierce political debates between the Democrats and the Liberals are found in this novel. The issue of whether gun-control should exist or not, whether the right to be armed with a gun boosts crime in the US and elsewhere are perennial debates which demonstrate a different method of encountering precarious circumstances, which is violence. This, too, can be seen when Richard feels threatened that Ahmed Siddique's decision to deny him the tenured position that he desperately aspires for and hence, stabs him to death. Cardoza feels Cirisha would divulge his guarded secrets about his sexual exploitation with Richard and hence kills her.

This type of cruelty becomes a plea for a new society incompatible with neoliberal norms:

> Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres, yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another? Is this not another way of imagining community, one in which we are alike only in having this condition separately and so having in common a condition that cannot be thought without difference?[25]

In the novel, Cirisha feverishly works towards attaining a place try to conform to its norms in the academia at MIT and so does Richard Avendon. Their supervisors Cardoza and Deahl also

do the same until they are caught violating them. They realize that "When their aspirations are not in sync with what we need from them it leads to trouble."[26]

According to Ridout and Schneider,

> Precarity is life lived in relation to a future that cannot be propped securely upon the past. Precarity undoes a linear streamline of temporal progression and challenges "progress" and "development" narratives on all levels. Precarity has become a byword for life in late and later capitalism—or, some argue, life in capitalism as usual. Life and work, and their dependence upon one another, are often imagined as increasingly precarious, their futures shadowed by pervasive terror as well as everyday anxieties about work. At the same time, "creative capital" invests a kind of promise in precarity with words like "innovation," "failure," "experiment," and "arts."[27]

This can be seen pervasively through the desperate money-laundering pursuits of Narayanan, Aditya and Shivinder. They try to secure their future but amass far more wealth than they need through foul and unfair means. They try to overcome a problem by creating greater issues for themselves and eventually get entrapped in their own maze of capitalist intrigues. Although each of these characters recognize this but their anagnorisis of their crimes does not rescue them from the drastic consequences of their actions. Judith Butler's work, *Precarious Life and Frames of War* argues that "from the moment of birth, … any human life relies for its sustenance and survival on "a shared network of hands""[28]While Narayanan, Aditya and Shivinder shared a vicious network of greed, desire and ambition while Deahl and Cardoza shared a network of power and corruption. According to economist, Guy Standing, the two groups, plutocracy and the elite (have national citizenship) "act as the effective ruling class, almost hegemonic in their current status. They embody the neoliberal state, and manipulate politicians and the media while relying on financial agencies to maintain the rules in their favour".[29] In this case, Standing describes plutocracy as "made up of a small group of billionaires who wield corruptive power"[30] and "an elite of global citizens mostly living off ill-gotten rental income"[31]In the novel, characters like Aditya, Shivinder, Mr. Narayanan, Deahl and Cardoza savagely manipulate their political and media cohorts to control precarious conditions to their advantage and render this plutocracy the appearance of a "political monster".[32]

One of the answers that Subramanian proposes to face precarity is honesty. This is essayed throughout the story by Cirisha. However, it is her strong sense of moral conscience,

ethics, a certain degree of stoicism and the desire for the redemtion (trying to save her failing marriage) that gradually allays her fears of every precarious predicament she strives through. Deliberations about precarity have attempted to expose the conventional facades that dialogues on economic engagement maintain as foundations. This affects not only social customs, organizations, and principles, but also of individual behaviour, approaches, and morals. Although the instances described in the novel are fictitious, they are largely representative of the moral weaknesses and corruption that are instigated by social, political and economic instability and precarity. However, through a series of consequences that are described in the novel, it is easy to see that human virtues and moral integrity can stand by precariats even in the most trying circumstances and thereby uphold the values that should ideally characterise civilized human beings as against animals.

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Biographical Statement

Dr. Monali Chatterjee is keenly interested in English Literature, Language and Communication Studies. She has been teaching English Language, Literature and Communication Skills for various courses in various colleges across Gujarat and abroad and has an experience of almost two decades in academics. She has had a long-term involvement with Indian Renaissance Literature. Her doctoral thesis was on Women in Indian fiction. She has also taught ESOL (English for speakers of Other Languages) at Merton Adult Education College, London. She has received a professional qualification to teach in the UK and holds a Level 3 qualification in Business Administration endorsed by EDI, London. An ardent lover of music, dance and drama, she has attained a professional qualification in Indian classical music and holds a Bachelor's degree in Dance (Bharatnatyam). She has an extensive leadership ability and can implement innovative solutions to the effective delivery of the courses. She has presented papers at national and international seminars and has many articles of research publications to her credit.

"Don't we have the right towards healthy life?": The precarity of sanitation politics affecting the everyday life of the migrant workers of Serampore

By Souradip Bhattacharyya

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to portray and analyse – through an ethno-historical study of the sanitary conditions of socially heterogeneous neighbourhood in Serampore, India – the practices through which precarity is induced in the everyday life of the migrant workers of Serampore and also how exclusionary strategies play an operative role in constructing neighbourhood boundaries and 'other-ing' the migrants from neighbourhood sociality.

Keywords

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to highlight the role played by politics of sanitation through various strategies of place-making at the local level of the 'neighbourhood' in order to produce segregated homogeneous spaces within its boundaries that privilege certain ethnic communities over others. Borrowing from Doreen Massey's (2005) concept of space I argue that while the history of settlement of such communities in the neighbourhood has been used to inscribe certain stereotypic qualities to such places and reproduce them as static entities, multiple social and spatial strategies have been devised by middle-class residents and local governmental agencies to preserve the so-called stasis of such local places of the neighbourhood and reproduce them as homogeneous community spaces. For instance, in the town of Serampore in West Bengal, India which is my focus of ethnographic study in this paper, the municipality's strategy to construct dustbins only at specific places close to the households of the migrant workers in the neighbourhood (I focus on the neighbourhoods of Nanilal Bhattacharyya Street and Pandit Kalinath Bhattacharyya Street in this paper) are cases that reflect how local places were manoeuvred by the dominant classes and local governing agencies through various spatial practices to reinforce social stasis on them.

This study is part of a larger ethnographic and historical research for my doctoral project that closely investigates how the various criteria of social stratification[1] in terms of caste, class, religion, regional background etc. in neighbourhoods that are socially heterogeneous[2] influence and are further reproduced by the power hierarchy between resident

communities through different periods in history in the Indian context. In this regard, the town of Serampore in West Bengal has been shaped by multiple religious, cultural, socio-political and economic issues and trends through successive periods of history from the precolonial to the contemporary period.[3] The town's material and social spaces have been produced by social and cultural heterogeneity and politics through the intersection between various criteria of social stratification operating in society and the power hierarchy between resident communities. This has resulted in the marginalisation of poor and backward communities from society on one hand and in 'forms of counter-power' for the deprived communities on the other to 'resist dominant structures'[4]. Such processes need to be studied in detail because the interplay between the various criteria of social stratification in the production of community identities and relations of power in socially heterogeneous neighbourhood societies of India have received attention in social science research only lately[5] much less the resistance of the poor and marginalised communities towards acts of domination.[6]

This paper studies the socio-spatial strategies through which the local administration of Serampore and the privileged resident groups of socially heterogeneous neighbourhoods implement sanitary politics to create precarious state of living for the poor and consequently marginalise them from neighbourhood societies.[7] Such 'precarity' or 'precarious' state of living, for the sake of this paper, is defined as the 'negative' environment of the poor and marginalised of Serampore that is produced through 'negative externalities' in the form of insanitary, unhygienic environment by the Bengali upper castes against their own positive social and material environment (or, 'positive externalities') to assert their social status and 'superiority'.[8] In case of Serampore, sanitary policies and implementation of hygiene generally operate under 'caste prejudice' or a 'widespread discrimination' against an underclass of low castes and working-class migrants.[9] Thus, the response of the Bhadralok residents of NBS to the deposition of trash and garbage in places close to the mill lines, as discussed in this paper, will show how the poor working-class migrants came to be 'identified' with waste or dirt itself.[10]

As part of this project on sanitation the methodology used was both archival and ethnographic. While most of the archival data was generated from the West Bengal State Archives in Kolkata, India, the fieldwork site for the project was focussed primarily on two specific neighbourhoods in Serampore that are socially heterogeneous in nature. 15 people were interviewed with respect to the context of sanitation in between the months of September and October in 2016. These 15 people comprised of both, the middle-class Bengali (across upper and middle castes) and working-class residents in the connecting neighbourhoods of

Nanilal Bhattacharyya Street and Pandit Kalinath Bhattacharyya Street in Serampore and the languages used to converse with the interviewees were primarily Hindi and Bengali. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewees and later transcribed for the purpose of clarity, reference, and writing.

Serampore was the first territory under British Colonial Empire where the jute industry was established in 1855.[11] Serampore has since then historically undergone structural transformation with random unplanned *bustees* making way for mill quarters for the labouring class. Sanitation and drainage facilities have undergone a general improvement, though there still are temporary settlements in various sites of Serampore situated at variable distance from the mill.[12] When compared with the moderate nature of settlement in Serampore during Danish colonialism in early 19th century, the settlement has gradually become compact and congested since British colonialism due to the migration of labourers as well as middle-class Bengalis and non-Bengalis from other townships.

The neighbourhood of Dr. Nanilal Bhattacharyya Street as part of the Serampore region is heterogeneous in its composition. It consists of the mill quarters (known as line no. 18) affiliated to the India Jute Mill, situated adjacent to it. It consists also of very old houses of Bengali (upper) middle-class people most of whom have stayed in Serampore for over five to six generations, and comparatively newer houses of Bengalis who have merely shifted between adjacent localities but are equally known in both. There are also a few huts (better called *jhhupdis*) located in the interior part of the neighbourhood.[13] The array of Bengali households have made a specific place for themselves on one side of the neighbourhood whereas the mill lines and *jhhupdis* have made a place of 'working-class households' on the other. The latter, however, through various municipal constructions as well as spatial practices on the part of the residents of the neighbourhood has been reproduced as an unsanitary and unhygienic living and social space. Nanilal Bhattacharyya Street (hereafter NBS) is connected perpendicularly with Pandit Kalinath Bhattacharyya Street (hereafter PKB) that consists of a neighbourhood lived mainly by the middle-class Bengalis. The neighbourhoods of NBS and PKB are well connected through various social, familial, and land relations. It is important to mention this connection at this point because when the mill-quarter residents or *jhhupdi* dwellers contrasted their conditions of living, sanitation, and environment with that of the "*e padar Bangalider badi*" (or the houses of the Bengalis in the same neighbourhood) they also included PKB as part of that neighbourhood. As a matter of fact, due to the fluidity in connection between the Bengalis residing at NBS and PKB, the working-class residents very often collated the resident Bengalis from the two neighbourhoods into a single neighbourhood-social group while

comparing the conditions of environmental space and the contrasting response of the Municipal Councillor to the complaints and demands of the Bengalis.14

The *jhhupdis* are located all along NBS but mostly by the walls of the jute mill, on the edges of the street covering the open drains. The opposite side of the street consisting of houses (old and new) of the middle-class Bengalis and Biharis, are kept cleaner compared to the side of the *jhhupdis* that has become the main site for the disposal of household and gutter wastes, and dust bins. The *jhhupdis* were mainly inhabited by those who were devoid of any landed property and could not afford to live in rented flats. Also, it was observed that those who lived in *jhhupdis* in the same area or neighbourhood bore either familial connections or migrated from the same place to Serampore in search of jobs. As a result, a greater affinity was found to exist between these inhabitants to stay in closer spatial proximity and develop everyday associations with each other.15

The Lives of 'Others': How the working-class copes with insanitary conditions

"Look at the open dustbin right beside our living quarters. The waste of the entire neighbourhood is dumped here and kept for days and the street near Bengali households are kept clean at our expense. Are we not a part of the neighbourhood? Don't we deserve clean places to live?", was Toofani Shaw's (a resident of the jute mill quarters at line no. 18) reply when asked about the sanitary conditions of and around the jute mill quarters where he lives.16 His constant reference to Bengali households was due to the fact that the India Jute Mill line no. 18 that functions as workers' residence form a part of a compact geographical area that is resided also by (upper) middle-class Bengalis.

Sanitation was in fact one of the earliest and most potent tropes used ever since British colonialism by the local Bengali municipal councillors of the wards of Serampore against migrant workers to deprive them from proper living conditions and to exclude them from neighbourhood social spaces.17 A detailed study of the reports published by the sanitary commissioners of the British colonial government in Bengal during the last two decades of the 19th century shows the absence of basic provisions (like chemicals, nightsoil carts, adequate number of cleaners etc.) for maintaining cleanliness in the public toilets of Serampore (used primarily by the working-class residents who largely had no access to private latrines) which points at a deliberate negligence in duty on the part of the local upper-caste municipal commissioners of the town.18 The denial of basic amenities to the resident working-class while the private latrines of the commissioners and other upper castes were kept clean was not just a strategy to create a hierarchy in the status of these two groups. It was also a policy to reproduce

or restructure the material and social lives and living conditions of the deprived communities through precarity that, as can be deduced from the reports of the sanitary commissioners, was implemented through a consensus between the local representatives of the administration and the affluent residents of Serampore which followed course in the post-independent period. In this period sanitation politics has been implemented through various spatial strategies of using the local places of the neighbourhood in order to homogenise its social spaces. However, as I shall argue, the initiative to impart a static homogeneous entity to place and a precariousness to the living conditions of the poor in Serampore got challenged by two main factors. First, the very act of reconstructing or reformulating place through spatial strategies implied that 'place' itself could not remain static but was *made* static in order to impose certain socially constructed character traits upon the migrants, restrict their movement within the neighbourhood, and to exclude them from the local haven that the middle-class created for themselves. Second, the resident migrants of the neighbourhood constantly challenged such processes of place-making by filing petitions against their unsanitary conditions of living, negotiating with the local councillor about measures for betterment, and by subverting the domination of the middle-class over the public space of the neighbourhood by certain public activities that ultimately resulted from the lack of fundamental provisions for living.

As I observed in the course of my fieldwork—that eventually confirmed Toofani's complaint—all the dust bins along NBS were located at intervals only by the edge of the street by the jute mill where the wastes from the middle-class households were being regularly dumped. Besides this, the open spaces beside the *jhhupdis* were filled with the waste from the open drains that the cleaners employed by the municipality dumped and where it remained for days in the open, emitting miasma and creating an unhygienic environment. This often resulted in serious health conditions for the dwellers of the *jhhupdi* like respiratory disorders, dysentery etc. As because the building of *jhhupdis* on government land is a controversial issue—and with which many middle-class residents of the neighbourhood have had serious problems—the dwellers themselves hesitate to make demands for hygienic living conditions to the local councillor.

Noor Alam, one such *jhhupdi* dweller explained how after persuading the councillor for three months and paying a certain amount of money (he would not disclose how much) to the political party fund was he able to build a *jhhupdi* of his own by the street side.[19] Even though he knew this was illegal he was confident that the councillor would protect him against any chance of displacement. However, such illegal occupation of land through negotiations with the local councillor prevented them from registering complaints or demands about their

living and environmental conditions any further. As Noor Alam himself mentioned, "it seems that the councillor has done us a favour by permitting us to stay here. We can only put mild *requests* but there is no guarantee that those requests would be attended to. It seems like our right to live has been favoured by them".

Similar cases occurred with the big dustbin lying right beside quarter no. 18 where apart from domestic wastes from all the households in the vicinity, the municipality cleaners also dumped the wastes from the gutters that remained there for days. Wastes were also dumped outside this dustbin, by the road where a few of the line dwellers had set up small makeshift stalls for selling tobacco or vegetables. This often got mixed with rainwater during monsoon and flowed onto the street space in front of the mill line and also inside the common space of the quarters, creating a menace for the resident mill workers and passers-by. The big dustbin was constructed by the municipality in 2012. A bigger dustbin implied greater disposal of waste and, the infrequent cleaning services for such dustbins escalated the rate of various diseases in the neighbourhood, especially among the line and *jhhupdi* residents. Toofani alleged that even upon multiple requests to the local municipal councillor no action had yet been taken to remove the wastes from the dustbin. After this, he took me around the entire neighbourhood to show the contrast in cleanliness and conditions of hygiene around the households of the Bengali residents and that of themselves. Pointing out the contrasting picture of street corners on the two sides of NBS and also that between a much cleaner PKB and their own mill quarters at NBS, he questioned the partiality in the actions of the local municipal councillor in cleaning the streets and dustbins around these two residential spaces. Unlike that of Noor Alam, the residents of mill quarters could demand the basic conditions of living from local governmental authorities as legal occupants and yet their living conditions failed to improve given what was alleged as partiality in the treatment of conditions. The different and yet deprived conditions of Noor Alam and Toofani in demanding, as equal citizens, the elementary conditions to a healthy life proves on one hand the inefficiency of state agencies to arrange for livelihood or habitation for underprivileged groups. On the other hand it highlights the fact that such agencies, through various political negotiations with such underprivileged groups to settle them, deny the latter their agency to voice any 'legal' demand as such (like proper sanitary or hygienic conditions) owing to their lack of legitimacy and in the process create precarity in the living conditions of the deprived communities.

Susan Chaplin (1999) in an article on sanitation in India argued that the middle-classes in post-independent India have continued the process of spatial segregation that was initiated in many parts of colonial India by the British in order to distance themselves from the pollution

and disease of what they referred to as 'black towns' or the residential areas of the indigenous people. A growing number of middle-class have shifted to newer suburbs "in self-contained apartments and segregated living" catering to their exclusive needs spatially, environmentally, and in terms of provision of urban facilities.[20] Such spatial segregation, Chaplin felt, further reinforced the disinterest in the middle-class to influence governmental agencies to take action against the unhealthy conditions of living that the underprivileged sections of the society suffered from. Governmental agencies too were concerned primarily with allocating resources for improving the environmental conditions in the segregated lived spaces of the middle-class, creating a "political subservience of local government to the interests of the middle-class".[21]

Another claim made by Chaplin in the same piece was that intense exploitation at the workplace coupled with insanitary conditions of living forced the migrant workers to leave the city and retire to their homeland once they became unfit to work. She argued that such "constant insecurity and problems of daily survival" prevented the development of any sense of community among the migrants and consequently failed to lead into any form of class solidarity or possibilities of class struggle.[22] However, the socio-spatial dynamics between the resident middle-class Bengalis and the line and *jhhupdi* dwellers of NBS and PKB challenges such generalisations made by Chaplin. The politics of sanitation and spatial segregation between classes operated in far more complicated ways in heterogeneous neighbourhoods such as NBS where the middle and working-classes had a greater possibility of everyday contact. Certain commonalities did exist in negotiations between the middle-class and the state as depicted by Chaplin and what existed at NBS and PKB. For instance, the very act of constructing all the dustbins of the neighbourhood by the Serampore Municipality by the side of the mill lines and *jhhupdis* by the Serampore Municipality was a way of creating and maintaining a spatial difference and contrast in living conditions between the middle-class and working-class.

The response of the resident middle-class Bengalis to the conditions of sanitation
Contesting the social existence of the working-class migrants took many forms. While interviewing middle-class residents of the neighbourhood, I asked in every respondent to describe their perception and understanding about the neighbourhood and its heterogeneous nature, the conditions of living and sanitation, and also the type and extent of social relations with the other resident communities of the neighbourhood. The responses carried a sense of decadence and nostalgia about the dominance and pervasiveness of Bengali culture in the past, and (regret/annoyance/intolerance with) how the socio-cultural practices of the resident labour community were constantly challenging and contaminating its 'purity'. It was clear from the

conversations that there was a distinct difference between the physical composition of the neighbourhood and its cultural constitution, in which case there existed a symbolic delimitation of neighbourhood boundaries produced through the discursive practices of the middle-class Bengalis. As a member of one of these households, the 56 year old Mr. Shyamal Laha staying at NBS remarked, '...because of these people (the migrant labouring community), there is a general lack of hygiene in the neighbourhood, 'we' cannot move freely often due to the stench from people defecating by the drains and noxious smell from the mill line public latrines that are anyway dirty and then the workers urinate there throughout the day, we have to use alternate paths on our walks and avoid these spaces whenever we can'. The discussion above proves that not only had the middle-class Bengalis' conception of the street, the 'outside' changed with its occupancy and usage by the labouring communities increased in time.[23] The neighbourhood space was also (re)produced through spatial practices of movement and demarcation of neighbourhood boundaries through discourses that accentuated class hierarchies and also involved subtle power-relation between the communities/classes through cultural practices.[24]

The cause of the problems in the living conditions for the underprivileged was thus in turn imposed upon the working-class by the middle-class residents of NBS and PKB. Rather than addressing shortcomings in the administrative policies of the local governing agencies, the cause of the precarious living conditions in the line or *jhhupdi* dwellers were in turn imposed upon them. They were uninterested in tracing or questioning the *actual* cause that resulted in such actions. Thus, open defecation by the *jhhupdi* dwellers by the open drains was interpreted as a lack of civic sense, education, consciousness by the middle-class and not as a problem of inadequate provision of basic latrine services for the underprivileged. In the same way, the lack of cleanliness in the mill quarter latrines was readily associated with the lack of awareness on the part of the mill residents to use the latrines rather than the disproportionate ratio between the inadequate number of latrines and the population of the mill line. *Basic* civic sense was therefore produced as a parameter of distinguishability between the middle-class Bengalis and the migrant workers, as if it was always present as elemental to human consciousness and not as a resultant subject to social conditions. It was produced as a priori to social existence, which the workers were shown to have *basically* lacked. Thus, the connection that I initially drew between the middle-class's disposal of wastes in the dustbins and their consequent devaluation of the outside was achieved by polluting the 'outside' that they reckoned was already 'polluted' by the "debasing practices of the workers". The act of keeping the inner space of their homes clean by further polluting such an 'outside' was a response that

enmeshed the categories of 'street garbage' and 'street people/*Jhhupdiwalas*/line residents' for the middle-class and they felt no responsibility towards the maintenance of that 'outside'.

In what ways could the middle-class residents of NBS and PKB, then, respond to the unhygienic, polluted, and unsanitary conditions that prevailed at NBS most of the times? The Bengalis created a homogeneous social space for themselves in the neighbourhood by rejecting the precarious living conditions of the *jhhupdi* and line dwellers socially and physically from certain parts of the neighbourhood. Though no physical boundary could be drawn within the neighbourhood, various measures were taken to enforce the exclusivity of such a homogeneous social space.

The politics at play here is divisive; on interpreting neighbourhood space through inter-relations between coexisting social groups, we see the privileged groups tending to claim unequal rights and privileges over that space. Not only do they aim to dismantle a neighbourhood space into discrete spaces that are espoused to be complete in themselves, they also lay claims of authenticity to a space, and attempt to erase the historical and social development of such spaces through constant interaction between communities that are placed unequally in such society. In the context of the historical development of neighbourhood space in Serampore and the various forms of interaction between social groups that constantly challenge its production, this shall play a crucial role. In the case of the segregating practices of the Bengalis of NBS that formulated the sanitation politics, their intention to create an enclosed discrete neighbourhood space for themselves by excluding the labouring class resulted in the production of symbolic boundaries that could make such spaces singular in nature and disconnected with that of other social groups.

Owing to the presence of the *jhhupdis* and mill line on the side of the jute mill, the Bengalis converted the other side of the street where their own houses were located into the general chatting or *adda* spots. Most of the Bengali households in the neighbourhood being relatively old, each of them had a *rowak* or a sitting space at the entrance of the house where its residents often sat in the afternoons and evenings for their daily dose of *adda*. A few of the participants in such *adda* sessions would also prefer to stand on the road circling the ones sitting on the *rowak* and the session might continue for hours. Such limited sessions that made very particular use of the street space and the *rowak* (if though only for a certain period everyday) imparted a specificity to it and such spaces were produced as being symbolically demarcated exclusively for the usage of middle-class Bengalis. Thus, even when the *rowak* remained empty during noon or at night and the houses of the Bengalis were closed, the residents of the *jhhupdis* or the line preferred not to sit there or even loiter around those spots on the street. A reason

behind this—and this leads me to the second measure adopted by the Bengalis—was an intentional cessation of communication with the migrant workers of the neighbourhood. Although residing on opposite sides of the same street within a residential neighbourhood, the migrant workers and the Bengalis lacked any form of communication with the former. In fact, the workers observed that the Bengalis often did not return their smiles or greetings let alone greeting them on their own. The Bengalis justified their own approach with a general statement of 'What have we to talk about with them?' The homogeneity in the *adda* grouping produced the space of the *adda* (comprising of the *rowak* and the attached street space) as homogenous as well and it only reinforced the cessation of communication with the resident migrants of the neighbourhood. The socio-spatial distance that was created between the two classes due to the absence of a general cordiality between them, or for the rejection of the line dwellers and *jhhupdiwalas* by the middle-class Bengalis, was further accentuated by the production of a homogeneous *adda*-cum-street space that intended to segregate the social space of the neighbourhood on the basis of social class.

Another measure adopted was the demarcation of neighbourhood boundaries through everyday use of the neighbourhood space, or a conscious disuse of sections of such spaces that were associated with the daily movement of the workers. This was done through the creation of alternative routes of movement for the middle-class of the neighbourhood in order to avoid the line areas, or the selective use of such spaces especially for various work purposes. One of such instances of selective use would be the disposal of household wastes in the dustbins that are all located on that side of the street, or as Johnston (1984) would argue, a deliberate reproduction of 'negative externalities' or precarious forms of existence in the lived spaces of the working-class residents. Such actions of reconstructing symbolic neighbourhood boundaries were not just meant to create a space for a specific community (in here the Bengalis), but they also subjected other communities, who were excluded from such spaces, to a denial of a neighbourhood identity, proper neighbourhood life, and free movement within the neighbourhood. Such denial too could thus be argued as a process of excluding the underprivileged from equal rights to neighbourhood life and living conditions that the line residents resisted through their constant vocal and written petitions and protests to the local councillor. The rise of heterogeneous neighbourhoods comprising the Bengalis and working-class migrants at Serampore implied that 'positive' and 'negative' externalities had to be continually produced within the neighbourhood spaces by employing different discourses and spatial techniques. This has redefined the ways in which abjection over the continued presence of a specific class of people (the working-class) has been experienced and put to use by the

privileged sections of society, a theme that has been dealt with to an extent in the literature on body politics and social discrimination.[25]

Julia Kristeva, in her analysis of abjection as a bodily response, states that it concerns something that disgusts somebody, for instance the wish to vomit on 'loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung'[26] that creates a 'symbolic symptom'[27] of distancing oneself from it, stemming from fear that such menace could also 'menace us from the inside.'[28] James Ferguson and Michelle Murphy have, following Kristeva, tried investigating how abjection works in 'governing populations and constituting subjects'.[29] Thus, abjection denoted the precarization of those 'unlivable and uninhabitable zones of social life'[30] that were not used or resided in by the privileged sections of society, but by those whose precarious existence in such abject zones devoid of proper welfare was used to designate the contrast with the domain of the privileged. Such was the contrast produced between the lived and used spaces of the Bengalis and those of the resident migrant workers in the mixed residential neighbourhoods of Serampore.

The middle-class Bengali households and the settlements of the workers were located in the same geographical area where, through multiple spatial practices, a dichotomy was created between a 'pure' inside (delimited by those portions dwelt by the Bengalis) and an 'impure' precarious outside (the settlement of the workers) that stood functionally rejected from neighbourhood limits. Thus, discrete spaces were intended to be produced through administrative politics. It can therefore be argued that the ways in which practices of exclusivity are used to try and create homogeneous spaces—and thereby fragmentise space by disturbing the coexistence of diverse social groups[31]—occur through attempts to slowly push the deprived and weaker social groups towards the periphery of socio-cultural and spatial hubs. From the colonial period when a lot of local administrative power was handed to the privileged sections of Serampore's society, to the contemporary period under a democratic form of governance, Serampore's upper-caste society has continuously devised newer strategies to produce abject spaces within heterogeneous neighbourhoods themselves. Such abject spaces, where the 'unlivable and uninhabitable zones of social life'[32] are described as the result of the actions of working-class migrants and other deprived sections of society, have actually been a product of politics of sanitation against them, rather than consequences of their own 'characteristic' ways of living. In other words, the criteria was not simply to produce a pure, uncontaminated, and hygienic haven for the Bengali residents within limited boundaries by disconnecting themselves from the 'outside', but rather to extend and expand material and symbolic control over that 'outside' by rendering and branding the lived space of the workers as precarious,

unhygienic and unsocial. Abjection or precarization therefore operated in Serampore by producing 'a holding tank for those turned away at the development door', thus constituting a remainder or marginalised group of people 'discarded, disallowed and disconnected'[33] from economic and social development. Such methods of deprivation and forceful disconnection of a specific populace from basic modes of livelihood in Serampore's abjection processes can be defined as a 'social and political process' devised to exclude the underprivileged sections of society from the 'biopolitical care of the state or other institutions'.[34]

Conclusion

There is a historical continuity between processes of producing neighbourhood spaces through sanitation politics in colonial Serampore and delimiting the material and social boundaries of a neighbourhood under today's political set up. As discussed here, the helm of local administration has still remained at the hands of the Bengali residents and through the politics of sanitation and hygiene that has been used by them, it is 'dirt' and 'waste' that have represented the social boundaries between the Bengalis and migrants. Unlike at the onset period of working class migration into colonial Serampore, where the migrants were unsure of their mode of settlement in the town and thus remained subjugated under the exploitative measures of the local Bengali administrators, they have in the contemporary period taken steps to voice their needs and opinions to the administrators. However, as my analysis of the contemporary sanitary condition of Serampore has shown, the Bengali's practice of creating a safe haven for themselves by physically and socially marginalising the migrants has historically made its way through from colonial to contemporary Serampore. Attempts at creating such homogeneous spaces in the present have been jeopardized by challenges 'from below', by the migrants

[1] Ram Ahuja, *Society in India: Concepts, Theories and Recent Trends*, (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1999), 35.

[2] Penny Vera-Sanso, *The Meaning of the Local: Politics of Place in Urban India*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 182.

[3] For further elaboration on this kindly refer to Sudhir Kumar Mitra, *Hooghly Jelar Itihash o Bangasamaj*, II, (Kolkata: Dey's Publication, 2013); Pranabranjan Ray, *Urban Sociology in India*, (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1974), 115−143; Pritimadhav Ray, *Seramporer Porichiti*, (Kolkata: Pelican Press, 2000), 53−82.

[4] Subir Sinha, *Staking Claims: The Politics of Social Movements in Contemporary Rural India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 226.

[5] For the kind of research that deals with the production of community identities in socially heterogenous neighbourhoods of India kindly refer to Sarbani Bandyopadhyay, *The Politics of Caste in West Bengal*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 35−59; Indranil Chakrabarti, *The Meaning of the Local: The Politics of Place in Urban India*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 68−88; Henrike Donner, *The Meaning of the Local: The Politics of Place in Urban India*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 141−158; Kathinka Froystad, *Blended Boundaries: Caste, Class, and shifting faces of 'Hinduness' in a North Indian City*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); Surinder S. Jodhka, *Caste in Contemporary India*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2015); Penny Vera-Sanso, *The Meaning*, 182−205.

6 For further reference on the analysis of kinds of resistance posed by the poor and marginalized communities towards acts of resistance kindly refer to Kenneth Bo Nielsen, *Staking Claims: The Politics of Social Movements in Contemporary Rural India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 165–199; Subir Sinha, Ibid., 225–234.

7Although the focus of this paper is mainly the sanitary politics of contemporary Serampore, it also talks briefly about the sanitary policies being implemented by the local governing bodies of the town in the British colonial period. The point is to argue that while sanitary policies had to be gradually transformed by the local governing body of Serampore under a post-independent democratic setup, the unchanging upper-caste elite stronghold over the Serampore municipality helped them to devise newer strategies of implementing sanitary politics to marginalize the deprived sections of Serampore's society.

8 R.L. Johnston, *City and Society: an outline for urban geography*, (London: Hutchinson Press, 1984), 164–166.

9 Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey, *Waste of a Nation: Garbage and growth in India*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 13.

10 Ibid.

11 Ray, *Urban Sociology*.

12The exact date of the construction of the Jute Mill lines is debatable. However, the estimation of the colonial period is mostly correct because by the end of the 19th century according to Municipal proceedings, 1889-97 at the West Bengal State Archives (WBSA) the Municipality of Serampore was facing extreme difficulties to control the facilities of sanitation and hygiene for the workers who settled themselves anywhere on empty land in Serampore. Right after that in collaboration with the Jute Mill authorities, lines were established adjacent to the mill itself for residential purpose of the workers.

13*'Jhhupdis'* and *'bustees'* are temporary settlements or at times squatter settlements of poor people (often migrant workers) who are either homeless or have failed to acquire accommodation for themselves from the concerned authorities. The term 'bustee' however may also refer to unclean, clumsy. and unhygienic conditions of living for the poor that transcends the level of materiality and often constructed as a metaphor for the culture of the 'lower class' that is deemed inferior in comparison to the cultural capital of the (upper) middle-class. The people who stay there often have no right to the land and illegally occupy government land. However, government representatives often let squatters, or *jhhupdis*, stay than demolish them by which they do not have to arrange for alternative settlements for the homeless.

14At the same time, as I have discussed below, the middle-class Bengalis from NBS and PKB often homogenised the resident working-class migrants into a single category of the 'dirty uneducated and uncivil outsider' that they constructed by attributing certain character traits to the latter thereby creating a process of *sanitising* the neighbourhood of such 'dirty outsiders'.

15However, in certain cases, members from the *jhhupdi* dwellers' extended families did stay in mill quarters or on private land for which they paid rent to the owner. But in such situations, owing to spatial constriction the entire family could not be accommodated which forced upon others the danger of homelessness and made them negotiate with the local governmental agencies for habitation. Noor Alam's *jhhupdi* is one such case in point. While his brother Raju Alam lived with his family in a small hut with tiled roof on a private land owned by a person named Zulfiqar, Noor was at one point desperately searching for accommodation for his own family.

16Madhu Rao, a twenty-two-year-old man, lives with his parents at line no. 18. His paternal grandfather had migrated from Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh in 1950 to work as a hand in the India Jute Mill while his maternal grandfather had done the same in 1955. They had both got mill quarters to live in at that time. Madhu's parents were both born in Serampore and had a love marriage. He has an elder brother and they both work as temporary hands in the jute mill while Madhu's father works there as permanent labour. Though he has worked as temporary hand for four years now, he does not wish to continue there due to the uncertainty of work in the mill. Given a better choice, he said, he would leave the work in the mill as there is no future in such a job.

17Multiple reports by various sanitary commissioners towards the end of the 19th century bear testimony to this. Significant among them are No. 300, dated Serampore, the 18th July 1889, From R.A. Barker, ESQ., M.D., Chairman, Serampore Municipality to the Magistrate of Hooghly, Municipal Department, Proceedings 26–27, September 1889, WBSA and, No. 116T, Surgn. Capt. H.J. Dyson, Sanitary Commissioner, Bengal to the Chairman, Serampore Municipality (through the Magistrate of Hooghly), dated Darjeeling, the 30th September, 1896, Miscellaneous Files, File M 1-M/8 1, 1896, WBSA.

18No. 116T, Surgn. Capt. H.J. Dyson, Sanitary Commissioner, Bengal to the Chairman, Serampore Municipality (through the Magistrate of Hooghly), dated Darjeeling, the 30th September, 1896, Miscellaneous Files, File M 1-M/8 1, 1896, WBSA and, Inspection Report of the Deputy Sanitary Commissioner, Western Bengal Circle, on the Serampore Municipality, Municipal Department, October 1896, WBSA.

19Noor Alam is thirty-four years old. His ancestors had migrated from Chhapra in Bihar thirty years before India's Independence, in 1917. It was his paternal great grandfather who had decided to migrate to Serampore to work as a hand in the India Jute Mill. Noor's grandfather and father were both born in Serampore and so was Noor. Except for Noor who works as a chauffeur to one of the managers from the India Jute Mill, his ancestors had all worked

in the mill. According to Noor, his father had some landed property in Chhapra which he had to sell of in order to marry off his two daughters (Noor has two elder sisters). Though Noor's ancestors have all passed away, he has made Serampore his permanent abode and stays here with his family (his wife and son). However, unlike his father who had rented a small room at NBS, Noor's luck hadn't favoured him that well and due to an expanding family (Noor has an elder brother named Raju who also has his own family) he had to request the local municipal councillor to arrange a *jhhupdi* for his family.

20 Susan Chaplin, *Environment and Urbanisation*, 11.1, 150.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 154.

23 Sudipto Kaviraj, *Public Culture*, 10.1, 83−113.

24 For further reference on such analysis, look in Sudipto Kaviraj, Ibid.; Henrike Donner, *The Meaning of the Local*, 141−158.

25 The most prominent examples of such literature would include Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); R.L. Johnston, *City and Society*; J. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Michelle Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty: Environmental Politics, Technoscience, and Women Workers*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

26 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

27 Ibid., 3.

28 Nikhil Anand, *Ethnography*, 13.4, 487−488.

29 Ibid., 488.

30 Michelle Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome*, 152.

31 Doreen Massey, *For Space*, (London: Sage Publishers, 2005).

32 Michelle Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome*, 152.

33 J. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, 243.

34 Nikhil Anand, *Ethnography*, 488.

Biographical Statement

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REVIEWS

Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature (2015)

Rebecca L. Walkowitz

Columbia University Press, 352 pp., ISBN: 9780231539456, p/bk USD$25.00

Reviewed by Ella Collins-White, *The University of Sydney*

Rebecca L. Walkowitz's monograph, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*, makes an interesting contribution to the literary field, asking readers to consider what role the contemporary novel plays in our globalising world. Born translated novels, Walkowitz suggests, ask their readers to consider how multiple and diverse audiences engage with a text. In doing so they seek to debunk the Romantic notion of the 'native' reader – a reader who has an innate and somehow superior insight into a text by virtue of it being in their 'native' tongue – and instead examine how literatures and languages are connected. In this book, Walkowitz explores how we might close read at a distance, how readers and novels form each other, and how literature is always a collaborative art. Through her study of born translated novels Walkowitz asks us to reimagine the English language's role in the creation and dissemination of contemporary literature.

While her book is notable for a great number of reasons, it is her detailed attention to the collaborative nature of literature, in both its creation and reception, which becomes a persistent thread drawn through her monograph. She explores literature's shared experience and creation through each of her chapters, working to reconceptualise the roles of reader, author and text and their interactions. In her first chapter Walkowitz examines the way in which born translated fiction negates the idea of a single reading. Using the example of J. M. Coetzee's fiction, she discusses how such novels use language, subject matter and production strategies to remind their English readers of the other multilingual readers reading the text. Walkowitz claims by distancing readers, born translated novels remind us of the irreducibly collective nature of literature. Moving forward in her second chapter towards a consideration of textual production, Walkowitz asks what role the translator plays. She discusses Kazuo Ishiguro works, reflecting on his notions of originality and imitation, and connecting these to translation as concept and practice. By linking these, Walkowitz calls for a reconsideration of

how we think of the copy (or translation) of a text in comparison to its original. She ultimately suggests that these types of texts defy this dichotomy, as they are both originals and copies. Translated works, and born translated novels, then need to be placed within a new category of literature, which recognises these kinds of collaborative acts and their value to the current literary field. In her third and fourth chapters Walkowitz explores how born translated novels are created by readers and how, in turn, readers are created by them. In these chapters she examines novels which are embedded with multiple voices, languages, places and reading strategies. Making the creative and production process visible, Walkowitz asserts, reminds us of the global community of readers engaging with these novels. Highlighting this shared experience draws away from the notion of a singular, unique, reading of a text, and instead emphasis the diversity and shared experience of reading. In the final chapter Walkowitz considers born digital texts, asking how such texts evoke ideas of translation and multiple readers, taking as her example Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries. She suggests that the digital texts of Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries dissuade interactivity, preventing their readers from becoming producers, and stressing the limits of both the digital world and translation, and perhaps the limits of language itself. In the latter part of the chapter she looks at post-digital print novels and their emphasis on bodies of readers, authors and texts. In a comparison of the two, digital texts and post-digital novels, Walkowitz finds that they both foreground the idea of many readings of any given text while simultaneously understanding their limits. She asserts that these texts are born collective, desiring to be continually translated and interpreted.

In our increasingly global world Walkowitz asks how can one language, one perspective, or one perception of the world be enough? Simply put, and as Walkowitz concludes, it is not. She suggests that born translated novels remind English-only uses of the world of readers around them. Instead, she proposes that rather than thinking of English as a (or *the*) dominant language, we reconsider its role as one of circulation. By placing English back into the world, we might recognise and understand its limitations, and begin to see the importance of reaching beyond the scope of any singular language. Approaching language, and texts, from this position Walkowitz suggests that we might learn to become "more knowledgeable, but less knowing" (Walkowitz, 2015: 245). In doing so we might relearn language's role and its limitations, and learn to value the irreducible diversity of the world we live in.

CREATIVE SECTION

Mona Zahra Attamimi

Dakha

I tame her black matted hair with the whites of quail eggs.
She inhales her *hookah*; the water gurgles, smoke rises, swirls
and clouds the room. I comb out lint, dirt, ostrich feathers
tangled in her knots. When the dull ends glisten I stroke

her strands the way priests spread their fingers to bless
a silted river. I breathe in the haze of tobacco laced
with date molasses. The sweetness drowns the odour
of burnt incense, mouldy bread, raw egg, old wine

and my unwashed feet. Whenever my mistress says my name
there is honey on my nose. Bend your back and knead my
tired legs, she demands. I pinch her ankles, rub her heels.
She yawns at the rook perched on the window-sill, then

I run my elbows down her shins. But my life is more
than this - before dawn, when my mistress and her co-wives
are asleep, I tiptoe up the tower, unbolting locks,
collecting coal, removing dates and tobacco from the silver chest,

filling her water-pipe, and I feed flocks of sparrow-larks
and collared-doves on the roof top. As the birds
gather at my feet, loving me for the treats I give them,
I watch the moon greet the sun as the sky turns

to light, the stars fade, and I wonder whose hands
had been spinning the world, drawing the silhouettes,
painting violets and blues. In these early hours,
I memorise the shape of my life. Only at the rooftop

do I remember my mother's rosette stones
and running naked under the moon with jungle leaves

brushing my navel; I remember my mistress as she sleeps,
eats and plans her next move against a co-wife.

My mistress is often drunk. Once she passes out I take
my hidden stash of indigo chalk, and etch the undulations
of her nose, cheeks and her round forehead on a wooden block.
At dusk, I sweep a swarm of dead flies from the floor

with my hands. Then the time comes for *qat,* freshly washed;
water, freshly welled; bread, freshly baked: the rewards
for my day's work. Afterwards, I rest my Nubian ways
and stretch my legs on the red arabesque rug.

But tell me, do you know about that morning years ago?
The merchants returned to the southern desert and I was
brought out of the dark and into the light. The rays
of the sun were scattered on my arms and warmed my cold

skull. The auctioneer rang a bell just as a winged creature
crossed my sight. I followed its path, and became
winged too, flying beside it, soaring higher
than a date palm, then dipping down into a rock crevice.

All of a sudden my chained neck was pulled, bringing me
back to the slave-market. A man bought me
for sixty dirham. One *harim* is what my wife needs, he said.
I looked at him, I said, *Dakha*, pronouncing my name

in my father's tongue. Today, I smell his blood on the shoes
of his men, I smell his hands on his wife's perfume,
and his sweat on the coins buried in her breasts.

Womb

I imagined you sleeping in her womb, in the same bed of fluid
that once caressed my inchworm spine. In that unknown
sphere before birth, I dreamed of her mouth while
my webbed fingers scratched the vein-branches coating her sack
and my palms felt the smoothness of petals long before I knew

what flowers were. I waited for you. Her back against the pillow,
she was round like the sun – whole and red – sinking into the horizon.
I stroked Mother feeling for your head and I asked you whether
you felt petals in her womb. You never answered, so I thought
you had died before you were born. I was five – on the day of Samum –

when you arrived drenched in slime and Mother's blood.
Windows and doors were sealed. Father cursed and attacked
the dust-storm. The city was buried. Whispers of her labour had travelled.
Seers and doctors queued in the heat, waiting to be paid well
once they displaced death onto some other realm unknown

to the Gods. Suddenly, louder than the agonies of wolves I heard
you leaving her and entering our world. Your cries
cleaved the quietness of my secret nook. But I wasn't afraid of you
even though your small body held the voices of kings.
Your toes were icy when I touched them. The scarlet rug

with black tassels from Mother's bed was wrapped around you.
But under wet cloths her skin was lotus-blue when the nurse removed
you from my gaze. That night, after the maid left I was alone,
I thought of you; how naked you were, though you
were wrapped in an old birth rug, breathing the reek of earth.

Saffron and Dome

Gujarat saffron, Gujarat saffron, Gujarat saffron,
he chanted while pouring wine and feeding me
a pack of tales: the magic of absinthe at your fingertips,
chalices dripping in pearls, horizons pleated with gold and blood

orchids, and a nightflower that blooms at dawn. My head aches
from last night's crapulence, but what hurts most,
what will not leave me is the memory of his voice – that sour
smelling merchant from *Bakkah*. Not even a sack of musk

or myrrh under his *izzar* had veiled his true nature. At the stroke
of midnight he whacked his boots on the table, his beard dripping
in beer gruel, his eyes fixed on the tavern crowd, staring
at each man, inspecting faces to divulge fraud or disbelief – he found

none, so he stroked his chest till a booming voice born from
his mother's torturous labour declared that one must only enter
his city with the right ingredients of mind. His head high
and loose on his neck, and like an unhinged boulder, he lumbered

and swayed, ready to topple into a gully crammed with benches,
tables and drunks. He lifted his stocky legs in a kind of dance
when he threw a copper mug over his shoulder, and the slag
and dregs from his drink sprayed my face. Then, he unleashed

the strings of his cloak, his voice deepened and each word
was marked as though they were underlined in ingot.
And, like a young emperor breathing in the crisp scent of power,
      he pronounced:

enter the sacred oasis with the pure heart
of a dove, enter it with the brisk mind of a fox, enter again
      with the patience of a camel; but to find virgin sapphire
and carved ivory caskets, then barter for the finest grains
      of saffron, the rarest kurkum ginger, and hold in one's hands
the irises of malachites one must possess the cunning,
      quick sense of a tiger-bee, Gujarati saffron, Gujarati saffron,

he chanted all night. As I remember this I splash
cool water on my face. The taste of those words still
intoxicates me. I need to rinse off the tart aftertaste of illusion
from my mouth. But as I'm flooded by this morning's citreous sky,

I wonder if there could really be a land where sorcerers, kings,
and minstrels surrendered their blades before entering
the market-bazaar; where caravan-vernacular cursing death,
fecundity, the gods, mules and donkeys is left at the foot

of the city-gate. The man spoke of the Dome of the Gods and drew
its dimensions with mere words; a dome-temple
that housed miracle stones, where the goddesses are dressed
in jaspers and peridot. A dome clothed in black. In the sun

the shroud resembles the coat of a slowly breathing panther;
in cold air and moonlight the dome turns into the waters of night lakes.
But in the wind, the dome throbs like the ascension of wings.

Biographical Statement

Mona Zahra Attamimi is Arab-Indonesian. She lived as a child in Jakarta, Washington DC
and Manila, before settling in Sydney at age nine. Her poems have appeared in *Southerly,
Meanjin, Cordite*, *Westerly* and anthologised in Australia and overseas. She was the recipient
of the Asia Link Arts 2019 Creative Exchange in Bandung, Indonesia.   Currently, she lives
in Sydney, working on her first poetry collection.

Erin Shiel

Ode to a Container Ship

After a painting by Joe Frost, Docked Ship, 2005.

Lying on your deck we have envied your life. A workhorse
among show ponies, you glide past ferries, cruisers and spindly
yachts. At the dock we see you load Lego boxes like a smuggler
on speed. No champagne is broken over your bow

but you toil all year bearing goods that grubby hands
grasp, hiding powdery substances in concealed
chambers. Your loads are awaited by child and crim alike.
We see the crew lavish affection on your sub-aqua

innards: paint them a colour (not grey) to conceal the clanging walls,
decorate with posters of tits and furry bits, photos and sports
fixtures from many ports. They know the comfort of your steely
bowels, the rhythmic creaks of your iron rooms made safe

by clank of bolt on hinge. Away, away so far away from feuds,
debts, faces. You are in your metallic element past the heads,
dividing the wind. Waiting outside Port Kembla you compare your
height to the escarpment. High cliffs softened by bush a perfect

vulva for your hardened bow. Keeper of the horizon, at dusk
you are a minus sign in the equation of sea and sky.
Reluctant advocate for refugees using plastic bags for pillows
and night's black velvet for a blanket, you have hidden us

in your 'tween decks, let us pray in your vast boxes. You ignore
borders we crave to cross. Our eyes scale your dizzying sides
and our frantic quest tampers with your disconnection from rocks
and soil, trees and territory. But, you ask no questions.

Worth / Wirth

I

He holds my hand in the dark at the Ritz.
The newsreel is barely over, people fidget
before the main feature. Flickering lights
filter faces. Shadows swell the shape of things
highlighting the down on the side of a face,
the plump heave of a breast, eyelashes
spidering from a lid. His farmer's finger
traces the mound of my palm up to my
wrist and then the wrist up to the elbow
crease. I will him to touch my thighs
and uncross my legs at the first caress.
By intermission I'll be nervous of the lights
in case I am recognised. There was a lingerer
last night who stood and watched the freak
show for longer than most as sometimes
they do. Left with his crowd then returned
alone with a glazed and unguarded look
as if he saw a distant relative. I watched
his eyes. They drank in the textures of my
face. He might know me if he saw me
tonight. I could leave at intermission,
collect my coat at the cloak room or powder
my nose and never return. But he has a pull
on me. His size makes me girlish.
I put my head on his shoulder and seal
my eardrum against it and I can feel his voice
roll around his chest cavity. Maybe he could
understand? It's worth the last hour of sitting
with him touching his cheek. It's worth
the risk, the pain his disgust will cause me.

II

We are walking up Arden Street
          where the lamp posts form the fish skeleton of Coogee,
lights splayed right and left like a ribcage.
          There's a frangipani scent above and he lifts
me to reach one for behind my ear.
          My waist curves in to collect his hold readily. He doesn't know
that I can shinny a pole in a flash.
          I feel the guilt of deceit. I cannot meet his eyes when he asks
about next Saturday. Cicadas shrill
          as we walk towards the big house on the hill. I list all the things
I could prepare for supper: cheese
          toasties, smoked oysters, midnight bacon and eggs. But I know
I won't need to put my apron on. He'll know
          when he arrives at the Wirth's Circus house that I am part
of the freak show and there's an elephant
          chained up in the backyard. He pulls me to him under
the yesterday-today-tomorrow bush,
          bends to kiss me and feeling my chin realises I am the freak,
that bearded one, painted in yellow
          and red make up on the side of the wagon. It doesn't matter
how long I spent this afternoon choosing
          a dress, shaving and drawing a beauty spot. I am the bearded
lady and before the first cirrus curls
          from my chin our love shrivels as though the circus just left
town. He drops his arms and starts
          to walk backwards still looking at me briefly but then turns
away. He will go back to the country
          with a story he might repeat around a campfire out droving
or maybe he is too revolted to ever
          think of me again**.**

Biographical Statement

Erin Shiel has had poems published in *Mascara, Meanjin, Cordite* and *Australian Love Poems*. In 2018 she was shortlisted for the University of Canberra International VC Poetry Prize. She has completed her Masters research program at the University of Sydney in ekphrastic poetry inspired by Australian contemporary art. She is writing her first collection.

Simeon Kronenburg

Train

Come on—
come with me
follow me.
Get off the train,
bring your looks
and swagger a bit,
turn me on,
rub your crotch,
smile.

We'll struggle
through crowds
and up the long escalator,
bumping elbows, bags.
We'll bang the turnstile
as we leave the platform
and finally out—
we'll be on the bridge
a bit breathless
but that's okay.

Watch me!
I'll glance at you,
but just for a second.
I'll stop at the railing,
look down at the traffic below.
But I'll feel you,
looking at me
as we stand close,
but apart, like strangers,
staring; it's allowed.

With the cars speeding
below the bridge,
I'll move towards you

slowly
and lean next to you.
I'll move my hand
along the balustrade
until it just touches yours.
And when it does,
I'll smile at you.

And you? What will you do?

Penelope revised

If it had just been a matter of waiting she could have managed
even enjoyed the loneliness. But they came after her, pawing

and sniffing like dogs as they loitered in her hallway,
tripped over her tapestries, fell drunk and spoilt her linens.

One night, sick to death of it, she poured wine into them
like petrol into tanks, until slack-mouthed and loose-limbed

they sprawled on couches, scratching at themselves, dozing
as she and her servant girls ran through the house with torches.

Two or three woke in the sudden heat and screamed
as roof beams fell across opened mouths, smashing skulls.

And after? She fled to another island and hid
among the slaves and women.

Biographical Statement

Simeon Kronenberg has published poetry, reviews, interviews and essays in Australian
poetry journals and anthologies. He has also published widely on the contemporary visual
arts. *Distance*, his first poetry collection was published in 2018 by Pitt Street Poetry.

TO POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTORS

Send articles to alteritystudiesandworldlit@gmail.com

In your email's subject line state whether it is an article or a review. Articles range from 5000–10000 words.

Reviews 750–1500 words.

The articles should be formatted in the Chicago Manual Style 16th edition. Endnotes rather than footnotes preferred. No bibliography required. Abstracts should be approximately 350 words. Up to 8 key words. 100 word biographical statement. UK english preferred.

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