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Trauma, Ethical Dilemma and Ethical Choice in Barker's War Novels[1]

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Abstract In Barker's war novels, she depicts the war-induced trauma sustained by soldiers and war journalists on the battlefield, by military doctors, veterans, volunteers and civilians at home. These characters are plunged into an ethical dilemma and are obliged to make ethical choices when confronted with their plight. In time of war, trauma is inevitable and many characters in Barker's works suffer a lot when making ethical choices. By elaborating on the many unbearable trauma symptoms and the ethical dilemma her characters are confronted with and their ethical choices, Barker intends to expose the cruelty of wars and trauma engendered by wars and tries to remind people of the severe impact of war-induced trauma on individual lives, and calls on people to strive for peace in this world.

Key words trauma; ethical plight; ethical choice

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Pat Barker, a well-known contemporary British novelist, has been exploring the theme of trauma in her oeuvre except the last one. Her *Regeneration* trilogy, which "extended the artistic boundaries of the war novel" (Monteith 147)，has secured her a place on the map of contemporary British literature. By writing from a strongly feminist perspective about the crushing effects of war-induced trauma and the ethical plight in which soldiers, war journalists, military doctors, volunteers and civilians are situated, and the ethical choices they are forced to make, she has

1 This is part of the research outcome of the 2019 National Funding Project of Philosophy and Social Science"A Study of The Trauma Narration and Ethical Introspection in British War Novels of the 21st Century" (19BWW076).

successfully combined the trauma of both men and women, working-class people and professional people, those serving on the battlefield and staying at home front, and in the Great War and WWII, allowing it to converge at the same platform.

Following the success of the *Regeneration* trilogy, she has been showing consistent interest in writing about war trauma in her later war novels *Another World, Double Vision, Life Class, Toby's Room and Noonday*. In the eight novels, she explores the war-induced trauma sustained by soldiers fighting on the battlefield, by military doctors, veterans, volunteers and civilians at home. These characters are plunged into an ethical dilemma and are obliged to make ethical choices in face of their plight. In time of war, trauma is inevitable and many characters in Barker's works suffer a lot no matter what ethical choices they make. Owing to her achievements in contemporary British fiction, Barker was granted the Booker Prize in 1995, the Author of the Year Award in 1996 and Commander of the British Empire in the New Year's honours list in 1999.

Psychosomatic Responses and Body Language of Masculine Complaint

In Barker's war novels, she has monumentalized the First and the Second World War and the effect on the British people, and some symptoms of trauma have become something common among almost all the traumatic. In their traumatic encounter with wars, most characters in her fiction have contracted different symptoms, which have brought about quite a lot of unspeakable pains upon them. Their physical reaction to war-related trauma is another strong accusation they make against the cruel wars, in which their guilt of participation cannot be purged and mental sufferings cannot be alleviated.

In the *Regeneration* trilogy, quite a number of traumatized soldiers who receive medical treatment at the Craiglockhart Hospital suffer from different mental or physical symptoms generated by bearing witness to many disturbing scenes on the battlefield, of which psychosomatic responses are the most prominent. The mostrepresentative cases of psychosomatic response in the trilogy can be found in both Burns' and Wansbeck's unbearable experiences on the battlefield. Burns "had been thrown into the air by the explosion of a shell and had landed, head-first, on a German corpse, whose gas-filled belly had ruptured on impact. Before Burns lost consciousness, he'd had time to realize that what filled his nose and mouth was decomposing human flesh". Henceforward, he vomits severely whenever he tries to eat as "that taste and smell recurred" and he "relived the experience, and from every nightmare he awoke vomiting"(Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 19). Burns' experience of being thrown up into the air by the explosion and landing head-first into the open

and rotting stomach of a German corpse at first brings him a sense of disgust against the terrible smell of the rotten corpse, while later his mental aversion results in his physical response, that is, vomiting. The shift of mental feeling into a physical response is termed psychosomatic response, which is one of the most typical symptoms sustained by Barker's characters in the trilogy.

Like Burns whose experience in the war makes him suffer from a psychosomatic response, Geoffrey Wansbeck, who murders a German prisoner for no better reason "than that he was feeling tired and irritable and resented having to escort the man back from the line" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 443), is also harassed by the same sufferings. He has had no remorse over his murder of the German prisoner for eight months, however, when he is in hospital recovering from a minor wound, he starts to "suffer from hypnagogic hallucinations in which he would wake suddenly to find the dead German standing by his bed" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 443). Besides, the ghost of the German prisoner in his hallucination becomes, visibly and olfactorily, more and more decomposed with each visit. What's worse, he starts to feel that he himself reeks of the same decomposing smell. On Wansbeck, the guilt of having murdered an innocent man has been transferred to physical sufferings, those of hallucinating and feeling his body stink. Both Burns and Wansbeck's experiences result in a weird condition change physically and make them suffer both physically and mentally.

Why they contract and suffer from such an unbearably painful symptom can be illustrated with Freud's earliest idea concerning the symptom formation of trauma in *Studies in Hysteria*, in which he thinks "an overpowering event, unacceptable to consciousness, can be forgotten and yet return in the form of somatic symptoms or compulsive, repetitive behaviours" (Berger 570). This kind of return is termed by Freud as "repetition compulsion". In essence, the psyche constantly returns to the scenes that arouse the unpleasant feelings because, by restaging the traumatic moment repeatedly, it hopes belatedly to process the inassimilable material, to find ways of mastering the trauma retroactively. Freud's theory on trauma symptoms explains well why Burns and Wansbeck's disturbing experiences in the war repeatedly and compulsively bring about their somatic symptoms, almost driving them to the brink of breakdown. Their symptoms are transferred from mental to physical reaction, making them acquire a very different feeling of their trauma, sensed by one sensory organ to another.

Burns' being catapulted headfirst into the decomposed body cavity of a corpse should cause his olfactory problem, however, this experience later leads to his gustatory problem, causes his nightly vomiting and hence emaciates him, making

him become “merely the skin-and-bone casing for a tormented alimentary canal” (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 19). While Wansbeck’s killing of a German guy not only brings his hypnagogic hallucinations of repeatedly seeing the man standing by his bed, but also results in his olfactory problem of feeling himself emanating the same stink. These psychosomatic responses of the traumatic combatants are physical reactions to psychic trauma, revealing from another perspective the horror of battlefields and the severity of war-induced trauma that soldiers have to sustain both physically and psychologically.

Apart from psychosomatic injury, Barker also depicts many various symptoms that appear on the traumatized soldiers whose agonizing war experiences bring about many sequelae, such as speech loss, stammering, nightmares, insomnia, hysteria, paralysis and so on. These sufferings of the returned men, as Brannigan argues, “constitute what Showalter calls the ‘body language of masculine complaint’ against the demands placed upon them in the war” (Brannigan 103). Men are commonly considered strong, tough and therefore should not complain or shed tears in face of difficulties, danger or even death. However, upon being exposed to so many bloody deaths and relentless slaughters on the battlefield, however tough and firm a man is, he can hardly acquire an internal tranquility and remain the same as before he fights in the war. The reactions of the returned men to trauma are involuntary expressions of protest: “Mutism, paralysis, stammering, blindness, deafness, nightmares, insomnia—these are the involuntary expressions of dissension from the war and, Barker implies, the social structures and ideological forces which precede the war (Kolk 106-107)”. The mutism of the combatants suggests something that should but cannot be uttered: “Mutism seems to spring from a conflict between wanting to say something, and knowing that if you do say it the consequences will be disastrous. So you resolve it by making it physically impossible for yourself to speak” (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 87). When trauma cannot be uttered, the only way to release one’s pain is to work it through by means of other symptoms.

Without a cathartic means to drain away their trauma, the severely traumatized men can do nothing but resort to “mutism, speech disorders, blindness and deafness” to lodge a complaint against the inhumane war. Thus, to reduce their sufferings of their agony and torture is to refuse to talk, see and remember, as in the cases of many shell-shocked soldiers: “We don’t remember, we don’t feel, we don’t think… By any proper civilized standard, we are objects of horror” (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 532). The response of veterans to their trauma is just as what Prior writes in his diary after he returns to the front in *The Ghost Road*: “Too close to deaths ourselves to make a fuss. We economize on grief” (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy

570). If grief could be economized, what else could not be? Words and memories could be economized too. In this sense, the best way to alleviate one's trauma, hinted by Barker, is to acquire aphasia so as to avoid talking about his trauma, go blind in order not to see the hallucinations, and develop amnesia so that he cannot recall his memories of the war. Through her pen, witnesses of unspeakable traumas are reduced to silence or speech disorder. Her characters that are involved with wars and thus suffer mentally are made powerless and hopeless.

Mutism and speech impediment seem to be two symptoms common to most returned veterans. There are quite a number of soldiers who contract speech loss or impediment in Barker's war novels, for instance, Geordie, Stephen, Prior, Rivers, Callan and so on. The most impressive description of mutism is centered on one severely traumatized man Callan in *Regeneration* as the process to restore him back to speech is so disturbing. He has lost the ability to speak after being shell-shocked. When he is sent to the hospital to be cured of his aphasia, Dr. Yealland applies electroshock on him so as to force him to articulate a sound. The painful curing process of Callan is a shocking scene to be witnessed, which lasts several hours without stopping until he cannot bear the torture of the electroshock and finally utters "'ah' at a normal pitch, then other sounds, then words" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 205). The cruelty carried out heartlessly on the mouth of Callan is therefore referred to, by Rivers, as "an oral rape" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 208). After the continuous electric treatment, the mutism of Callan is cured at last.

When Callan is asked about whether he is happy about being able to speak after the use of electroshock, he smiles but remains silent. This annoys Dr. Yealland as his original intention is to restore his patient Callan back to speech. When Callan responds to his question in silence, it seems that his efforts have been in vain. Therefore, he applies electrode to the mouth of Callan, which stops Callan's smile immediately and elicits the eventual speech from him as desired. Here lies the irony of it as the mute patient is restored to articulate by force. One can never forget the terrible process of how Doctor Yealland restores Callan to speak. The mutism of Callan is an accusation against the brutal war and the menacing harm that it has brought upon the combatants. His refusal to speak can be regarded as a body language of masculine complaint against the brutalities he has experienced in the inhumane war and a physical protest waged upon the military authority that has called on and sent him and many other young men of his age to fight for the nation.

Prior, the major protagonist throughout the trilogy, contracts speech impediment and refuses to talk about his war experiences with the military psychotherapist W. H. Rivers when he is first sent to the hospital for treatment.

The first day when Dr. Rivers goes to see him, he keeps his mouth shut and refuses to speak, therefore, "getting a few simple facts out of him was like extracting wisdom teeth" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 182). When he is obliged to speak, he "answered questions in monosyllables and finally, when asked whether he felt physically fit for service, said nothing at all, simply stared at Huntley, unable either to claim that he was ill or to deny it" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 182). He rejects any communication with anybody in the hospital, and the only way for him to talk to his doctor is through writing on the paper. Later on, when situations turn out to be better, he stammers. Mutism is the most serious and typical symptom for traumatized men to display their rebellion and anger and voice their protests, while stammering becomes the second most serious one. That is why Prior at first remains mute and later on stammers. Stammering shows his reluctance to speak about his unbearably painful past. In Barker's novels, combatants are not the only people who contract mutism or stammer, doctors who treat the traumatized men are not immune to the problem. Rivers, a military doctor who treats patients at the hospital, is "infected" by the traumatic symptoms of his patients, "He was getting all the familiar symptoms. Sweating, a constant need to urinate, breathlessness, the sense of blood not flowing but squeezing through veins. The slightest movement caused his heart to pound" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 124). Apart from these symptoms, he stammers a lot. After witnessing the brutal experiment carried out by Dr. Yealland on Callan, Rivers responds to another story told by Yealland of how he cures an officer patient who stammers badly in one session, by "beginning to stammer rather badly. And whenever he'd hesitated over a word, he'd sensed Yealland calculating the voltage" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 208). Unlike Geordie and Prior who stammer to avoid being understood, Rivers stammers for he has been traumatized by what he has observed and witnessed as a doctor.

Callan, Prior，Rivers remain mute or stammer in face of the unspeakable past, and Geordie, Stephen, Kit and Paul are among the many men who also keep silent. In *Another World*, the 101-year-old veteran Geordie remains silent about his war experiences, especially about his extremely gut-wrenching memories of how he stabs to death his severely wounded brother by his own hands: "As a young man just back from France, Geordie refused to talk about the war, and avoided all reminders of it…Refused all questions. When obliged to speak stammered so badly could barely make himself understood" (Barker, *Another World* 82). Geordie's silence about his past reveals his pain of touching upon the topic of fighting in the war, and when he cannot avoid speaking about it, he chooses to stammer, which makes his words hard to be comprehended. It is clear that he does not want to be

understood as he deliberately keeps his past a secret from others. Stephen, a war journalist in *Double Vision* who reports cruel atrocities on the battlefield, is heavily traumatized and also refuses to talk about his trauma, making himself something like a clam. His silence about his war experiences and his refusal to communicate with even his wife results in their drifting apart, and in consequence her extramarital affairs and eventually a divorce. In *Life Class*, like other men who keep silent about their past, Paul, an art student who volunteers for the Belgian Red Cross during the First World War, does not want to talk about his work at the war hospital with his girl friend when the latter pays him a visit in France. He locks his pains inside his heart without confiding to her. Kit and Paul in *Toby's Room* both take part in WWI and their traumatic war experiences have caused great mental sufferings to them. They both refuse to talk about their past and keep it a secret to other people.

Many cases of combatants refusing to talk about their war experiences or stammering in Barker's works are not written as a coincidence. Instead, their archetypal models are Barker's step-grandfather who refuses to speak of his wartime experiences and her stepfather who has developed speech disorder that has prevented him from talking about his unspeakable past in the war. Their silence or speech impediment is the only means for them to avoid talking about the past which is so agonizing and beyond endurance that they simply choose not to speak.

The Return of Traumatic Memories: Ghosts and Nightmares

The horrors of trench warfare and bombardments change the lives of Barker's veterans, sometimes irreparably, as they experience a variety of symptoms including hallucinations of seeing reappearing dead comrades, terrifying dreams, and hysterical symptoms. In her war novels, Barker "draws on and revises the literary genre of the ghost story, so that the specters that haunt the soldiers represent a form of psychological possession" (Whitehead 15). Many of the soldiers in her war novels are haunted by their own particular ghosts. The one who has been haunted frequently by hallucinations is Siegfried Sassoon who often sees weird scenes of mutilated corpses not only at night but also during the day. His hallucinations do not end and recur when he appears in the next novel *The Eye in the Door*. This time, instead of seeing mutilated and unrecognized corpses, he often sees his already dead comrade-in-arm Orme, "He woke to find Orme standing immediately inside the door. He wasn't surprised, he assumed Orme had come to rouse him for his watch…After a while he remembered that Orme was dead" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 128). Even when six months have passed, the sight of Orme and some other dead men in his hallucinations still lingers with him. Still in *The Ghost Road*, his

hallucination continues with a sense of guilt when he is visited by the ghosts of his dead comrades who, he thinks, come and question him for not returning to fight at the front:"At Craiglockhart, Sassoon, trying to decide whether he should abandon his protest and go back to France, had woken to find the ghost of a dead comrade standing by his bed. And thereafter, on more than one occasion, shadowy figures had gathered out of the storm, asking him, 'Why was he not in the line? Why had he deserted his men' (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 554)"?

Sassoon's hallucinations have been torturing him day and night until he finally returns to the front. While in *The Ghost Road*, Wansbeck is frequently haunted by the ghost of a German prisoner whom he has murdered. Every night, he wakes up from his nightmare, only to see the dead guy standing by his bed and therefore feels extremely horrified. Not only combatants are haunted by ghosts, the military psychiatrist Rivers, in treating his patients, finds himself unable to dismiss the reality of their ghosts. At the end of the trilogy, he also sees the ghost of the witch doctor Njiru in his hallucinations whom he meets in Melanesia, and it seems that he is marching on the "ghost road" as well. His contraction of the same symptom of having hallucinations can be demonstrated theoretically by MaCann's theory on the countertransference of trauma: "Trauma is contagious. In the role of witness to disaster or atrocity, the therapist at times is emotionally overwhelmed. She experiences, to a lesser degree, the same terror, rage, and despair as the patient. The phenomenon is known as "traumatic countertransference" or "vicarious "traumatization" (McCann 131-150). And Herman's statement well explains why Rivers is also infected by the same traumatic symptoms of the patients he treats, "Hearing the patient's trauma story is bound to revive any personal traumatic experiences that the therapist may have suffered in the past. She may also notice imagery associated with the patient's story intruding into her own waking fantasies or dreams" (Herman140).

Sassoon's ghosts come from his survivor's guilt, while for Wansbeck who has been seeing the ghost of the German prisoner he murders for no good reason, the spectre embodies his unresolved guilt over the act of killing. A man killed cannot be resurrected and things done cannot be undone. Since he has no way to redeem the murder he commits and compensate for his doings, he can do nothing but feel guilty all the time. Thus, the ghost of his heart appears to harass him. To Rivers who treats shell-shocked patients, the guilt derives from his ambivalent feelings of whether he should restore the disturbed soldiers to psychological fitness to return them to the front to continue fighting and be slaughtered.

Ghosts, as Barker says in an interview with Mark Rawlinson, are "metaphors

for whatever in the past we haven't managed to resolve" (Rawlinson 166). Just as she says, ghosts represent something dreadful in the past that cannot be resolved. The ghosts that appear in the hallucinations of her characters stand for something they do not want to or dare not disclose to others, namely, their sense of survivor guilt, guilt derived from murder and secret from their dreadful past. World War I is the first war that has rendered such a tremendous disaster to mankind, especially to the European people, thus it is called by Ted Hughes as the "national ghost".

In Barker's war novels, the sleep of soldiers or war journalists is frequently intruded by nightmares in which they are forced to be brought back to the "rememory" of traumatizing situations, and the visceral and repetitive reliving of trauma is represented in brutal memories. The most typical nightmares depicted by Barker are those of Stephen's and Geordie's. In *Double Vision*, Stephen, a traumatic war journalist committed to the exposition of brutalities, is frequently haunted in his nightmares by the disturbing scenes he has witnessed, of which the focal and routine image is one of the raped and murdered girl he finds in Sarajevo. Ever since he discovers the bloody death of the girl in Sarajevo, he cannot escape from the involuntary compulsion to recall the wretched scene in his nightmares. When he sleeps at night, he keeps thinking about the girl and how "her eyes had looked up at him", and he feels "her head was beside his on the pillow". What makes it worse, when he rolls over to get away from her, he found "her body underneath him, as dry and insatiable as sand" (Barker, *Double Vision* 55).This illusion of having the girl underneath his body brings him great fright even after he wakes up, "He daren't switch the light on, because in this state he found light more frightening than darkness. All the while the details of the dream went on invading his waking mind. Being buried alive … he was too afraid the dream would return" (Barker, *Double Vision* 72).

Stephen suffers from the great torture of being repeatedly returned in his nightmares to the scene that arouses his trauma. It is during the nightmares that he experiences the fright of being an eyewitness of such violence. The horror that goes with his nightmares is indescribably disturbing, which always makes him wake up in extreme terror. Freud's comment on the transformation of repressed memories in the form of nightmares well describes the situation Stephen is situated in: "Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (Freud 13). His rememory of this raped and murdered girl is so consistent and persistent that he relives the frightening event in the form of traumatic dreams. With regard to the transformation of trauma in the form of

nightmares, Allan Young has also expressed similar views: “It (trauma) permits the past (memory) to relive itself in the present, in the form of intrusive images and thoughts and in the patient’s compulsion to replay old events” (Young 7).

Like Stephen who is severely tormented by the same nightmare, Geordie, a World War I veteran in *Another World*, is always molested by the recurrent nightmares of seeing the horrifying and screaming mouth of his own severely-wounded brother Harry, into whose heart he stabs a knife to stop his pain. He repeats this nightmare even decades after the end of the war, especially on the verge of his death. To him, the effect of the Great War shows no sign of being laid to rest, especially when the screaming mouth of his dead brother keeps recurring to trouble him in his nightmare: “Harry disappears, bit by bit, like the Cheshire cat, until only the screaming mouth is left. Night after night he feels himself falling towards that mouth” (Barker, *Another World* 146). To him, trauma is like the screaming mouth of Harry that is big enough to swallow him.

In displaying soldiers’ trauma, Barker adopts the striking image of “mouth” which becomes the symbol of trauma in her war novels. In *Regeneration*, the tortured “mouth” of the speechless Callan being treated by Dr. Yealland with the use of electroshock therapy lingers in Dr. Rivers’ nightmares, “He was in the electrical room, a pharyngeal electrode in his hand, a man’s open mouth in front of him” (Barker, *Regeneration*trilogy 207). The image of Harry’s screaming mouth in *Another World* also becomes the symbol of trauma as it represents pain and sufferings of a dying man. In her presentation of trauma in *Double Vision*, Barker also uses the singularly disturbing paintings of Goya to represent the carnage of war and an outraged conscience in the face of death and destruction. “Goya is depicted to be exemplary of an artist committed to the ethical representation of war and terror…The mouths in his paintings cry out to be heard, and produce a roar which cannot be ignored” (Brannigan159). By choosing the paintings of Goya that become testimonies of the horrors of war, she wants to form a contrast between the terror of carnage represented in Goya’s paintings and the terror of the wars Stephen covers. The images of the “mouths” in Goya’s paintings, which also symbolize man’s pain and trauma, have become one arresting feature in her war novels that cannot be ignored or forgotten. When people are in pain, they will cry out by instinct. By creating different “mouths” that have become the equivalent of trauma, she successfully conveys both the physical and mental sufferings of her characters.

The nightmares of Geordie, Stephen and Prior are all the results of the belated responses to the original or violent events they experience in the past, which do not traumatize them right away, but return belatedly to harass them in the form of

nightmares. Since trauma refuses to be put to rest and keeps surfing on the minds of war-ravaged men, it will have to be relived repeatedly in the form of nightmares and hallucinations. No matter how hard the traumatized men in Barker's and Heinemann's works struggle to go through a quagmire of painful feelings, they cannot fight back the demons that return to haunt them. Their waking nightmares have become living fossils of memories they are forced to be confronted with. To relive the horrors is just like tearing open old wounds before they heal up. Thus, these returned men have to sustain the endless trauma as Prometheus has suffered, waiting for the visit of an eagle in the forms of ghosts and nightmares every day.

Ethical Dilemma and Ethical Choices

In writing about war-induced trauma, Barker not only focuses on their various psychosomatic symptoms and their hallucinations and nightmares, but also penetrates in depth into their hearts so that readers can detect how painful they feel when they are caught in an ethical dilemma and forced to make difficult ethical choices. In her war novels, different characters are portrayed to be trapped in this type of dilemma.

In *Regenerations*, Sassoon, as a military officer, is situated in an ethical dilemma of whether to continue to advocate fighting and encourage his men to fight bravely on the battlefield or to voice a strong protest as he is fully aware of the absurdity of the war that has cost lives of millions of young people. One the one hand, he not only has the responsibility to preach and emphasize the glory and honour of fighting for his own country, but also has the duty to watch over his men and ensure the minimum casualties of them on the battlefield. However, on the other hand, after witnessing and enduring the suffering of the troops, he can no longer be a party to prolong these sufferings for ends which he believes to be evil and unjust. (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 5). He is thus trapped in the ethical dilemma and feels agonized at heart. Confronted with this plight, he, however, has to make an ethical choice concerning this.

As Sassoon protests vehemently and poignantly against the prolongation of the cruel war, he is sent as a patient to the Craiglockhart hospital with the other shell-shocked soldiers. When in the hospital, he feels guilty of not staying with his men at the front. There he starts to realize that the only result of his protest has been to remove him to a place of greater safety, while his men still have to encounter what he believes to be unnecessary danger at the front. Therefore, his mental struggles oscillate between responsibility and guilt, placing him in a dilemma. His dilemma of whether to go back to fight in the senseless and cruel war or to stay away from

it causes him to have hallucinations in which he sees the dead men coming into his room to question him. At last his sense of duty triumphs over his negative emotions against the war, and he finally volunteers to return to battle, back "to the sausage machine" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 214) although his opposition to the war has not changed. For him this is really a hard decision to make. Sassoon's original "'solution' was to tell himself that he was going back only to look after some men, but that formula would not survive the realities of France", for "however devoted to his men's welfare a platoon commander might be, in the end he is there to kill, and to train other people to kill" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 219). Therefore, there is only one very obvious way out, that is, the sense of duty as a commander wins over Sassoon's strong objection to fighting in the war, and he has no other desirable choices but to choose to go back "with the intention of being killed" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 219) . Confronted with such a difficult ethical choice, he is forced to make a decision to "support" the war and return to the battlefield, only to be killed at last.

Rivers, as a psychiatric doctor responsible for curing the shell-shocked patients in the *Regeneration* trilogy, is confronted with no less mental struggles than Sassoon. He, in treating patients suffering from different symptoms of 'shell shock', is also launched into a paradoxical ethical predicament of duty and guilt. Not long after *Regeneration* begins, Rivers is seen to be trapped in a predicament when he treats Sassoon, a "patient" who does not suffer from war neurosis, but anti-war neurosis. His talk with Sassoon shows his inner struggle, "You realize, don't you, that it's my duty to… to try to change that? I can't pretend to be neutral" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 16). On the one hand, he bears witness to the enormous trauma his patients endure and hopes to exorcise the ghosts in their hallucinations or nightmares. While on the other, he is caught up in the ironies of his situation: He is only too aware that his job is to make men "sane" enough again to return to the trenches, which precipitates their breakdowns in the first place. In treating his patients, Rivers' role is both a listener and witness of their testimonies, pains and sufferings on the battlefield, hence he is infected by the contagious symptoms suffered by his patients. Oscillating and struggling between his conscience and his obligation of being a military psychotherapist, he contracts the same psychological crisis, and hence later he begets PTSD as the other shell-shocked soldiers and acquires similar symptoms of having hallucinations and seeing ghosts.The acquisition of traumatic symptoms is the outcome of the transmission of trauma among people. As Luckhurst says, trauma appears to be worryingly transmissible, which leaks between mental and physical symptoms, between patients and doctors

via the mysterious processes of transference or suggestion, and between victims and their listeners or viewers who are commonly moved to forms of overwhelming sympathy (Luckhurst 3).

Being a scholarly and considerate man who has been a social anthropologist before the war, Rivers has to wrestle with his own conscience and sub-conscious as much as with those of his patients. His dilemma is enlarged when he has to sign to discharge the physically and mentally fit pacifist Siegfried Sassoon to the battle. He is rather anguished as he is fully aware of the disastrous effect on the latter, "He wasted no time wondering how he would feel if Siegfried were to be maimed or killed, because this was a possibility with any patient who returned to France" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 218). He understands the real intention of Sassoon to return is to go back and be killed. "If death were to be denied? Then he might well break down. A real breakdown, this time" (Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy 219). Restoring the officer Sassoon who objects to the war to "mental fitness" and discharging him to the front is equal to a doctor leaving a patient to die without taking any measures. However, he has no other alternatives but wait for it to happen, "watching" him killed or break down completely if he survives. His role of being both a savior and an "accomplice" is where his dilemma lies and how his trauma is derived from.

Rivers' ethical dilemma comes from his inner struggle between duty and guilt, just as what has been remarked by Vickroy, "Military therapists faced conflicts between their obligations to soldiers and to the war effort; the emphasis was on sending men back into combat" (Vickroy 16). Being a military psychotherapist, he has the responsibility to abide by the rules stipulated by the military authority as it is his duty to do so. However, his job of curing shell-shocked patients is against his conscience as he is completely aware of the possible tragic outcome for those returned men who will be sent back to fight in the war again if they are restored to suitable mental sanity. His dilemma reflects what Luckhurst remarks, "Many of those treating shell shock discovered that military psychiatry was an impossible profession, caught between contradictory imperatives of cure and fitness for return to service" (Luckhurst 51). Difficult as this ethical choice is, Rivers has to decide which choice to make. He is forced to make an ethical choice to sign on the paper to discharge Sassoon to the battlefield. Doctors who have conscience will all think it a difficult and painful choice to make.

Another figure who is also trapped in an ethical dilemma between his duty and guilt in his work is the war journalist Stephen in *Double Vision.* In this novel, through Stephen's memories and Ben's photos taken on the frontline, Barker leads

her readers into a brutal and atrocious modern world: the attack on the twin towers in the U.S. on September 11, the rape and murder of a young girl in Sarajevo, the execution of innocent civilians on the modern battlefield in Bosnia and so on. Stephen is strongly affected by the destructive effect of modern wars and cannot escape from his inner shadows caused by reporting wars and thus becoming an eyewitness to the wartime atrocities. His presence and witness of the cruel murders and brutalities on the battlefield make him feel complicit in the war crimes. When he views the photograph of the nameless raped and murdered girl, he thinks, "it was difficult not to feel that the girl, spread-eagled like that, had been violated twice" (Barker, *Double Vision* 121). After his colleague Ben is shot while taking photos of the Soviet tanks in Afghanistan, he feels heart-broken. When he returns to pay a visit to Ben's widow, he finds in the study more photos taken by Ben earlier. The sight of these photos has again brought him back to the traumatic past in Afghanistan, "Further along, a man's face, distorted with anger, one hand half covering the lens. Another was of an execution. A man on his knees staring up at the men who are preparing to kill him" ((Barker, *Double Vision* 123). Although he has never shot or killed any man on the battlefield, he shares the same kind of trauma as those soldiers who fight and kill in the war, which is as Cole says, he returns from the wars "in vexed and complex ways" (Cole 187).

It seems to him that reporting the brutal violence is being complicit in committing murder and as a result has made him feel agonized. His trauma of being a witness to the brutalities in the wars conforms to what Jenny Edkins says in *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*: "Witnessing violence done to others and surviving can seem to be as traumatic as suffering brutality oneself. Here a sense of shame is paramount. The survivor feels complicit in the betrayal perpetrated by others (Edkins 4)". Stephen feels exactly the same as what has been remarked by Edkins to be complicit in violence, regarding himself as an accomplice in the war crimes committed by others simply because of his mere presence at the spot of the death. On the one hand, it is his job to report what he has watched on the battlefield, true and real. However, on the other hand, he doubts about the ethical problem of what and how to report. As a result, he lingers between his duty and guilt, and questions himself whether it is morally justifiable for him to report what he has seen: "It's the argument he's having with himself, all the time, between the ethical problems of showing the atrocities and yet the need to say, "Look, this is what's happening" (Barker, *Double Vision* 119). His sense of guilt gnaws at his heart, plunging him in a real predicament. What's more, as he survives the death of his colleague Ben, feelings of survivor's guilt and unacknowledged grief and

anger come together. At last, this pain derived from his dilemma is so enormous and beyond his endurance that he chooses to give up his job and return to the peaceful pastoral to heal.When having to make an ethical choice to continue to witness atrocities on the battlefield and report them or to stop being an eye-witness of all these pains, he chooses the latter. The choice he has made is finally able to restore him to mental peace. However, his colleague Ben is not as lucky as him for Ben has been shot to death when he ventures his life to take photos of the Soviet tanks on the battlefield. A lot of war journalists also feel traumatic and feel it hard to make a choice. If they continue to report on the battlefield, they will be obliged to witness war atrocities and bear pains and trauma induced by being an eye-witness. However, if they stop reporting, they will also feel guilty as it is their job and duty to report what they have witnessed on the battlefield. No matter what choices they make, they will be traumatized.

In *Life Class*, the art student Paul is also thrown into an ethical dilemma between his job and guilt. When the First World War breaks out, Paul shows great enthusiasm as the other British civilians and joins in the war as a volunteer for the Belgian Red Cross, tending on the mutilated, dying soldiers from the front line. He has become an eyewitness of many disturbing scenes: "He went to one hospital where there were five hundred men lying on the straw, covered in piss and shit—some of them hadn't had their wounds dressed in a fortnight. No anesthetics, no disinfectant, nothing. Whole place stank of gangrene" (Barker, *Life Class* 119). Watching the severely wounded soldiers left to survive for themselves due to lack of drugs or medical services makes him feel grieved. His heart aches a lot whenever he is exposed to scenes of bloody deaths. His trauma derives not only from bearing witness to the pain, but also from his reluctance and even resentment of taking care of the wounded and watching them return to the front to be killed again after their recovery, "The staff resented having to nurse somebody back to health in order for him to be shot. Obviously, this might be the fate of many of the patients, but only on the battlefield" (158). He, just like the military doctor Rivers in the *Regeneration* trilogy, is also plunged into an ethical plight of whether to save the wounded or not for he is also fully aware of the tragic outcome for them. However, as a volunteer, his duty is also to help tend on the sick and help them recover. He has to make a choice when confronted with the dilemma of whether to help save the traumatic soldiers or not. His experience as a volunteer has changed his life and mindset so much that by the time he returns home, Paul must confront not only the impossible challenge of how to express all that he has seen and experienced, but also the fact that life and love will never be the same for him again. Memories of his war

experiences prevent him from living a normal life as before.

Toby and Elinor, brother and sister in *Toby's Room*, fall in love with each other and develop incestuous love between them. Their love is against morality and therefore they are situated in an ethical plight when they cross the border of incest. They realize that it is against ethical norms to have this kind of love between them, so they feel extremely painful after having sex with each other and have to make an ethical choice to stop or continue their love. After many times' inner struggle and conflict, they finally decide to be separated from each other, with Toby going to join the army in the First World War and Elinor working a volunteer at the home front. The ethical choice they make is a compromise with the social norms and allows them to return to their normal life again, though their life will never be the same as before after all this. To Elinor, the incestuous love between Toby and her"was a catastrophe that had ripped a hole in the middle of her life"(Barker, *Toby's Room* 10).

Toby, while he is working as a doctor at the battlefield, bullies a horse boy by "raping" him. His behavior is witnessed by Kit and reported by him to the Padre. Toby is then given two choices: to die at the battlefield or to be charged at the military court. In order to avoid the shame of putting his family through all this, Toby makes up his mind to commit suicide at the battlefield. He takes Kit to go with him, intending to kill him at the same time. But when he is pointing his revolver at Kit, he hesitates for a while. He is faced with an ethical choice: whether to kill his "enemy" Kit for reporting him or to let him go. As a man of compassion and conscience, he finally lowers his revolver and puts it in his mouth and blows the back of his head off. The ethical choice he makes is to kill himself but not Kit who reports him to the Padre, and to bring an end to his shame.

It is obvious that when doctors, soldiers, volunteers are confronted with duty and guilt, they will make up their minds to choose duty over guilt though the choice is not an easy one to make.

By means of her seemingly unsentimental narration of the unspeakable traumatic experiences of people living close to the margins of survival, Barker brings to light the trauma and ethical dilemma of many people whose trauma, as Peter Childs discloses, "remains in the collective memory as a persistent traumatic experience that has been insufficiently addressed or acknowledged" (Childs 62). Through the cases of Sassoon, Rivers, Stephen, Paul, Toby and Elinor, Barker reveals that not only soldiers who fight and kill on the battlefield are plunged into an ethical dilemma, military doctors, war journalists and volunteers who bear witness to wartime atrocities are also situated in this plight. In their involvement with wars,

they are obliged to make ethical choices. Their difficulty in making ethical choices reveals the cruelty of inhumane wars and the extreme trauma of them.

Conclusion

Barker, in returning repeatedly to the terrain of the First World War that has become a topic of interest to her, Barker attempts to probe into war-induced trauma and ethical plight of many British people in time of war. As a female writer, she successfully writes on the topic of war that has been a male-dominating field of writing and obtains her own unique achievement. By registering a different sense of history as a catalogue of unspeakable traumas and by ingeniously fusing fiction with history in her writing, Barker has become a distinctive voice and outstanding figure in contemporary British literature. By elaborating on the many unbearable trauma symptoms and the ethical dilemma they are confronted with and the ethical choices made by the combatants, military doctors, journalists and volunteers, she intends to expose the cruelty of wars and trauma engendered by wars and tries to remind people, for whom WWI and WWII are distant events, of the severe impact of war-induced trauma on individual lives, and calls on people to strive for peace in this world.

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An Exploration of the Concepts of Place and Space with Emphasis on Past and Memory in Selected Novels of M. G. Vassanji

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Abstract This paper attempts to analyse the concepts of place and space with reference to diaspora, migration and settlement. The paper elucidates the characters' places of origin i.e. their birthplace, places where they spent their childhood and on the other their ancestors' homeland i.e. their ancestral place. The past of the characters situated in diaspora plays a pivotal role. The correlation between one's place of origin and ancestral place produces the "place of memory" which weighs heavily on the present-day lives of the characters. Having been immigrants in another land, the places of memory grant the characters identity and roots. Hence, their memories are often so powerful that they by and large return to the specific places. They create their own space in which they attempt to make the most of their lives. Edward Relph's concept of "existential outsideness" and Henri Lefebvre's theories on social space have been exploited in this article to enhance the authors' objectives.

Key words place; space; past; present; memory; identity; diaspora

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Introduction

Moyez Gulamhussein Vassanji is an Afro-Asian author who was born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1950 and brought up in Tanzania. He shifted to the U.S after having

obtained a scholarship and presently he is residing in Canada. Vassanji is primarily placed in the diasporic realm as he has vaulted three continents. Hence, issues related to homeland, past, memory and identity predominantly gain centre-stage in his novels. The characters ascribe special attachment to their respective homelands. Vijay Mishra writes, "Recalling homelands from a diasporic space is not uncommon among writers of the diaspora" (179). This can certainly be attributed to M. G. Vassanji. In his works the significance of the ancestral place in the lives of the characters can be seen. As the characters are always on the move, it is but natural that the memories of their homeland cling to them dearly. This paper predominantly focuses on two main ideas:

1. The past or the homeland of the characters which is the place of memory.
2. The picture of homeland as remembered by the ancestors of the characters which eventually gives identity to the characters.

The works chosen for our exposition are *The Gunny Sack* (1989), *No New Land* (1991), *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003), *The Assassin's Song* (2007) and *The Magic of Saida* (2012). The ideas of homeland and place of birth figure prominently in the novels of the diaspora. For a writer like M. G. Vassanji straddling the three byzantine continents of Asia, Africa and North America, place becomes a strategic issue which he has precisely worked upon. In the contemporary scenario, globalization, transnationalism and muticulturalism have become decisive issues. Citizens today are inclined to shed their parochial and nationalist tendencies in order to embrace a global and a universal outlook. The question then arises as to why the topic of ancestral place or the homeland is given undue attention. The answer, of course, is a veritable part of the question itself as the very word 'ancestral' has links with history and place. The place of origin provides identity, roots as well as a sense of belonging to an individual.

Notions of Space and Place as Expounded in Humanistic Geography

The notion of identity is deeply connected to one's homeland. An individual is assigned with an identity as he is associated to a particular place. The homeland, thus, plays a fundamental role in the formation of identity. The individual's past is essential in determining his present. The characters in Vassanji's novels operate largely on past and memory. Their ideas of their homeland form a substantial part of the novels. Since they leave their motherland and move elsewhere, they are always anxious of their future in a different country. In Vassanji's novels, the place of origin of all the characters is an important topic for our study and research. The major characters for our study are: Salim Juma — *The Gunny Sack*, Vikram Lall —

The In-Between World of Vikram Lall, Kamal Punja — *The Magic of Saida*, Nurdin Lalani — *No New Land* and Karsan Dargawalla — *The Assassin's Song.*

Apart from these, the minor characters are also discussed in the context of homeland and identity. It is noteworthy that all the characters have more than one place of memory. India is the ancestral place of all the characters which they remember unswervingly. Through double or triple migration, they have made "homes" in many places. A succinct insight from the subject of humanistic geography would be complementary to the central idea of the paper. While talking of space it is understood as the space of geography, i.e. a realm without any meaning; whereas naming a space becomes a place. Space denotes movement; whereas place is the 'pause' in between (Tuan 6). Edward Relph mentions:

> Space is amorphous and intangible. It is not an entity that can be directly described or analysed. Yet, however we feel or explain space, there is nearly always some associated sense or concept of place. In general, it seems that space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places. (8)

Space provides the context for places and by doing so it derives meaning and an essence. Place demonstrates a sense of belonging. When human beings invest meaning to a space by becoming attached to it, it becomes place. Human beings inhabit and cohabit in a particular space and make it unique and special by accrediting emotions to it. Thus, space is turned into a meaningful location. Space is associated with phenomenology and existentialism. It is an open arena of action and movement. Place is stopping, resting and eventually becoming involved. Edward Relph signifies that place is the very everyday andmundane fact of our knowing where to enact our lives (Relph 9). In this way we protect our place. Place thus, determines one's existence, attachment and rootedness. Relph comments:

> The basic meaning of place, its essence, does not therefore come from locations, nor from the trivial functions that places serve, nor from the community that occupies it, nor from the superficial or mundane experience… The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence. (43)

Identity and Homeland

In the context of Vassanji's novels, the characters have "made, maintained and

contested," (Cresswell 5) their places in the countries they emigrated to. The treatment of the host country towards these characters can either be favourable or hostile. Thus, they do have a 'place of memory' which exists in the past but emphatically and shows up in the characters' present lives. Kamal Punja, in *The Magic of Saida* can be taken as a wonderful example to explain this predicament. In one of his interviews with Asma Sayed, Vassanji was asked about his original idea in penning *The Magic of Saida,* he replied, "Concerning Saida, if I had to name original thoughts, I'd guess one was the idea of return. What does it mean to return—to repay debts or obligations—moral ones, of course?" (Sayed 242-243)

Having come from noble and humble origins in Kilwa, a small but significant island on the southern coast of Tanzania, he settled in Edmonton, Canada as a flourishing doctor. His father Dr. Amin Punja was a Shamsi Indian who belonged to Singpur, a tiny village near Verawal on the coast of Gujarat. His mother Hamida was an African. Punja Devraj, Kamal's great-grandfather came as a trader to Zanzibar. He blended so perfectly with the people of the African coast that "he gave himself a place name, in Indian fashion, so that he was now Punja Devraj Sawahil" (139) and "would do all he could to help resist the invasion of his adopted land" (139). The German colonization of Tanzania was at its zenith then. The novel provides considerable historical insights related to the imperialist policies of the German rule and the Maji-Maji uprising. Punja Devraj sacrificed his life for the protection of his adopted land.

Kamal was labelled as a "half-caste" by both the Africans and the Asians owing to his parentage from two different races. He returns to the place which he "had left half a lifetime ago, more; he had made a life elsewhere, planted roots there; and still Kilwa haunted" (13). He returns to Kilwa after thirty-five years to search for his beloved Saida. This search is overlaid with an exploration of past, memories of his homeland and a whole lot of historical details. In a spirited discussion with Dr. Engineer, one of his acquaintances in Kilwa, Kamal asserts his sense of belonging,

> "I belong here, speak the language, but move around unconnected like a ghost."
>
> "I understand you are from Kilwa originally," Navroz said. "This is home?"
>
> "I was born here," Kamal replied. "This is my village, I guess—my mother's place."
>
> "But you don't belong anymore…"
>
> "Is that a question?"

"Yes."

"Well. I am of here and these are my people, and yet I have a life and a family elsewhere. In Canada, I've thought of myself as African – though not African Canadian or African American - attractive illusions for a while. It becomes difficult to say *precisely* what one is anymore. Isn't that a common condition nowadays?" (*The Magic* 222)

In a similar vein Vikram Lall pledges his loyalty to Kenya. As a Hindu—Punjabi (Indian) in particular and an Asian at large, he belongs to the third generation of Indians in Kenya. In a discussion with Njoroge he openly declares that Nakuru was his home and that he never wanted to go to India:

> And would the Asians go home to India? I didn't want to go to India [...] I knew of no world outside my Nakuru, this home, this backyard, the shopping centre, the school; this town beside the lake of flamingos, under the mysterious Menengai crater where we sometimes went on family picnics, passing the European area on the other side of the tracks. (*The In Between* 49)

It is an incredible idea for Vassanji to give a Hindu-Punjabi identity to his protagonist Vikram Lall. His grandfather like many others came to Kenya as an indentured labourer to work on the railways. Since then, the family made Kenya their home. Vikram is extremely attached to Nakuru. He only heard about India from his parents. For him, Nakuru is his home and he is very much close to it. He says quite unambiguously:

> We have been Africans for three generations, not counting my own children. Family legend has it that one of the rails on the railway line just outside the Nakuru station has engraved upon it my paternal grandfather's name, Anand Lal Peshawari, in Punjabi script- and many another rail of the line has inscribed upon it the name and birthplace of an Indian labourer. (*The In-Between* 15)
>
> Anand Lal, my dada, stayed on in the new colony after his indentureship, picked Nakuru as the spot where he would live. (*The In-Between* 16)

Vikram always wondered, "What makes a man leave the land of his birth, the home of those childhood memories that will haunt him till his death-bed?" (17). As his grandfather had made his home in Nakuru, the family stayed there for the successive

generations. The contribution of the indentured labourers from India in Africa has been immense. Vikram Lall, in fact, pays a glowing tribute to those labourers in the following passages:

> The railway line running from Mombasa to Kampala, proud "Permanent Way" of the British and "Gateway to the African Jewel," was our claim to the land. Mile upon mile, rail next to thirty-foot rail, fishplate to follow fishplate, it had been laid by my grandfather and his fellow Punjabi labourers – Juma Molabux, Ungan Singh, Muzzafar Khan, Shyam Sunder Lal, Roshan, Tony – the cast of characters in his tales was endless and of biblical variety – recruited from an assortment of towns in northwest India and brought to an alien, beautiful, and wild country at the dawn of the twentieth century. (15)

In *The Gunny Sack* too there is a reference to the railway line construction by Indians. Dhanji Govindji narrates to Ji Bai his adventures to the innermost parts of the African continent as a part of his search for his half-caste son Huseni.

> The railway goes all the way to the lake in the interior, and everywhere the train stops there is an Indian settlement. The line was built by our Indians, every stationmaster in an Indian and every conductor is also one of us. Our people are doing well under the British, Bai. (35)

Even though the Indians have made Kenya their home, the Africans do not accept them wholeheartedly. When Mwangi, Njoroge's grandfather and the family's gardener asked Vikram's mother as to why the Indians have been delaying going back to their homes in India since they have made enormous fortune in Africa, she retorted, "But they don't want to go, it's been a long time, Mother told him. This is their land too now, where their children and grandchildren were born. Isn't that true?" (106). In the same way, Paul Nderi, the Transport Minister and also Vikram's boss speaks about the Indians in derision, "you people have your feet planted in both countries, and when one place gets too hot for you, you flee to the other" (314). In reply, to the minister's scorn for the Asians, Vikram countered tartly, "It's rather that "we people" as you call us, don't have a place anywhere, not even where we call home" (314). This riposte by Vikram pertinently echoes the dilemma of the Asians in Africa. There is no such thing as permanent home for the Asians who are considered as in-between by the Africans.

Vikram's mother had visited her homeland India twice since her father's death.

Now she believed that "India was calling her, that she was ready to end her African sojourn and return finally home" (315). For her, getting back to her homeland would provide ultimate solace and peace. Allon Gal, Athena S. Leoussi, Anthony D. Smith write about this condition in the introduction of their book *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present:*

> The similarities and differences between the host country and the diaspora's homeland are also relevant and important: frequently, the greater the contrast between the modernity of the host country and relative backwardness and conservatism of the country of origin, the weaker the attachment. By the same token, when the homeland is relatively developed and dynamic, and somehow attuned to the emigrants' destination, the diaspora tends to consistently sustain the homeland and cherish its call. (Gal et al. xv)

Vikram Lall's mother is shown as a typical Hindu-Punjabi Indian woman who decorated her room with idols of Indian gods and goddesses. She vehemently opposed Deepa's decision to marry Njoroge enunciating that inter-racial marriage is not an Indian custom. Even in Africa, Vikram's mother tries to keep their traditional customs alive. Gijsberg Oonk remarks about the people of South Asian origin in diaspora:

> They may want their children to prosper in their adopted countries, but at the same time they may prefer them to adopt Indian family values, marry other Indians, and share their common culture. In other words, many South Asians living overseas tend to reproduce their Indian culture, values, language and religion as much as possible. (Oonk, 9)

Ironically, in the end of the novel we see that Vikram's father (after his wife's death) lives in with his African mistress. The novel depicts Vikram's childhood in detail. He remembers the family gatherings every Sunday, when topics of mythology, politics, sports, trade and commerce would be discussed with genuine interest. In the present when he is in Canada, he fondly recalls "Nakuru, the place of my childhood" (303) and it was there during his childhood that he spent those happy moments which now are a part of memory, ". . . and we were all alive and the world was wonderful" (45). There are glaring references to the ancestral places of Vikram Lall's parents. The feeling of exile experienced by his mother and his maternal uncle also get specified in the novel. Vikram's mother experiences a sense of exile as her

homeland is lost to Pakistan.

> When Rama's exile was the subject of the stories, it was never far from our consciousness that Mother and her brother shared a deep sense of exile from their birthplace, Peshawar, a city they would never be able to see again because it had been lost to Pakistan. And since Peshawar was the ancestral home also of my dada Anand Lal, the rest of our family could somehow share in that exile, though not with the same intensity. (*The In-Between* 85)

Vic, (as he is called in the novel) takes pride in his "Nairobi Punjabi Hindu" (221). Years later, the family moved to Nairobi for the betterment of education and business. India, however, "was always fantasyland" (19) to him. Members of the first generation of migrants have a greater affinity towards their homeland. Gijsberg Oonk explains how migrants' sense of belonging in a multicultural location has various connotations.

> The diaspora as a *type of consciousness* emphasizes the variety of experiences, a state of mind and a sense of identity. This is described as *dual or paradoxical nature.* This nature has various connotations. First, it refers to the experience of discrimination and exclusion, and at the same time, the positive identification with the highly praised historical heritage of the Indian civilisation. Second, the awareness of multi-locality, the notion of belonging 'here' and 'there' as well as sharing the same 'roots' and 'routes'. The awareness of the ability to make a connection here and there, making the bridge between the local and the global. Third, double consciousness creates a 'triple consciousness', that is, the awareness of the double consciousness and being able to use it instrumentally. In addition to the identification with the host society, and the homeland, there is the identification with the locality, especially in the discourse of multiculturality. (18)

Vikram Lall belonged to Kenya and had an identity there. In a meeting with Lieutenant Soames, he proudly asserted his Kenyan citizenship, "I said I was a Kenya citizen and currently studying in Dar es Salaam" (235). In a letter to Mzee Kenyatta requesting a personal favour, seeking permission for Mahesh Uncle to enter Kenya as a permanent resident, Vikram mentions about his ancestor's service to the nation, "Your Excellency may not be aware, I wrote, that my family's service to the nation did not begin with me. I informed him that my grandfather had worked

on the construction of the railways" (307).

As a matter of fact, Part 4 of *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* is circumspectly titled 'Homecoming'. As soon as Vic lands in Nairobi, he sensed that, "There is something immeasurably familiar in the cool Nairobi night that tells you you are home, that for better or worse, this is where you belong" (382). Once when his father divulged if they could also have joined the emigration rush to England after independence, Vikram replied, "We stayed because this is our country. And Mother would have gone to India, not England—you know that" (384). Here again, Vikram upheld his Kenyan national identity apart from being a Hindu-Punjabi with roots in India.

In *The Magic of Saida*, Kamal's visit to Kilwa is marked by depression and dejection. He made desperate attempts to search for Saida and came to the very place which was once the home where he stayed with his mother.

> The street was an extension of the street of the Indian shops. Arriving there, Kamal took a cross street and found the one on which he had lived with his mother. He choked when he saw the old mango tree, staid, dignified – as he imagined it- the lonely sentry of his nights' imaginings. It looked strangely forlorn; why wouldn't it, with its old friend gone. He went and stood under it; almost shyly put a hand on the trunk. Bwana Mwembe, do you remember me? Can you tell me things? The house in which he had lived had been built over. (The Magic 63)

Kamal's uncle Jaffu took pride in his Tanzanian identity and his place of birth: "I was born here. I will die here." (267). Shamim, Kamal's wife asserted her Indianness more in Canada rather than her Africanness.

> No point harping about Africa, the children are Canadians, she said, and so are you, don't forget that. But Canadians came from somewhere? And your khano and shalwar-kameez? And your Bollywood and Shahrukh Khan? Glamorous India. What did he offer as a heritage: a dusty town in Africa, a slave ancestor, an absconded Indian grandfather. (The Magic 273)

Whether it is Kilwa for Kamal Punja, Nakuru for Vikram Lall, Pirbaag for Karsan Dargawalla, Dar es Salaam for Nurdin Lalani and Salim Juma, one can indisputably articulate that place performs a deep-seated function in influencing an individual's worldview. All these characters have a lasting affinity with these places and they

cannot wipe them off from their memory. Their emotions, ethics and social codes are thoroughly entrenched in these places. The host countries are like "parking lots" for them where they are stationed at present and these are the locations from where they construct the memories and remember their past. Ontario and Edmonton in Canada for Vikram Lall and Kamal Punja respectively; Lisbon and Canada for Salim Juma, Boston-Harvard in the U.S and British Columbia in Canada for Karsan Dargawalla, and again the suburb Don Mills in Toronto, Canada are the settings where these characters are in the present. It is from these locations that their past is looked upon retrospectively. Kamal Punja, in fact, becomes the mouthpiece that Vassanji employs to emphasize the importance of reconfiguring the past.

> That so much of history lies scattered in fragments in the most diverse places and forms—fading memories, brief asides or incidentals in books and in archives—is lamentable, but at least they exist. All we need to do is call up the fragments, reconfigure the past. (*The Magic* 131)

The themes in these novels are embodied in the framework of historical (both national and global) and socio-political events. The ingenious incorporation of incidents like the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, British imperialism, Mau-Mau war and the post-independent political assassinations in Kenya, the Maji-Maji rebellion, German colonization in Tanzania, assassination of John F. Kennedy, the forced exodus of Asians from Uganda under Idi Amin's regime, the bitter-sweet Sino-Indian relations, the momentous Indo-Pak war, the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in India, the ghastly communal riots in the Gujarat state of India feature punctiliously in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall, The Gunny Sack, The Magic of Saida* and *The Assassin's Song* respectively. It is also remarkable Vikram Lall, Salim Juma, Kamal Punja and Karsan Dargawalla had been witnesses to their own country's independence from the colonial establishments. However, the attainment of independence in the four East African states namely Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Zanzibar in the early 1960s provided a catalyst for massive Indian migration out of the region.

In *The Gunny Sack,* the entire novel is built upon memory and the past. In fact, the gunny sack itself stands as a metaphor for memory. As the novel begins, Salim Juma, in exile from Tanzania, opens up a gunny sack bequeathed to him by a beloved great-aunt named Ji-Bai. Inside it he unearths the past—his own family's history and the story of the Asian experience in East Africa. Its remnants and artefacts bring with them the lives of Salim's Indian great-grandfather, Dhanji

Govindji and his extensive family. Each object in the sack is a symbol of the past. As he gropes into the sack, he narrates their community's history in Africa. Memory has been exclusively presented in the novel.

> Memory, Ji-Bai would say, is this old sack here, this poor dear that nobody has any use for any more. Stroking the sagging brown shape with affection, she would drag it closer, to sit at her feet like a favourite child. It would plunge her hand through the gaping hole of a mouth, and she would rummage inside. (*The Gunny* 3)

Dhanji Govindji arrived in Matamu—from Zanzibar, Porbander, and ultimately Junapur—and had a son with an African slave named Bibi Taratibu. Back in Gujarat, India, Zanzibar was the "Jewel of Africa, isle of enchantment" (9). He started his trade in Matamu "where Africa opened its womb to India" (45), and with the help of mukhi Ragavji Devraj from his community he managed to establish his first home in Africa. Later, growing in affluence, he married Fatima, who bore his other children. Part II of the novel is named for Kulsum, who marries Juma, Husein's son; she is the mother of the narrator, Salim. We learn of Juma's childhood as a second-class member of his stepmother's family after his mother, Moti, dies.

Among the stories tumbling from the gunny sack comes the tailor Edward bin Hadith's story of the naming of Dar es Salaam, the city Kulsum moves to with her children after her husband's death. Gradually Salim takes over the telling, recalling his own childhood. His life guides the narrative from here on. He remembers his mother's store and neighbours' intrigues, the beauty of his pristine English teacher Mrs. Gaunt at primary school, cricket matches, and attempts to commune with the ghost of his father. It is a vibrantly described and a deeply felt childhood. When Uncle Goa had applied for school admission for Salim Juma at the behest of his mother, issues of his origin came to the fore which is explained in the following extract from the novel.

> 'Grandfather's name first', said the application form, and Uncle Goa asked me. 'Huseni,' I said naming my renegade half-caste ancestor, and became Huseni Salim Juma for ever after. (*The Gunny* 124).

There is also a meticulous delineation of the nation's history in the novel as it had been shattered by political animosities on its road to independence, which comes about as Salim Juma reaches adolescence. With the surge in racial tension and

rioting, several members of his close-knit community leave the country and move to the West. Michel Bruneau says that memory plays a decisive role for the members of diaspora to preserve their relationship with their culture of origin.

> Through migration, diaspora members have lost their material relationship to the territory of origin, but they can still preserve their cultural or spiritual relationship through memory. Territory or, more precisely, territoriality—in the sense of adapting oneself to a place in the host country—continues to play an essential role. (Bruneau 48)

Childhood and the years of growing up play a substantial role in almost all of Vassanji's novels. The role of Kulsum, Salim Juma's mother in *The Gunny Sack* is based upon the life of Vassanji's own mother. In an interview titled "History, Magic and Film," with Asma Sayed he mentions,

> Obviously, my mother is a huge influence. I think *The Gunny Sack* is inspired by her. She's also suffered a lot; what a trauma it must've been not only to raise the five of us alone, but to raise several of my cousins - sometimes my uncle would leave his three children with us, so there were often eight of us together. It must have been very difficult for her. But I also remember those times as happy times – the bonds that were created then have lasted. …. Those childhood experiences are very memorable. (Sayed 285-286)

Vassanji's works are a testament to the fact how past operates and intervenes in one's life. Though at a particular stage one may feel that past has no place in a person's life, an adept reading of some of Vassanji's works will certainly help us think over it again. We all are creatures of the past and it has a paramount bearing on the present. He also emphasizes the role played by memory. His characters are people who survive on the periphery of the host societies dreaming of a home. Their lives are full of cherished memories and poignant connections with their homelands. Vassanji's treatment of history is exclusive and distinct. He portrays it with an ambiguous approach leaving much essentially upon the readers to decipher. We can understand the complicated nature of history in almost all his works. Vassanji opines that a writer plays a unique role as a historian. In one of his path-breaking essays titled "The Postcolonial Writer: Myth Maker and Folk Historian" he states that a writer is,

> A preserver of the collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker. He gives himself a history; he recreates the past, which exists only in memory and is otherwise obliterated, so fast has his world transformed. He emerges from the oral, preliterate, and unrecorded to literate. In many instances this reclamation of the past is the first serious act of writing. Having reclaimed it, having given himself a history, he literates himself to write about the present. To borrow an image from physics, he creates a field space- of words; images and landscapes- in which to work with, and instal the present. (Vassanji 63)

Edward Relph's Concept of "Existential Insideness and Outsideness"

Canada is the exiled space for Salim Juma and Vikram Lall alike. This is a place that reiterates the burdens of dislocation and melancholy. Salim Juma, Kamal Punja, Vikram Lall and Karsan Dargawalla have been to more than one place. Their experiences of travel, movements, migration and settlement (both temporary and permanent) make them carry the weight of their memory. This displacement makes the borders between home and the world and the private and the public perplexing. The resultant oscillation of memories concurrent with place supplements Edward Relph's proposition of 'insideness' and 'outsideness' within a given place. Edward Relph expounds that there is a distinction between the experience of "insideness" and 'outsideness' within the human experience of place. Here is a gist of the same:

> I. "Insideness"
> (i) To belong to a place
> (ii) To have an identity within it
> (iii) The more one is inside the stronger one becomes and identity gets rooted there
>
> II. "Outsideness"
> (i) The existential outsideness i.e. alienation from a particular place
> (ii) Antithesis of an unreflective sense of belonging that comes from being an existential insider (55).

All the characters taken up for this study encounter "existential outsideness" when they are away from their homelands. In Korrenburg, Canada, Vikram feels alienated though he feels that it is a "calm retreat" (371). Here, he gets ample of time to think of the years gone by and to come up with a plan to get back to Kenya. It is going back to Kenya – his homeland that is foremost on his mind. Seema Chatterjee, his

friend in Canada asked him if he "unwillingly, unwittingly" belonged to that place i.e. Korrenburg, Vikram doubtfully asks himself, "Can I too learn to belong here?" (370) He desperately wanted to return to Kenya and settle things with the government and to come out clean.

> Do I belong here—in this wonderful country where the seasons are orderly, days go past smoothly one after another? This cold moderation should after all be conducive to my dispassion? No. I feel strongly the stir of the forest inside me; I hear the call of the red earth, and the silent plains of the Rift Valley through which runs the railway that my people built and the bustle of River Road; I long for the harsh familiar caress of the hot sun. (*The In-Between* 371)

This same feeling reverberates in an essay titled "Canada and Me: Finding Ourselves" by Vassanji. He is strongly attached to Africa as he has his roots there. Of course, one cannot forget the place where he / she has childhood memories. As a young boy he used to accompany his mother on shopping and realized the struggles that a young widowed mother faced. He writes of his days in Africa where he spent his happy childhood,

> I remain strongly attached to Africa, the continent of my birth; its music, the sight of its grasslands, its red earth, or its mighty Kilimanjaro, stir me to the core. I have happy memories of my childhood there. (Vassanji 20-21)

Similarly, in Edmonton in Canada, Kamal Punja is drawn towards Kilwa in his thoughts. If Vikram is nostalgic about Kenya, Kamal and Salim (*The Gunny Sack*) express their yearning for Tanzania. Kamal's return to Kilwa after thirty-five years is an attestation to that. Salim Juma, however, cannot return as he is in exile; but his memories about the country of his birth are quite poignant. When they were students in Uganda, Shamim suggested that they too should leave for Canada following many Asians who were expelled by the Idi Amin regime, Kamal insisted that they should stay in Tanzania since it is their country.

> "We could go," she said softly. Then looked intently at him: "Why don't we go?"
>
> "Where? To Canada? You must be crazy—we are Tanzanians. We have families there. That's our country." (*The Magic* 263)

During a visit to India with other doctors, Kamal and Shamim felt that "India was special" (276) and that "India had thrilled them and they all agreed Mumbai felt like home—meaning Dar – but multiplied a hundredfold" (276). As he was in India, Kamal was driven by an impulse to visit "the town in Gujarat where his great-grandfather PunjaDevraj had hailed from" (276). He visited "Verawal, in a far-flung corner of Gujarat" (277). This visit made him realise that he was connected to India and had his origins in this place. He observed,

> This was an area prone to drought, which was why young men historically left its shores to seek their fortunes on the coast of East Africa. All the Asians Kamal had known in Dar had their origins in this peninsula. (*The Magic* 277)

In *The Assassin's Song,* though Karsan was in America, he could not break his ties with Pirbaag. Karsan's life in Pirbaag as an adolescent, as an aspiring student at Boston-Harvard, his married life with Marge Thompson in Canada, his new identity as Krishna Fazl while working as a Professor in a college in British Columbia, his familial life and tragedy in the form of his only son's death, his return to India, his research period at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla and finally his getting back to his roots and assuming the role of the Saheb of Pirbaag are evidence to the fact that place determines one's experiences and thereby plays a decisive role in the shaping of identity. Place means being in the world. It is "primary because it is the experiential fact of our existence" (Cresswell, 32). It is where our lives are enacted and the veritable bedrock of human meaning and social relations. Throughout the novel, Karsan is seen travelling to many places and settling down (of course, temporarily) in some of them. Each of his experiences with place instils a new acuity to his life. In fact his identity gets moulded by the experiences that he had underwent (that is also to say, the places he has been to).

Karsan's return to India, to his roots, is an impulsive response to his brother's telegram informing him of their father's catastrophic demise in the gory communal riots that had wreaked havoc on millions of lives. The neutral shrine of Pirbaag that once upheld the lofty ideals of secularism was in ruins now. Karsan encounters this abject reality of life on his return to Haripir and takes up the very role of the Saheb which he once ran away from. His extensive research about Nur Fazl's identity as an assassin in the Middle Ages in Central Asia infuses in him a new-found zeal which enables him to undertake the role of the Saheb of Pirbaag; of course in a different manner. He does not possess the poised and the dignified aura that his father had when he was the Saheb of Pirbaag; rather Karsan is more down-to-earth and

endorses realistic principles for the betterment of the society. He is the care-taker of the shrine as undertakes many activities of reform for the community. Life comes full circle as he ends up taking the very responsibility which he once ran away from. He gets back to his roots and achieves a sense of belonging. Here, Vassanji brings in the theme of return which we can see in his other novels too. Finally, Karsan gets back to his own place 'Pirbaag' after a considerable sojourn in many countries. With utmost confidence and credibility he declares that he is the "caretaker of Pirbaag" (367). His return to the very place Pirbaag which he kept running away from demonstrates that one cannot let go off one's roots. Karsan remarks, "Do we always end up where we really belong? Do I belong here"? (364)

Vassanji's *No New Land* differs slightly from his other novels. The novel opens on ambivalent note as the two contradicting concepts of place and identity collide at the very start. This is a precursor to the conflicts in Nurdin's life that follow in quick succession. The Lalanis belonged to the Shamsi community which had migrated to Canada in pursuit of better prospects. Their arrival in Canada from Dar es Salaam is marked by anxiety and apprehensions regarding their future. The plot spins around the predicament of the Lalanis who are transplanted into a land of alluring potential but also laborious struggle. Nurdin Lalani, the protagonist of the novel represents those emigrants who envisage that Canada is the land that heralds bounties. The following quotation from the novel reveals how the "ghosts from the past" cannot be shaken off.

> We are but creatures of our origins, and however stalwartly we march forward, paving new roads, seeking new worlds, the ghosts from our pasts stand not far behind and are not easily shaken off. (*No New* 9)

Nurdin Lalani's family felt they could attain prospects of a decent standard of living and a secured identity. The plight of the Lalanis in Tanzania was dismal and their economic sustenance was minimal. That's the reason they had decided to migrate to Canada. They managed to survive by doing odd jobs. Zera, Nurdin's wife successfully handles domestic pressure to earn a living. It is the younger generation that managed to find a way out for themselves in the diaspora much comfortably and effortlessly than Nurdin and Zera. Nurdin contemplated the attitude that Fatima, his daughter had adopted to deal with the new world, new people and new ideas.

> For the crime of being her father when he wasn't anything like what she had in mind. She was ashamed of this little Paki-shitty-stan of Don Mills, as she

> called it. She didn't belong here, she would pull herself out of this condition: everything about her attitude suggested that. She would rise to where they had neither the courage nor the ability to reach. Where had she picked up this abrasiveness, this shrillness, this hatred of her origins? (*No New* 167)

Nurdin's children noticeably imbibed the Canadian ways of living and even despised their father who carried out menial jobs. Fatima disengaged herself from the Shamsi community in Don Mills. In fact, she was more akin to the Canadian way of life and strived to be one of them. Interestingly, characters like Jamal, Romesh and Sushila have an advantage in the diaspora and chose Canada as their new home instead. In the beginning of the novel we get to know that Nurdin is charged of sexual assault. This event has been mentioned in the very first pages by the novelist to draw our attention to the crashing of the ideals and dreams of Nurdin. He could not bring himself to terms with the incident.

It is, thus, a clash between dreams and reality for Nurdin as he is incapable of coming to terms with the awkward circumstances he found himself in. Nurdin is the "existential outsider," in Relph's terms, in these circumstances as there was a vast chasm between his dreams and reality. On the contrary, Nurdin's children stand for the transformed Asian-Canadians who are not troubled by their pedigree or nostalgic reminiscence. Nanji and Jamal too moved to Canada but Nanji felt that his dreams were not fulfilled whereas Jamal survived by doing odd jobs. Here home turns out to be an unachievable dream. The promises that Canada once held for Nurdin are unfulfilled. "No new land" is thus, "no new home" as the same experience of disillusionment that the Lalanis had left behind in Dar es Salaam gets repeated in Don Mills. Ian Chambers is of the opinion that, "The migrant's sense of being rootless, of living between worlds, between a lost past and a non-integrated present, is perhaps the most fitting metaphor of this (post)modern condition." (27)

In the novel there is no indication that any of the members of the African Indian community are in contact with their original homeland, India. Dar es Salaam, rather than India is the place of memory for the characters. They do, however, correspond with Dar es Salaam, especially Zera, who consulted with Missionary over traditional Shamsi reactions to events of daily life in Toronto and requested him to join them in the West. Vassanji thus finely validates that the act of looking back, which is often enveloped in nostalgia and a longing to return, forms part of a multifaceted psychological negotiation of guilt. Vera Alexander writes,

> The Afro-Asian network of immigrants to which the protagonists belong plays

> an important but ambivalent role in their trials of initiation. In practical terms, the community facilitates their access to the 'new land' by providing help-lines and familiar social structures. The safety in numbers alleviates the newcomers' sense of inadequacy and insecurity. On the other hand, the modern lifestyle in Canada exposes the immigrants to problems for which they have no traditional panacea. (200)

It needs to be comprehended that India is the 'place of memory' for certain characters whereas for some others it is Africa. Characters like Karsan Dargawalla in *The Assassin's Song*, Mrs. Lall (Vikram Lall's mother) Mr. Anand Lal in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall,* Dhanji Govindji and Ji Bai in *The Gunny Sack*identify India as their place of memory. Such a place gave them identity and roots. Characters like Kamal Punja in *The Magic of Saida,* Nurdin Lalani, his wife Zera in *No New Land*and Salim Juma in *The Gunny Sack*are seen longing for Africa.

Conclusion

In the modern times, diaspora can arguably become a metaphor for life and identity. For diasporic identity, spatiality is of particular importance especially as mobility and resettlement shape both experience and imagination. Diasporic mobility and resettlement connect at least two places, while the simultaneity of migration of a group to more than one place creates the conditions for networked relations across places. Diasporic identities, in this context, become complex and changing systems and the position that individuals or groups take in spatial matrices define many of the identities. R. Radhakrishnan mentions that "the diasporic location is the space of the hyphen that tries to coordinate, within an evolving relationship, the identity politics of one's place of origin with that of one's present home" (Radhakrishnan, xiii).

Space in diaspora is not singular; it brings together meaningful relations and forms of practices within that code. It also carries social meanings which are always pluralistic in nature. The home, the public, the city and the national within the transnational space form layers of the spheres of belonging. It is the context where social relations, communication and action take place. This activity in turn shapes the meanings of identity and community. The domestic, the local, the public, the national and the transnational form an interconnected spatial matrix, where possibilities of belonging, for choosing not to belong and the existence of multiple communities emerge. In addition, the geography of social relations is changing as

much as the relations between spaces. They often stretch out over defined spaces but they meet in places that become unique points of their intersection.

Vassanji has envisaged a multidimensional concept of home as he bestrides the three continents with their socio-political twists and turns. This results in the creation of a hyphenated identity and an exilic precondition so much so that the tendency of home away from home develops on one hand and on the other no particular home as such. These circumstances are deftly pictured in his works. When asked in an interview as to why he wrote essentially about homeland Vassanji says he "was pushed by a sense of loss—maybe just a perceived loss—which later turned out to be real, of a homeland, of stories, of history, and all of that which—it seemed to me—would soon be forgotten and lost" (Sayed 288). Cynthia Sugars notes how the migration histories are primarily the products of memory,

> The interplay of private and public accounts, individual and collective memory, as well as the oral and written, combine to produce a chronicle that strives to make sense of migration histories as they affect individuals and their communities for generations to come. (584-585)

The place of memory held close by the characters conspicuously propels the discourse of rootedness and belongingness further accentuated by a quest for home. Vassanji interrogates his own community's history in his works. He writes at length about the Gujarati traders who migrated to Africa in the late 19th century. Africa and America are the background for his portrayal of Indian lives. Though he migrated to Canada from the United States, his emotional bonding with Africa is unequivocally truthful. A sense of identity and nostalgia about one's homeland has always been exhibited in the writings of the Indian diaspora. Writing from a hyphenated space M. G. Vassanji illustrates that multicultural identities constantly get ripped apart with respect to their language, class, race and gender differences. These disparities get transmuted and reconfigured in the translocal spaces. The notions of homeland i.e. the places of memory are remembered over and over again. Consequently, the emotional, political and cultural affiliations of the characters become inextricably linked to their identities.

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Anchee Min's *Red Azalea*: Memoir as an Enterprise to Self-discovery

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Abstract Alexander Pope's epigraph, "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; the proper study of mankind is man." captures the essence of what this paper sets to examine: Anchee Min's recollections of her past through her memoir and how it reflects a fragmented self. *Red Azalea*, her memoir, poignantly delineates her confused and conflicted self. This genre is apt, as it provides the opportunity to reach the past and analyze past experiences. Min's exploration of herself through her memoir is the first step to facilitate an understanding of self in order to reconstitute her self through her creative writing. By her self-narrative, Min engages in the role of an artist who allows the dynamics between her imagination and the power of language to be an agent of discourse for her past female self. This affable world of creative endeavor provides the space for writers to explore, rediscover and reconstitute the notion of self.

Keywords Anchee Min; memoir; self-discovery; *Red Azalea*

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Memoir: A Textual Depiction of the "Fractured" Self

The form of the memoir is typically employed in texts dealing with the search for a self because it bestows primacy to an individual's subjectivity and experience. The memoir is a literary form rooted in the private dimension of living, but poised ambivalently between private and public statements generated from one's memory. It is a platform where personal, historical, ideological and cultural issues are absorbed, articulated and reflected within the framework of the memoir. Generally, a memoir is a form of "biography, the writing of a life," and thus, it is included as a "branch of history" (Gass 178). William H. Gass tells us that a biography "requires quite a lot of labor, and therefore, when such a work is undertaken, one would expect the subject to be of some significance to history as a whole." (178). In his book *Finding A Form*, Gass explains that:

> A memoir is usually the recollection of another place or personality and its primary focus is outward bound: […] Even when the main attention of the memoir is focused inward, the scope to the memory tends to be limited […] and not wide enough to take in a life. (188-9)

This insight sets memoir apart from autobiography, with the latter chronicling one's life and being "wide enough to take in a life." Gass also observes that all diaries, journals, notebooks, chronicles, memoirs, travelogues and testimonies are different. The point where they concur is in their character: each one of these is "autobiographical" and "predicated on privacy" (186-8).[1] These instances are variable under the genre of self-life-writing. Of all, autobiography is considered the

1 Gass makes a summary of the differences between a diary, journal and notebook. According to him, a diary demands day-to-day entries, whereas a journal's "sweep is broader, more circumspect and meditative. Facts diminish in importance and are replaced by emotions, musing, thought." As for a notebook, it is no longer chronological. In fact, we learn that entries do not even require any dates (187-188).

most chronological and complete in describing an autobiographer's life experiences. The popularity of the autobiography has gained vast recognition and is considered the most sophisticated and well-researched of all the types of self-life-writing. However, Beth Lynne Brunk, a scholar of women's autobiography, informs us that the word "autobiography" was only coined in England in the beginning of the nineteenth century to take the place of the earlier term "memoir" (23). As such, if autobiography is recognized as a "fertile site" to draw out "women's inventive rhetorical strategies," certainly rhetoric via memoir is just as important (Brunk 19). Another critic, Leslie Schenk, in his article, "Memoirs: From Scribblings into High Art" defuses the "claptrap" that ascribes memoirists with "too little imagination to write fiction and too bad a memory to write the truth" (1). He goes on to say that "memoirs written qua memoirs" are a significant form and works of great art by citing great works done in the form of the memoir.[1] To Schenk's deepest regret, these "celebrities' memoirs are not admitted into the pantheon of belles letters" because for him, they deserve it (5). A memoir, the "art of reminiscences" as Schenk has called it, is a reflexive act of writing which can also be seen as a mirroring of the self.

In *Virginia Woolf: Moments of Being* (1985), Jeanne Schulkind's introduction draws on Woolf's memoirs to inform us that although memoirs may appear incoherent and "a random heaping together of fragments of a life," in reality, they contribute to a pattern of an emerging self:

> Yet the fragments do arrange themselves into a meaningful order; a pattern emerges which expresses Virginia Woolf's view of the self generally, and herself in particular, in ways that a conventional autobiography could not have done …. She believed the individual identity to be always in flux, every moment changing its shape in response to the forces surrounding it: forces which were invisible emerge, others sink silently below the surface, and the past, on which the identity of the present moment rests, is never static, never

1 Schenk's observation of how a number of the pioneering novels were written in the form of memoir is worthy to be mentioned. He gives a list of texts in the first-person reminiscences: *Robinson Crusoe, David Copperfield, Moby Dick, Jane Eyre, Henry Esmond, Tristram Shandy*. He also includes a list of recent works in this genre: Ford Madox Ford's *Good Soldier*, Willa Cather's *My Antonia*, Simone de Beauvoir's *Memoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, Saul Bellow's *More Die of Heartbreak*, William Boyd's *New Confessions*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Le Mur* and *Les Mots*, and Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. Schenk also brings to our attention several outstanding memoirs: Elie Wiesel's *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, Jean-Francois Revel's *Le voleur dans la maison vide*, and not forgetting Irish-American Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1-6).

> fixed like a fly in amber, but as subject to alteration as the consciousness that recalls it. (12)

The excerpt above clarifies how the form of the memoir, albeit comprising mere "fragments" of a life, uses these fragments which "arrange themselves into meaningful order" and contribute to a "pattern" of the self (12). The self is described as "always in flux, every moment changing its shape in response to the forces surrounding it"; this can be captured succinctly in a memoir, which then highlights an emerging pattern of this self (12). The memoir, which captures life experiences, is also likened to "a bowl that one fills and fills and fills" ("A Sketch of the Past" 64). Each new experience adds to the existing ones and also "displaces them ever so slightly and alters their previous meaning by forcing them into new combinations" (13-14). It is also important for us to bear in mind that the memoir is a compilation of one's memories, "the means by which the individual builds up patterns of personal significance to which to anchor his or her life and secure it against the 'lash of the random unheeding flail' " (21). This highlights the importance of the memoir in delineating a person's self, and hence, from here, is the relation of this to Min's portrayal of self in her memoir. The form of self-life-writing provides the opportunity to reach the past, analyze past experiences, and perhaps re-define oneself by experiencing them again while living in the present. It is a space of freedom and potentiality for validation and even re-definition of self. In essence, it is a space of self-creation, the dynamics of self-in-becoming. The attempt to write the self, or regard the self as narrative, is deeply bound up with the concerns of, in Min's case, a fractured self and the need to re-define the self.

Min's travails make her life story vivid and engaging. It is interesting to note how she incriminates herself as the "guilty agent" through her narration. As observed by Wenying Xu in her article, "Agency via Guilt in Anchee Min's *Red Azalea*,"

> *Red Azalea* is an exception to the exclusive focus on victimization common in most of the writings by Mainland Chinese immigrants dealing with the Cultural Revolution. Rather than portraying herself only as victim, she incriminates herself (even if only mildly) and thus proclaims that she did exercise agency: she did something for which she holds herself responsible and guilty. She is using her personal narrative as a way of engaging in a project of empowering herself as a responsible agent in her new world by reconstituting her identity in just the way that is so highly prized in the liberal Western community,

> acknowledging personal responsibility and guilt. (4)

This same sense of guilt is also noted in Jung Chang's autobiography, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (1991), as she contemplates the notion of "individual responsibility."

> In bringing out and nourishing the worst in people … Mao had created a moral wasteland and a land of hatred. But how much individual responsibility ordinary people would share, I could not decide. (495-6)

Both Chang and Min discarded the "moral superiority" tone through their respective autobiography and memoir, unlike many other Chinese writers who exonerated themselves of personal complicity from being a part of the GPCR. As Xu contends:

> As someone who lived through ten years of the political turmoil and personal agony of China "Cultural Revolution," I find these autobiographies unsatisfactory because of their high moral tone, which exonerates them from any responsibility for the horrors. […]. Many of them strive to portray their own moral superiority to those Chinese who betrayed, persecuted, or brutalized others for their own political security or advancement. […]. Almost all of these writers are silent about any personal complicity in the horrors of these events. (2)

Chang and Min, on the contrary, believe that no one was a mere victim and thus, no individual could fully disclaim responsibility. Min's self-representation as a "guilty agent" provides a new horizon of possibilities for her as an agent of discourse. According to Xu,

> [t]hey (some mainland Chinese immigrants' writers) are adopting a vocabulary that allows them to understand and speak of their involvement in the Cultural Revolution and making use of a reading public who can redeem their "inhumanity" with the liberal realization […]. (14)

Xu concludes that Min's memoir works in a dialectical way: firstly, to incriminate herself rather than to portray herself as a victim. In doing so, it serves another purpose, that of an agency to voice her need for self-discovery. Farmanfarmaian concurs with Xu's view on Min's boldness in incriminating herself: "she [Min]

defiantly takes on the responsibility for who she is, refusing to put the blame on the Cultural Revolution, party bosses or any of the other scapegoats she sees her countrymen turning to explain away what she calls the corruption of their souls" (1). Here, the dialectical relationship of Min's search is brought to light: on one hand, her search for who she was in China; on the other, the redelineating of her incoherent self. This is made possible through her choice of form, the memoir, which provides her the distance and space to analyze herself. The memoir, in short, serves as an agent of discourse about her past female self. Min's choice of a memoir instead of an autobiography is foregrounded in the fact that the former is a more effective form to explicate the idea of her many fragments and fractures. Admittedly, an autobiography has more continuity and unity. It traces an individual's life chronologically and closely, whereas a memoir is more selective and its form is abrupt and choppy. However, it is these distinctive qualities which poignantly capture, delineate and replicate the fractured self. Thus, a memoir opens up more space for a contemplation of and search for the self instead of just delineating the past in linear fashion and with the coherence than an autobiography may suggest.

As Gass points out, a memoir's "primary focus is outward bound," therefore, it is invaluable to measure how a self is subjected to the forces of the political upheavals of the time (188). The best means to analyze a particular period, the GPCR for instance, is really through the exploration of the prevalent themes of memoirs crafted after 1976, such as those by Gao Yuan, *Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution*, Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters: A Memoir*, Zhang Xianliang, *Half of Man Is Woman*, and Anchee Min, *Red Azalea* (Brownell and Wasserstrom 252). Indeed, Min's idea of writing a memoir functions as a springboard for her to voice her concerns and needs under the Communist regime which left no room for negotiation and led Min to feel deprived of a normal childhood or personal choices. Her memoir, hence, is essentially an enterprise in self-discovery. Through the narration of her life story, Min bears witness to the experiences of her past "fragmented" self, inevitably the darkest moments of her life. In doing so, she creates a space to attain a certain personal integration for a nascent self.

Like a particular *zeitgeist*, the outburst of autobiographical materials in post-Mao women's writing is characteristic of the predominant concern of the era or generation. Therefore, this genre of self-life-writing cannot simply be an autobiographical validation of their experiences and selfhood, but "a political strategy to deconstruct and renegotiate the structural relation between the personal and the public, as well as its underlying gender system" (Lai 26). Min's memoir, like Yu Luojin's *Dongtian de tonghua* (Winter's *Tale*), attests to the conventional

dismissal of women's writings for their supposed inability to transcend personal experiences and concern. As noted by Xu Jianyi and Zhang Qing, many contemporary critics have argued that post-Mao women's writing merited little significance in their literary value and quality because of the narrowness in subject matter and shallowness of social reflections and representations. Ming-yan Lai in "Telling Love: The Feminist Import of a Woman's Negotiation of the Personal and the Public in Socialist China" refutes such reductionistic criticism:

> Implicit in this kind of criticism is a reductive interpretation of women's focus on the personal as straightforward "autobiographical" transcription of actual experiences. Given the conventional understanding of autobiography as writing of and about the self, and the hegemonic association of feminine self with the 'private' and domestic realm of love, marriage, and family, such an interpretation simply furthers the predisposition to read women's writings as concerning nothing but the personal. (26)

Min's articulation of the personal serves three aims. First, to open up a space for self-expression; next, as an agent of discourse; and finally, to "craft" a self as against the atrophied self. In *Red Azalea*, Min neatly structures her narratives into three parts. Part One delineates her childhood to her adolescent years; Part Two brings us to the worst years of her life – toiling on a leech-infested farm; and finally, Part Three lightens up with the opportunity of becoming a lead actress. In each part, Min emphasizes strongly the sense of herself as provisional and indistinct. This comes across as a rather puzzling issue, yet central and important to Min.

This paper delves into the structure of the memoir to examine how each part brings across this issue. At the beginning of her memoir, Min clearly depicts a self that is dictated by the Party: her whole life is circumscribed by Mao's indoctrination and Madame Mao's operas. She memorized Mao's Little Red Book with great determination, sang Madame Mao's operas, and later served as a Little Red Guard. The memoir opens with a self-proclamation of her staunch pledge of loyalty to her country. This underlines her naïveté and ignorance of the devastating repercussions of her blind devotion and faith in Mao's teachings:

> I was raised on the teachings of Mao and on the operas of Madam Mao, Comrade Jiang Ching. I became a leader of the Little Red Guards in elementary school. This was during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

when red was my color. (*Red Azalea* 3)[1]

The two key persons who had immense influence in her life were Mao Zedong and his fourth wife, Jiang Ching (Jiang Qing).[2] Min relates her life story from elementary school where she was a good and obedient communist. She was selected as leader of the Little Red Guards because of her good grades. Oaths of fealty to Mao's doctrine were espoused in her declaration, "red is my color" (3). As Ross Terrill informs us, the color red is "a cultural appellation for Mao" (20). Min is representative of her generation. Her pledge is representative of the same commitment shown by her contemporaries. The description of her parents' occupation also shows the adults' compliance to Mao's call for loyalty. Her father works as "an instructor of industrial technique drawing at Shanghai Textile Institute" (3) despite his true love for astronomy. Her mother teaches at a "Shanghai Middle School" (3). Her parents, Min reflects, did not like their jobs, but they behaved correctly for their children's sake. From the opening of the memoir, the idea of the stripping of one's self is immediately impressed upon us. The notion of a fragmented self is explored right from the beginning and is sustained throughout the memoir. Her self-introduction, "I was an adult since the age of five" (4) conveys the idea of a robbed childhood. As the narratives unfold, Min owns up to a realization of an effaced self as she says, "I don't belong to myself" (140). These utterances appear on separate occasions, a hundred and thirty-six pages apart, but they are pertinent remarks which reveal the psychological make-up behind her words. Her obedience, in this light, was the only means to survive the demands of the revolutionary task force. Every single action, thought and word hinges on Mao's collectivistic ideal.

On another occasion, Min tells us of the careful choice of naming children. It seems that her neighbors had totally given in to the country's call for complete and unwavering loyalty. They called their children, "Guard of Red, Big Leap, Long March, Red Star, Liberation, Revolution, New China, Road of Russia, Resist U.S., Patriotic Forerunner, Matchless Red Soldier, etc." (4). Min is not oblivious to the absurdity of these names; in fact, she seems to be in agreement with her parents that it is necessary to have more original ideas. However, it is noted that they were

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1 Anchee Min, *Red Azalea* (New York: Berkley Books, 1994). All quotes from Min's memoir will be taken from this edition hereon.

2 The different spelling of the name "Jiang Ching" is a deliberate choice of the author. Perhaps, in this way, it is easier to distinguish Jiang Ching as a character in her memoir and fictional works from that of the historical figure. The latter's name is spelt "Jiang Qing."

"considered eccentric" for differing from the norm set by the Party (4). The sense of creativity and liberty of mind is discouraged and denied. Every individual is expected to place his loyalty with the community or country before his personal desires. Many times, we see Min, as a representation of her generation, honoring her country before her parents. In fact, Min secretly criticizes her parents' counter-revolutionary behavior. In a later interview, Min confessed that if she had known that her mother was a Christian, she would have reported her as a counter-revolutionary to the Communist Party.[1] Her position as the head of the Little Red Guards, her obsession with singing heroic operas and painstaking effort to memorize Mao's Little Red Book, demonstrate her total submission to the Party.

At the tender age of eleven, she is coerced into denouncing her favorite teacher, Autumn Leaves. This episode is given substantial attention and marks the end of Part One in Min's memoir before she continues with her new life in Red Fire Farm. It is an incident that is etched in her memory as she is convinced of Autumn Leaves' innocence. The overwhelming "guilt" she feels is of paramount importance because it serves as an agent of discourse for the writer to speak of her involvement in betraying and persecuting others for her own advancement or political security. At the same time, owning up to such inhumanities allows the writer to redeem him/herself and start afresh with a new sense of integrity. This is vital for Chinese immigrants "to gain empowerment in their new lives in the West" through "their reconstruction of their subject positions in the old country" (Xu 13). This particular event in Min's young life is crucial to show that when one's personal convictions collide with the Communist ideologies; the nationalist agenda will surely take precedence. Min's tone is emotional, peppered with guilt and remorse as she recalls the incident from a vantage point years later. In effect, her guilt underlines the fact that Autumn Leaves was innocent and unjustly treated:

> Autumn Leaves was […] an energetic teacher who never seemed to be tired of teaching. […] Once she completely lost her voice while trying to explain geometric progression to me. When she finally made me understand she laughed silently like a mute with her arms dancing in the air. […] One day when it was raining hard after class, she gave students her raincoat, rain shoes and her umbrella as they went home. She herself went home wet. The next day she had a fever, but she came to class and struggled on, despite her fever. By the time she finished her lecture, she had lost her voice again. (30-2)

1 This confession is drawn from one of her interviews, available on the internet website: <http://www.ivillage.com/books/intervu/fict/articles/0,,192468_87327,00.html>.

As if to assuage her own guilt and pain, she tells us that it was actually the school's new Party Secretary, a man addressed as "Secretary Chain," who not only pressured her to denounce and implicate Autumn Leaves as an American spy, but told Min exactly what to say:

> He said, Tell the masses how you were mentally poisoned. I said that I did not quite understand the words "mentally poisoned." Secretary Chain said, You are not mature enough to understand that yet. He then asked me to give an opinion on what kind of person I thought Autumn Leaves was. I told him the truth. Secretary Chain laughed loudly at me. […]. He stopped laughing and said, You shouldn't be discouraged by your immaturity. He made me feel disappointed in myself. Let me help you, he suggested. (33)

Min's confusion is obvious and apparent. She tells us how her "world turned upside down. [She] felt deeply hurt and used" (35) but succumbed to his persuasion when he twisted the facts and said that Autumn Leaves' goal was to make Min and others betray Communism. The episode on Autumn Leaves ends on this forlorn note. Having excelled at school, and having pleased her teachers by following Mao's teaching absolutely, Min is next instructed to go to the countryside to labor on a farm for women:

> When I was seventeen, life changed to a different world. The school's vice principal had a talk with me after his talks with many others … He told me that I belonged to one category. The category of becoming a peasant …. The policy from Beijing was a holy instruction. It was universally accepted. It was incumbent upon me to obey. […]. He said a true Communist would love to take challenges. She would take it with dignity. *I was* seventeen. *I was* inspired. *I was* eager to devote myself. *I was* looking forward to hardship. (43, emphasis mine)

Min is assigned to a rural outskirt farm, known as Red Fire Farm, located near the shore area of the East China Sea. When days turn into months and months into almost two years, Min's earlier enthusiasm dwindles. Even the depiction of the farm recedes into that of a barren, infertile and unproductive place. It is a poignant metaphorical allusion of Min's own life there. Her description of the "cotton" harvest demonstrates this:

> The cotton plants would bend to the side; they live in the shadow of the reeds. Their flowers were pitiful. They looked like pinkish-faced widows. The fruit - the cotton bolls they finally bore - were stiff nuts, thin, crooked, and chewed by insects, hiding in the hearts of the plants. It was cotton of the lowest quality. Not even qualified to be rated. (73-74)

It is a farm that "produced nothing but weeds and reeds"; she describes it as a "complete darkness" and a "hell" (100). The farm's depiction teems with descriptions of sterility and is a poignant metaphorical allusion of Min's own life there.

Chairman Mao made it incumbent for the youths to serve for their countryside as peasants. This took place from 1967—'76 and over seven and a half million city youths were involved. As Min informs us, every family must have a peasant worker, otherwise, they would be suspected of being, and ridiculed as counter-revolutionaries. Those who turned their backs on this policy sealed their own fates:

> [m]other reported that none of these people met a good end. They were shamed in the neighborhood. Their families were bothered every day until the appointed youth moved to the countryside. (177)

Also, on surface level, the decree was meant to provide gender equality. Feminists however, would argue that Mao's injunction on collectivism and egalitarian values were nothing more than a substitution of Confucius' patriarchy with Socialist patriarchy. As Lydia H. Liu argues:

> [t]he category of women, like that of class, has long been exploited by the hegemonic discourse of the state of China, one that posits the equality between men and women by depriving the latter of *their* difference (and not the other way around). In the emancipatory discourse of the state, which always subsumes women under the nationalist agenda, women's liberation means little more than equal opportunity to participate in public labor. (35, emphasis author's)

Indeed, gender equality in socialist China only meant equal opportunity to labor. In fact, in this socialist state, male and female were regarded as having equal opportunity and equal rights. When Min was asked by the Supervisor how she felt

at being a female in society, Min was only able to regurgitate Mao's propagandist notion of gender equality between male and female.

> […] Chairman had taught us everything about equal rights. Equal rights between men and women, equal rights among human beings. (272)

Equal opportunity to labor is not the only gender exploitation which occurred. The women were also deprived of their femininity and made sexless. In terms of appearance, the females were subjected to many "rules" of behavior (56). Min, fascinated by Little Green's boldness in enhancing her physical appearance, admitted that most women did not dare to decorate themselves as this was rather an act of "bourgeois allure" (57). Hence, she

> […] scorned [her] own desire to display [her] youth. A nasty desire, [she] told herself a hundred times. (57)

This was another form of self-abnegation couched as "political correctness." As Liu's penetrating observation reveals,

> [d]uring the Cultural Revolution, political correctness consisted largely in women wearing the same dark colors as men, keeping their hair short, and using no makeup. I am not suggesting that women ought to be feminine. But the fact that the state did not require men to wear colorful clothes, grow long hair, or use makeup, which would have produced an equally iconoclastic effect, indicates that it was woman's symbolic difference that had been specifically targeted and suppressed on top of all other forms of political repression. (35)

James Petras in his article, "The Chinese Cultural Revolution in Historical Perspective" discusses the infiltration of Maoist doctrine into every sphere of life where the "collectivist rule failed to acknowledge a distinction between public and private spheres of life." (453) Owing to Mao's perpetuation of the need for self-denial which most Scar Literature aptly portrayed, *Red Azalea* also pinpoints Min's

longing for a need to recover this fractured female self.[1] Her obsession with the role of the main character in the biographical film of Jiang Qing in "Red Azalea" dramatizes her need to be someone else, someone more empowered and stronger. She desires to be Red Azalea. This is to say that the attraction of playing Red Azalea lies in the appealing figure of Jiang Qing, one of the most powerful women in China. The film, entitled "Red Azalea," was meant to celebrate Jiang Qing as the liberated daughter and the figure of a strong female Party leader. It was part of Jiang Qing's cultural apparatus to portray herself as an ideal working-class girl. The choice of the "shrubs of the genus Rhododendron and members of the heath family," the azalea, lies in the plant's attributes. It requires acidic soil and is found chiefly in hills and mountains, mainly in North America and Asia ("The Encyclopedia Americana" 888). The azalea's distinctive quality lies in its being a hardy plant. Perhaps Jiang Qing's choice in depicting it as an enduring shrub in harsh regions is to depict her own perseverance through life's difficulties. The choice of the color red correlates with the notion of passion. Min's secret affair with the Supervisor at "Peace Park" throws light on this:

> I see the hills of youth covered with blood-colored azaleas. The azaleas keep blooming, invading the mountains and the planet. The earth is bitten and it groans, wailing nonsensically in pleasure-drive. (291)

Undeniably, the idea is that Red Azalea is an embodiment of communist passion. Metaphorically, Jiang Qing ascribes to herself this image of a faithful comrade, serving the Party full-heartedly. The Supervisor is adamant that Min play Red Azalea, despite her failed attempt during the audition. He gives her another chance to replace Chearing Spear. He, in fact, personally guides and encourages Min to portray the soul of Red Azalea.

> [from] this moment on, I want you to forget your family name. You are Red Azalea now, said the Supervisor. Let me hear your name, please. I shivered and pronounced it loudly: I am Red Azalea. He nodded with satisfaction. (309)

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1 "Scar Literature" (Scar Literature hereafter), on the other hand, is a generic term used in writings of post-Mao China. This mode of literature refers to fictional texts produced in the specific period of the immediate aftermath of the GPCR, from 1977 to around 1981. It is still one of the major preoccupations in the works of writers from mainland China, as well as those who have emigrated.

To cast herself in the role of an empowered woman is alluring and enticing, a breath of fresh air to her mundane, sterile and suffocating life: "I am the embodiment of Red Azalea. I am my role" (326). From Part Three onwards, Min yearns to break out of the miserable hardship and detention on the farm. Her leaving Red Fire Farm is symbolic of her severing herself from her old identity. Henceforth, she fixes her mind on getting the lead role as Red Azalea. As Red Azalea, she is brought to the world of imagination, dream and fantasy in which herself may become fluid and capable of change. The final part of the memoir develops Min's desire to reconstitute and refashion herself. Her obsession with the role of Red Azalea demonstrates this intense yearning of possessing imaginative space to become autonomous. As things would have it, her hopes collapse with the death of Mao Zedong on September 9, 1976.

The discussion so far has dealt with the importance of the memoir in delineating Min's effaced self under the "masculinist" nationalist agenda. By structuring her memoir in three parts, Min neatly and aptly shows the unity, thought and sensibility of her predicaments. Each unique experience underlies her responses to the repressive regime. Self-realization, thus, is prerequisite to the next step of self-validation and reconfiguration of self.

The Truncated Self as A Result of the Restrictive Gender Norms

In Imperial China, the seclusion of women from public life was considered proper. In the Republican era (1912-1948), however, these previously admired women became symbols of backwardness, pity and targets of modernization efforts (Brownell and Wasserstrom 25-28). Hence, when the Communist revolution succeeded and the PRC was instituted (1949), leaders advocated women's liberation through annihilating all orthodox or feudal practices. Mao Zedong, as noted in Kristeva's "On Chinese Women," had written passionately in his youth about the injustices of patriarchy governed by Confucius' kinship structures. According to Mao, these structures were considered symptomatic of all that was wrong with the old order. On a broader scope, an even more crucial explanation was that China was impelled to reconstruct its official gender rhetoric because Western imperialists said that "the subjugation of women in China came to symbolize the subjugation of China in the world of nations."[1] Both situations led the CCP to promote the strengthening of women's position by enforcing their participation in labor in the public sphere. Mao's trajectory of gender identities heightened during the GPCR, a

1 Lisa Rofel, "Liberation Nostalgia and a Yearning for Modernity." *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, eds. Christina Gilmartin et. al. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994) 236.

period which has been characterized by "gender erasure" or "socialist androgyny," when both men and women wore short hair and donned "Mao suits" (Brownell and Wasserstrom 252; Finnance 3-36). With that, the government also utilized women's so-called "equality" as "the sign of China's qualifications for entrance into advanced nationhood in a western-dominated neocolonialist world order" (Rofel 244). Mao pronounced the end of class oppression and propagated equality through his slogan: "The times have changed; men and women are the same." With this proposition, the image of "Iron Girls—strong, robust, muscular women who boldly performed physically demanding jobs traditionally done by men" was valorized, celebrated and disseminated through various media (Honig 255). Women dramatically deviated from their perceived traditional femininity and resorted to wearing army-like attire and wearing broad leather belts. They also wielded weapons and displayed a capacity for verbal expletives and even physical assault. These acts were regarded as efforts to extirpate the old stereotypes of feminine behavior. They indicated what Honig describes as a radical aberration from the feudal past (255-68). But this slogan could not really justify the claim of gender neutrality; instead, it required women to behave like men. This trenchant insight is irrefutable because "[a]lthough men and women were declared equal, the CCP defined equality by erasing women's difference from men, and thus women were expected both to look and to behave as men did at that time" (Somerson 104).

Honig in "Maoist Mappings of Gender: Reassessing the Red Guards," remarks that the "gender-neutral style that was emulated by teenage girl Red Guards who cut their hair short (or more daringly, shaved their heads), donned army clothes, and marched barefoot through city streets" represented a period when femininity was deliberately effaced (255). Female militancy instead was valorized and popularized through "Red Detachment of Women" and the historical figure of Jiang Qing.[1] Mao's fourth wife, who rose to political prominence during GPCR, always appeared in military attire and represented the paragon of the "Iron Girl" image. She, in short, symbolized the rejection of femininity as part of shackling Chinese

1 *Red Detachment of Women* is one of the eight famed model operas. The film made its debut in the early 1960s and was premiered as an opera four years later. The plot of the story is based on historical events. It takes place on Hainandao and centers on the heroic efforts of a young slave girl, Wu Qinghua, to resist a wicked and evil landlord. She manages to escape and eventually joins the CCP's Women's Detachment, a group of heroic female guerrillas that wreaks havoc on the local landlords. The story ends with Wu's vow to live by Mao's motto, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" (Wilke 426-29).

tradition.[1] Despite this rejection prescribed by the official discourse, Honig informs, "gender identity and gender relationships were being continually contested and reformulated" (256). Her essay explores the significance of female ferocity and the role of violence in re-mapping male and female identities in the GPCR. As she observes,

> […] personal accounts and memoirs of the Cultural Revolution reveal that its violence was in fact deeply gendered, sexualized, and enmeshed in contested notions of masculinity and femininity. This does not mean that violence was *about* gender, but rather that its practice and representations had clearly gendered dimensions. (256, emphasis author's)

To Honig, the most prominent theme in memoirs crafted in the aftermath of the GPCR actually serves as a consideration of women's violent behavior. There are two ways of looking at female ferocity during GPCR: firstly, female compulsion to militancy, a dramatic turn from their "normal" behaviors, which was an effort to compete with their male counterparts; and in doing so, they upheld Mao's equality of the sexes. Another explanation for female violence was "attributed to the particularly severe forms of "sexual repression" to which young girls had been subjected. Whether sexual repression referred to control of women's sexuality per se, or to a more general social control for female behavior, remains unclear" (261-262).

Both perspectives mark a radical departure from women's conventional deportment. The official ideology also imposed the desexualization of women's femininity through advocating plainness and sexless dress codes.[2] Such social restraints virtually denied women any way of realizing their femininity and achieving natural sexual fulfillment. Such restrictive gender norms reshaped society during the GPCR. Min, in her memoir, captures this remarkably. Through her descriptions of the repressed female sexuality, Min delineates a truncated female self and thus, interrogates sex-identity politics within the framework of the memoir.

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1 For a more detailed account of Jiang Qing's dress code, see Yen Chia-chi and Kao Kao, *The Ten-Year history of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Taipei: Institute of Current Chinese Studies, 1988) 460-62.170).

2 For further reading on the semiotic of dress, refer to Antonia Finnance's "What Should Chinese Women Wear? A National Problem." Through the charting of the changes in Chinese women's dress over the past century, we can delineate the shifting position of the figure of the Chinese woman within nationalist discourse. See Antonia Finnance and Anne McLarren, eds., *Dress, sex and text in Chinese culture* (Australia: Monash Asia Institute, 1999) 3-35.

Underscoring Min's exploration of her fractured self is the reconfiguration of female gender identity. Gender constitutes a major trope for the construction for the self. The phenomenon of the "masculinization" of women is reflective of a truncated self, and indirectly spurs the practices that subvert official discourse that sublimated all desires into desire to serve and obey the Party.

Wendy Somerson's article, "Under the mosquito net: Space and sexuality in Red Azalea" is insightful to convey that Min's exploration of her own sexuality in her memoir is, in fact, a subversive reaction towards the state "degendering" of women in Communist China. Min explicates the account of restricted sexuality through four main occurrences: Little Green's narcissistic inclinations, her own sexual awakening, her furtive lesbian encounter, and finally, her sexual liaison with the androgynous Supervisor. The sequel of her complicated sexual relationships is what Somerson regards as a subversive tool, couched in the phrase, "desire as resistance" (108). "Sexuality today is," according to Jeffrey Weeks, "perhaps to an unprecedented degree, a contested zone. It is more than a source of intense pleasure or acute anxiety; it has become a moral and political battlefield" (4). This is because, as Weeks further stresses, sexual meanings are not "neutral, objective phenomena, but art the bearers of important relations of power" (177). The polymorphous dimension of sexuality, concurrently, invites us to reevaluate and reinterpret the significance of Min's portrayal of her repressed sexuality. The suppression of her sexuality stands as a "metonymy" of her fragmented self. To begin with, Min insists on the preeminence of women's bodies in her narrative as a means of renegotiating her subject-position to enable her to articulate her predicament. The inscription of "body narrative," in the eyes of feminists, would be an attempt to recover and reinstate her truncated self as demonstrated through the following four main events.

During the reign of the CCP, the Party executed unwarranted social restrictions: one of them was the stringent prohibition against any contact with the opposite sex. Any male and female relationship had to be endorsed by the Party. This was an "obligatory procedure," lest the couple be viewed as treacherous.[1] Little Green's episode best demonstrates the Party's harsh social restrictions. Somerson sees her

1 We can gather this "obligatory procedure" from Chang's autobiography, where her parents had to apply for permission to date each other (with a view to marriage): After hearing each other's frank accounts of their past lives, my father said he was going to write to the Jinzhou City Party Committee asking for permission to "talk about love" (*tan-lian-ai*) with my mother, with a view to marriage. This was the obligatory procedure. My mother supposed it was a bit like asking permission from the head of the family, and in fact that is exactly what it was: the Communist Party was the new patriarch (170).

as a representative of "a different form of resistance to official doctrine" (107). Little Green's life is a bold display of "contempt for the rules":

> [s]he was daring. Dared to decorate her beauty. She tied her braids with colorful strings while the rest of us tide our braids with brown rubber bands. Her femininity mocked us. […]. She was the Venus of the farm's evening. (56-58)

However, she was denied her desire to display her femininity and to indulge in her unquenched sexual appetite. Any expressions of love were strictly forbidden and punishable, even if they happened between heterosexual lovers. This is most poignantly illustrated when Little Green was caught with her lover. Their relationship was considered treacherous and an act of violation of the Party's trust:

> Little Green screamed. It broke the night. She was in her favorite shirt-the one embroidered with pink plum flowers. The lights shone on her naked buttocks. […]. The man with Little Green was skinny, wore glasses, and looked very bookish. He pulled up his pants and tried to run. He was caught immediately by the group led by Deputy Commander Lu, who pulled out her rifle and held it to the bookish man's head. (65)

After a public trial, the incident was concluded with the execution of the man who was labeled a "rapist" (66). Little Green, unable to withstand such inhumanity, gradually slipped into insanity and later committed suicide by drowning herself. Her pathetic state is a reminder of the harsh and uncompromising iron-fisted rules of the Party. Somerson comments that "Little Green's severe punishment and subsequent death exemplify the threat her resistance and expression of desire posed to official discourse" (107).

The idea of a truncated self is also apparent in the individual's alienation and suffocation within the repressive system. The other two prominent characters, Yan and Lu, epitomize Maoist zealots. Through these characters, Min reveals the deep-seated sense of an individual's alienation within this repressive regime. She constantly finds herself in conflict with jealous antagonists. On Red Fire Farm, where she was scouted for the role of Red Azalea, her dream and only means of an escape from the hellish farm was almost disrupted by an envious Lu. When she was auditioning, Chearing Spear, one of the other four contenders, also schemed her way into securing the role. At one juncture, Min lamented, "Chearing Spear often

reminded [her] of Lu. It seemed that [she] could never escape from Lus. There were Lus all over China" (248). The repressive ideology imposed was not only disruptive to human relationships; it brought the worst out of people. To survive, one had to be ruthless and scheming.

At the turn of Min's eighteenth year, she underwent a phase of sexual awakening: "[a] nameless anxiety had invaded me. It felt like a sweating summer afternoon. […] It was the ripeness of the body. It began to spoil. The body screamed inside trying to break the bondage. I was restless. […]. The body and the restlessness worked hand in glove. They were screaming in me, breaking me in two (69-70). She began to examine her own body, out of curiosity: "I used a small mirror to examine my body, to examine the details of its private parts. I listened to my body carefully. I heard its trouble, its disturbance. It had been trying to capture something, a foreign touch, to soothe its anxiety, but in vain" (70). This experience underscored her sexual awakening, which hitherto, had been stunted by the Party's stringent sanctions of a sexless society. Min did not personalize her desire; in fact, the shift from what she termed "my body" to "[t]he body" which "demanded to break away from its ruler, the mind" is Min's way of saying that this unquenched sexual urge was a common situation shared by many other women on the farm. Somerson astutely notes that,

> [t]he mind as the privileged term in the mind/body split becomes emblematic of official discourse which utilizes this opposition to suppress bodies that might resist or disrupt its doctrine. While women's bodies are supposed to function only as workers to advance China's position, Min links her individual body to the social body and asserts that women's bodies have desires that cannot be contained through recourse to official ideology. (108)

The proposition of "desire as resistance" is brought to the fore once again when Min's admiration of Yan turns into sexual desire (Somerson 108). On one hand, Min's desire to be Yan is partially due to the rhetoric of the masculinized "Iron Girl" figure. Yan, who is the secretary and commander of the Red Fire Farm, is famous for her "iron shoulders," and "her blisters were the size of thumbs" from her laborious work (60). Yan, in Min's eyes, exemplifies the image of a good proletarian as propagated by the Party. Yan becomes Min's heroine. Determined to emulate her, Min begins to "imitate Yan's way of walking, talking and dressing" (62).

This relationship begins in the context of a narrative of desire as they both negotiate their feelings by assuming the different gendered roles (Somerson 108).

At various moments, Min and Yan reverse gender roles back and forth, both wishing the other were a man. Yan confides, "[t]oo bad you are not a man" when they share the same bed (121). Eventually, they transgress these previously prescribed roles, turning the heterosexual narrative into a homoerotic space. Their erotic encounter reinterprets the original heterosexual narrative, as Min admits, "I did not know what role I was playing anymore: her imagined man [Leopard] or myself" (142, addition mine). The blurring of gendered roles is again a prominent issue of the truncated self, as these women are de-familiarized with their own sexuality. Somerson explains:

> [a]lthough official discourse during the Cultural Revolution suppressed the private sphere and sexuality, through its promotion of strong roles for women in attempts to posit China as a strong country that could compete with the "West," it inadvertently created a space of desire between women; social production is clearly linked to the production of desire. Whereas the state discourse claimed to "degender" women, it masculinized them on the official level; however, when actual women occupy these masculinized positions, they change what it means to be both a man and a woman. […], when women take on the male role of the narrative, they simultaneously revise the romance narrative itself and reconfigure symbolic positions of desire. Women can thus articulate desire from the traditionally active male sexual position for either other women or men; desire need not be restricted to active/passive, but it can encompass two strong active beings, and thus sexual desire itself is redefined. (109)

The redefinition of sexual desire is an attempt to define identity. Weeks points out that through the preeminence of the subject of sex in contemporary political and moral discourse,

> […] we are expected to express our subjectivity, our sense of intimate self, our 'identity'. Through its grids of definition, we are subjected to the operations of power, fixed in a world which tries to form us, but which we could re-form. […]. Sexuality could be a potentiality for choice, change and diversity. (5)

The symbolic position of "desire as resistance" is further stretched when Min becomes involved in another relationship. This time it is with a feminized man of position and power, the Supervisor. When she first sees him, she describes him

as "femininely handsome" and later wonders, "[w]as he a woman or a man? He seemed to be both. He was grotesquely beautiful" (260). The Supervisor's gender "ambiguity," Somerson remarks, "dislodges gender and sexuality from their traditional ontological configurations" (111). Min, in doing so, shows that even men experienced the sense of the truncated self under the nationalist agenda.

Min's entanglement with Yan is the most fully elaborated episode on relationship in *Red Azalea*. She traces how the friendship gradually evolves into a lesbian relationship, with several passages describing highly sensual and erotic encounters between the two. They are both emotionally and sexually starved young women, deprived of any possibility of fulfilling their personal desires. This passionate affair is conducted secretly under the "mosquito net" and under constant threat of being discovered which would have led to possible severe execution. From the compulsive need to emulate, she gradually channels her admiration to "[worshipping]" Yan: "I must have a heroine to worship, to follow, to act as a mirror" (76). This desire to "have a heroine to worship" is an expression of Min's sense of an inadequate self. She needs an exemplary figure "to act as mirror" in order to be a reflection of what she aspires to become. Only then is she able to recover from the sense of self-deficiency and affirm her self-worth.

A "mirror" is a symbol commonly used to express self-affirmation as seen in fairy tales. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, the Wicked Witch is overtly concerned about the mirror's answer to, "Who is the fairest one of all?" Similarly, Min, like the Queen/Wicked Witch, needs the "mirror" to affirm herself. At an even deeper level, Lacan identifies the mirror stage as pivotal to identity. It is a basic differentiation between two orders within signifying practices: the signifier and signified. The mirror stage provides a person with a "spatial location or position" to locate only "an unstable identity" as the mirror-double of the self is a mere reflection (Grosz 45-6). Therefore, Min's curiosity with the mirror is actually a desire of seeing herself through a mirror's reflection. This mirroring act is important to her as she seeks to understand her growing sexuality. In Min's case, her sexual energy breaks loose from the confines of the regime through her sexual gratification with Yan. Earlier on, as she examines her own body, she thinks about men. This is an expression of the need for human intimacy in reaction against the repressed sexuality of the official discourse. Her lesbian encounter is an outlet, a means to reach out for human contact and a means of fulfilling her sexual needs. The outlawing of sexual desires was an official decree but, Min demonstrates that women have physical desires that cannot be contained through the recourse of the official ideology. Min, in going against the grain, disrupts the official decree.

Indeed, she confirms Somerson's proposition that "desire is resistance." From the feminists' perspective, lesbianism, which is concerned with sexuality, becomes the focal point where women's lives are reconstructed (Martin 83). Sexuality constitutes the ground of identity. Elizabeth Wilson explains, "'sexuality' was about identity and gender, about masculine and feminine, about desire, fantasy, and the whole construction of the self" (360). Some see lesbianism as a vital point of resistance, as "validating a denied sexuality"; others, as a "relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affection are directed towards one another. It becomes a synonym for sisterhood, solidarity and affection and as such a basic aspect of feminism" (Weeks 201-202). The common ground of lesbianism is about identity and sexuality because it offers the space for interrogation, defies the fixity of identity and essentially defines a life (Cooper 2; Martin 79 and Wilson 360; Weeks 201-209). Min, in her lesbian discourse, reclaims her sexuality by revoking the mainstream ideology imposed by the regime. This may be construed as her first step to recover her need for self-affirmation and reshape her stunted female identity.

Conclusion

Suffice to say that the hodge-podge of memories allows Anchee Min to explore her past in the Socialist realism of the fifties and sixties very effectively. From the discussion above, her memoir succinctly delineates an attenuated self. It is not just a personal spectacle of the past, but it proffers her the opportunity to reclaim her female self. When the past and present coalesce, both are enriched and this helps in the shaping of a self. Her memoir, therefore, is a textual validation of subjectivity, a critical reflection on the relation between subject constitution, representation of experiences, and knowledge production. Wang Gan, a male critic, affirms the autobiographical bent in Chinese women's writing of the 1990s. He thinks that "women's self-dissecting exposure of their personal lives constitutes their most valuable contribution to literature, supposedly because such acts promote an emancipation of individuality (*gexing jiefang*) that China sorely needs" (Lai 44). Min, in her memoir, does not only delineate a paralyzed self-sublimated under the Maoist regime. Through the power of language and the power of imagination, Min "reclaims agency for women by disrupting official discourse and revealing the potential effects of 'degendering'" (Somerson 112). Min's memoir, *Red Azalea*, poignantly delineates her confused and conflicted self. The genre is apt, as it provides the opportunity to reach the past and analyze past experiences. Through this, she engages in the process of making the self-public, of defining and creating the self by experiencing her past again while living in the present. Writing, hence,

serves the purpose of validating past experiences and is thus also an agent of discourse for her past female self. It is an enterprise locked in self-discovery which oils the process of becoming.

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Towards a Coherent Society: Family Warmth and Psychological Peace in Luisa May Alcott's *Little Women*

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Abstract The main aim of this paper is to reveal the feelings of family warmth and psychological peace in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. Besides, the paper seeks to indicate how strong ties and sincere love among the members of the family lead to the cohesion and stability of society. The novel tells the story of four sisters who are part of a poor but loving family. With their father off to war, the four sisters have only their mother left to encourage them to be the best version of themselves at all times. As they go through love and loss, they truly do learn to become "little women." Love, warmth, and psychological peace prevailing in the four sisters' family not only help them achieve success in life but also make their family, the central unit of society, stable and coherent.

Key words Alcott; family, *Little Women*; society

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Introduction

Throughout ages, the family has been seen as the cornerstone of society. In pre-modern and modern societies, it has been regarded as the most fundamental unit of social organization. Accordingly, the family plays an essential role in social cohesion. In other words, we can reasonably expect the cohesiveness and stability of a society that depends on the unity and strength of its most basic unit, the

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family. If members of the one family love each other, help each other, encourage each other, and if their life is characterized by family warmth and psychological peace, this will positively be reflected on society itself and will of course make it coherent and stable, simply because society is a group of single families. That's why governmental and non-governmental organizations in different parts of the world stress the importance of the role played by the family in the cohesion of society. In recent decades, this role has been considered to be even more necessary and more urgent due to the increasingly divergent and often conflicting values and practices that characterize life nowadays. Accordingly, studying family warmth and psychological peace in Luisa May Alcott's *Little Women* is of great importance as it offers a positive example of the stable family whose solidarity contributes to the cohesion and stability of society in general.

In "The Family as the Fundamental Unit of Society," Allan Carlson highlights "the natural and proper place of the family as the fundamental unit of society" (28). Sumita Chudhuri, in "Social Development and the Family," describes the family as "a near sacred community with its own particular rituals and practices," pointing out how the family "always thinks of its own well-being, looks after the old and aged, and is the fundamental unit of human society" (1). In "The Role of Families in Social and Economic Empowerment of Individuals," Zitha Mokomane states, "Stable functional families … contribute to youth social empowerment by providing many of the factors that protect young people from engaging in risky sexual behaviour, drug use and abuse, delinquency, and other anti-social behaviours" (3).

Drawing on the present literature, the researcher has found that most of the studies dealing with the idea of how the cohesion of family contributes to the general cohesion of society rarely provide examples of coherent families and how the members of such consistent families stand as good examples for the other members of society. Through her study of Luisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, the researcher has discovered that the novel offers an example of the stable family in which the four sisters enjoy family warmth and psychological peace, a feeling that strongly pushes them to challenge difficulties, achieve their dreams, and become successful people who can add to their society and make it coherent and prosperous.

Luisa May Alcott

An influential American writer, Luisa May Alcott was born in 1832 and died in 1888. Alcott was lucky to grow up among the great intellectuals and thinkers of the day, such as Henry David Thoreau, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Alcott was deservedly an eminent novelist.

Among her famous novels are *Will's Wonder Book* (1870), *An Old Fashioned Girl* (1870), *Work: A Story of Experience* (1873), *Beginning Again, Being a Continuation of Work* (1875), *Eight Cousins* or *The Aunt-Hill* (1875), *Rose in Bloom*: *A Sequel to Eight Cousins* (1876), *Under the Lilacs* (1878), *Jack and Jill: A Village Story* (1880), and *Proverb Stories* (1882). She also wrote well-known short story collections for children such as *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag* (1872–1882), *Lulu's Library* (1886–1889), *Flower Fables* (1849), *On Picket Duty, and Other Tales* (1864), *Morning-Glories and Other Stories* (1867), *The Candy Country* (1885), *A Garland for Girls* (1888), and *The Brownie and the Princess* (2004).

Little Women was mainly published in two volumes in 1868 and 1869. The first volume was written quickly over several months "at the request of Alcott's publisher and greeted with an immediate commercial and critical success," writes Zhang pointing out how "readers were attracted by the story and demanded to know more about the characters. Therefore, Alcott quickly completed a second volume, which was also a great success. The two volumes were issued in 1880 in a single work entitled Little Women" (503). Set in New England in the mid-nineteenth century, the novel takes us into

> the lively, combative, and caring atmosphere of the March family parlor. There we are introduced to the four young sisters, each with intriguing personalities, processing an energy specifically their own. We become privy to their dreams and disappointments, their squabbles and collective imagination, the immediate world they learn to maneuver. Each struggling with their lot, but accountable to the expectations placed upon them. (Smith)

Family Warmth and Psychological Peace in *Little Women*

Based on Alcott's own life, *Little Women* traces the lives of four sisters Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March, depicting their passage from early childhood to mature womanhood. The father is off at war and the mother, Marmee, is the inspiring power that always provides support and encouragement. Meg, the eldest sister, is a responsible and kind person who mothers her younger sisters when their mother is absent. Jo, the second-eldest sister and protagonist of the novel, struggles hard to be a writer. It is worth noting that her character is based on the character of Louisa May Alcott herself. Beth, the third-eldest sister, loves music and finds great happiness in pleasing others. Amy, the youngest sister, dreams to be a successful lady with a high position in society.

Alcott's portrayal of the strains and delights of family life in the novel is distinctive. It has a telling message for young women everywhere. The four sisters do not have much money, but they have family warmth and psychological peace that amazingly endow their life with deep meaning as they gradually change into little women bearing great responsibilities. Alcott's *Little Women* shows how the young woman can find in her family the good model and the honest advice that enable her to choose the right path in her life. Thus, there is a universal lesson to be learned by young women everywhere from the examples offered by the author in this novel. Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy stand as good models for other young women in society, as each of them can distinctively find her own way, can outstandingly achieve what she yearns for, can effectively keep her family coherent and solid, and can positively contribute to the total welfare and stability of her society.

Outstandingly, the mother plays an important role in the lives of the four girls. For the girls, their mother Marmee is the mother and the father at the same time. While Mr. March is away from home during the Civil War, Marmee strives hard "to keep things together with her four temperamental, feuding, loving teenage daughters. Based on Alcott's own mother, she's the foundation of morality and love the March sisters return to in times of trouble" (Lenker). Marvelously, she provides her daughters with all they want, nurturing them with love, compassion, kindness, and peace of mind. Her greatest wish in life is to see her daughters happy and successful. As she states in the novel,

> I want my daughters to be beautiful, accomplished, and good. To be admired, loved, and respected. To have a happy youth, to be well and wisely married, and to lead useful, pleasant lives. (105)

Throughout her life, she presents the quality of purity, piety, and hard work. She stands as a model for girls to follow in order to be good women in the future. She wonderfully creates an enjoyable atmosphere inside the house, leading her daughters to sing a song every night before they go to bed. As Alcott writes,

> At nine they stopped work, and sang, as usual, before they went to bed….and it had become a household custom, for the mother was a born singer. The first sound in the morning was her voice as she went about the house singing like a lark, and the last sound at night was the same cheery sound, for the girls never grew too old for that familiar lullaby. (12)

It is the mother who sets the rules at home for the girls to follow. At the same time, she responds to their needs and requests, encouraging them to depend on themselves and become responsible people. Providing the four girls with an atmosphere characterized with family warmth and psychological peace, the mother opens the gate for her daughters' ambitions and aspirations. Guiding her daughters into success and self-assertion, she tells them:

> Our burdens are here, our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace which is a true Celestial City. Now my little pilgrims, suppose you . . . see how far on you can get before Father comes home. (11)

Armed with family support and encouragement, the four girls become ready to begin their journey towards achieving their goals and dreams. Let us start with Margaret or Meg, the eldest sister. From the beginning, Meg is shown to us as a serious girl who resembles her mother in many aspects. She considers herself responsible for her sisters and for their success in life. She never forgets her mother's valuable advice to her and to her younger sisters:

> To be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman, and I sincerely hope my girls may know this beautiful experience. It is natural to think of it, Meg, right to hope and wait for it, and wise to prepare for it, so that when the happy time comes, you may feel ready for the duties and worthy of the joy. My dear girls, I am ambitious for you, but not to have you make a dash in the world, marry rich men merely because they are rich….I'd rather see you poor men's wives, if you were happy, beloved, contented, than queens on thrones, without self-respect and peace. (105)

Meg is always referred to as beauty and when her mother is away from home, she outstandingly manages the household and guides her younger sisters. She is a second mother for them. One of her main goals is to make her sisters grow into little women. An important trait of Meg is that she sometimes attempts to change who she is in order to satisfy others. To help her family, Meg decides to work as a governess for a wealthy family called the Kings. Meg is married to John Brooke, a poor man she loves, and they have two children. Meg finds herself in ordinary life, doing the household and caring for her sisters. She is a simple character whose main aspiration is to keep her family coherent and stable. Alcott has indeed succeeded in

portraying Meg as a truly perfect "little woman."

Josephine or Jo, the second oldest girl of the March family, is the main character of the novel. She is the heroine of *Little Women*. Her character is based on the character of Louisa May Alcott herself. At the beginning of the novel, she is fifteen years old. The main aim she pursues throughout the book is to be a famous writer, and she does her best to achieve this dream. To help her family, Jo decides to work. When we first meet Jo at the beginning of the book, we find her having a job as a companion for her old, rich Aunt March. However, she loses this job but works later as a governess in New York. Jo is an independent character with a hot temper that sometimes puts her in trouble. She loves her family and is ready to do anything that makes her sisters happy.

At the start of the book, Jo shows full rejection of the idea of marriage because, according to her, marriage will take her away from her beloved sisters. Though very close to her friend and neighbor Theodore Laurie, she refuses to marry him and finally, by the end of the novel, she marries Professor Friedrich Bhaer whom she meets in New York and they have two children. When Jo first meets Professor Bhaer, she has a positive impression of him. This is how she describes him to her mother:

> A regular German — rather stout, with brown hair tumbled all over his head, a bushy beard, good nose, the kindest eyes I ever saw, and a splendid big voice that does one's ears good, after our sharp or slipshod American gabble. His clothes were rusty, his hands were large, and he hadn't a really handsome feature in his face, except his beautiful teeth, yet I liked him, for he had a fine head, his linen was very nice, and he looked like a gentleman…(370)

Compared to John and Meg's marriage, Professor Bhaer and Jo's marriage is more impressive. While john feels proud of his beautiful wife, Professor Bhaer is wholly devoted to Jo, and his love for her never fades even after they get children. Perhaps the most important aspect of Jo's character is her love for literature and her determination to be a star in the literary world. She adores writing so much that she writes interesting short stories and composes dramatic works for her sisters to perform and enjoy. Thanks to her mother and sisters' encouragement and thanks to the warmth and the psychological peace provided for her by her family, Jo successfully attains what she has aspired to.

Elizabeth or Beth is the third sister in the March family. She is quiet, kind, gentle, very shy, and fond of music. She is sixteen years old when the story begins.

She is the peacemaker among her sisters. Like Meg, she attempts hard to make other people happy; and similar to Jo, she is keen to keep her family coherent and consistent. She is a main source of compassion, thoughtfulness, warmth, and psychological peace in the family. Different from her other three sisters, Beth is so good, so virtuous, and so ideal that she seems to be unfit to survive in the realistic world depicted for her by Alcott. Developing scarlet fever, Beth remains at home and Jo, her closest sister, stays beside her all time. However, she recovers from her disease but her health begins to fail very badly. Her family begins to realize that Beth will not live much longer and she herself has the feeling that her time with her loved parents and sisters is short.

Despite this heavy burden, Beth is satisfied and keen to leave a mark on the world. She is enthusiastic about helping others and making everyone happy, not only her family but other people as well. To keep the children who go to school and pass the March house happy, Beth knits and sews beautiful things for them. She is really a pure creature who finds happiness in keeping others happy and smiling. However, Beth finally dies, leaving a world that does not suit her angelic nature.

The death of innocent Beth leaves a deep wound in the March family. It is the saddest event throughout the novel. Yet, the portrayal of the character of Beth, with her innocence and purity, stresses the idea that though beautiful souls leave this our world early, yet their gentle touches and sweet memories stay forever inside our hearts. Though Beth dies early, she achieves something important ; she gives the readers of *Little Women* an example of the enduring person who can adjust to difficult circumstances, can help others and can spread love everywhere till the last moment of life. She can deservedly be called a “little woman.” Even when she is on her deathbed, Beth kindly advises Jo saying to her:

> You must take my place, Jo, and be everything to Father and Mother when I’m gone. They will turn to you, don’t fail them, and if it’s hard to work alone, remember that I don’t forget you, and that you’ll be happier in doing that than … seeing the entire world, for love is the only thing that we can carry with us when we go, and it makes the end so easy. (459)

Aged twelve when the narrative starts, Amy is the youngest sister of the March family who is often coddled and referred to as the baby of the family. Usually called the artist of the family, she has a good artistic talent which she develops very well. Furthermore, she has the ability to behave in a good way in society and she greatly feels at ease with herself and with others. Throughout the book, Amy acts as if she

were a perfect lady; this act provides her with a sense of pleasure and satisfaction. Remarkably, Amy finally gets all she dreams of, particularly travelling to Europe and getting the popularity she yearns for. From the beginning, she works hard to achieve her aspirations. When she faces an obstacle, she overcomes it and never laments a loss. This meaning is embodied in her conversation with Laurie:

> And what are you going to do with yourself now, if I may ask?' 'Polish up my other talents, and be an ornament to society, if I get the chance.' It was a characteristic speech, and sounded daring, but audacity becomes young people, and Amy's ambition had a good foundation. Laurie smiled, but he liked the spirit with which she took up a new purpose when a long cherished one died, and spent no time lamenting. (444-445)

Though she is portrayed as rather selfish and unwilling to sacrifice anything for others, Amy loves her sisters so much and feels the warm feelings of family ties that make matters very easy for her and help her develop her life in a distinctive way. An important characteristic of Amy is that she knows her aim very accurately and does her best to accomplish it. Alcott portrays her as a decisive 'little woman' who works very hard in order to lead a successful life and attain what she dreams of in life

In Alcott's writings, work is an important aspect. The novelist enthusiastically tells her readers about her female characters who go out of the home and seek enjoyment and contentment in work. In *Little Women*, work is an effective means through which the four girls can achieve happiness, independence, and self-assertion. Throughout the narrative, the March sisters realize that work is valuable and rewarding. During the time of vacation, when the girls are away from work, they become bored and dissatisfied. Their mother advises them to make a balance between work and fun, and she often tells them that work makes them feel happy and keeps their spirits up. Thus, work enables the four sisters to express themselves, assert their abilities to be reliable persons and gives them the chance to help and support their family. Through work, they can also accomplish their ambitions and find an outlet away from the domestic sphere. In this sense, work stands as an important theme not only in *Little Women* but also in many works by Louisa May Alcott whose female characters always

> find personal happiness in jobs ranging from governess to philanthropist to artist. Unlike many novels in which a woman works solely to earn a living and is unfulfilled by her work, moreover, Alcott's characters, whether rich or

poor, are inspired to work because they desire independence, achievement, and enrichment. (Lenahan 58)

Conclusion

To conclude, Luisa May Alcott's *Little Women* is an embodiment of how the family can work as a coherent unit that helps its members achieve their personal aspirations and, accordingly, contribute to the total stability and welfare of society. Through providing the four sisters with the feelings of love, warmth, and psychological peace, the March family can successfully guide them into success in life. They can outstandingly weave for themselves a world that is "rich enough to complete itself" (Auerbach 55). The reader clearly traces the distinctive development of the four sisters as they grow into little women who prove to be fit for bearing great responsibilities and find their ways in life in a distinctive manner. Though the departure of Beth has left a sad touch on the house, *"Little Women* brings success and contentment to the surviving members of the March family," Stephanie Foote writes, pointing out that "by the end of the novel, Jo, Amy, and Meg are happily married and are laboring in the fields best suited to the strengths as well as the weaknesses of their personalities" (69).

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Female Exploitation in *Notre Dame de Paris* by Victor Marie Hugo

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to trace out different ways of exploitation of women. This study aims to examine *Notre Dame de Paris* (Translated as *Hunchback of Notre Dame* in English) which is structured on the consciousness of the general cultural suppression and exploitation of women in the Fifteenth Century France as portrayed by Victor Marie Hugo. Patriarchy subordinates women prescribing images and roles for them. This qualitative study makes an analysis of the female protagonist who is exploited in every sphere of life i.e. social, economic, psychological, sexual etc. and records how female exploitation has persisted as a continuous phenomenon. Through the discussion of the exploited character, the study brings awareness about the plight and existential rights of women.

Key words exploitation; patriarchy; identity; social prescription; existential rights

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Introduction

Women have been exploited across cultures and ages. The testimony of the Bible proves that the exploitation of women started with the very birth of Eve when she was created for the company of Adam and solely held responsible for their shared guilt of tasting from the tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden. Therefore Eve stood for desire, and the source of temptation for man. Sartori et al quote the views of St. Paul: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (xi).

Through history, women have been labeled physically weaker than men. They are considered more emotional, less reasonable, less able to learn, and dependent. Although responsible for instilling civic and religious virtue in children, they themselves have been seen as susceptible to sin. According to the Encyclopedia Americana, "Social customs and laws were developed to ensure that women fit these definitions. The occasional woman who did not conform was explained away or, more often, labeled a witch or a prostitute and punished" (111a). Traditionally, the gender roles are accepted by men and women alike, and consequently this fact is amenable for both that men have rights and women do not. The norms of society are set by male behavior and women are viewed as inferior. This social stereotyping shapes thinking about women and women's behavior. In the worlds of classical Greece, Rome, and Egypt, women were stereotyped to bear and rear children or sold in bazaars like a commodity. The condition of the slave women was even worse. Their masters had sexual relationship with them. Their sign of identity was the label which distinguished them from their neighbour. "Still others were economically and sexually exploited" (Ency. Ameri. 111b).

In the Renaissance, a limited basic education was given to the daughters of elite families only but they were still exploited in other ways. They were given the doll image i.e. passive, submissive, entertaining and beautiful. This period marked an increase in the educational facilities on the one hand and a decrease of economic power and imposition of legal and moral restrictions on the other hand (Sartori et al xvi). So the Renaissance inaugurated another phase of legal and economic exploitation. The period from mid- fifteenth to mid-eighteenth centuries is notorious in history for the greatest exploitation and oppression against women in the form of witch hunting and a majority of women was condemned as the witches and punished with death or imprisonment (Ankerloo et al 44). In Victorian male chauvinistic society, women were compelled to accept either of the two roles assigned by men i.e. angel in the house as a conformist or the fallen woman as a deviant. Society purged itself by expelling such fallen women to other places. Men who were guilty of the same crime were free of any blame but women were stigmatized and ostracized by society (Clark 60). By contracting marriage bond, a woman gave up most of her social, legal, rights to her husband (Evans 58). Even Catholic church Portrayed women as sexual temptresses. There were double standards of morality in society that best suited the male majority (Clark 57-59). This stereotyping of women put them in service of men in all the roles.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the scenario for women has not changed as patriarchy still rules their life. In the Asiatic societies, when a daughter

grows up, she is subjected to all sorts of exploitation from forced marriage to sexual abuse in society. A grown up girl is a guest in the family who is soon to be seen off and her person and rights are shifted to her husband. Her role in society is predestined even before her birth.

Past portrays a thoroughly different picture when seen through the eyes of women. The way women interacted in society, struggled against the social ideology, resisted the patriarchal and gendered structures and the fact that most women's lives were structured by the ideology and the material reality of family and in this context how they carved out identities for them is part of the history of many centuries.

On the whole, women have been seen as deprived of subjectivity and therefore a suitable site for exploitation. Their roles and images are defined by patriarchy and it is believed that they have no identity other than what is prescribed by society. But this is only male perception of them. Their consciousness has gradually increased through ages as highly individualized beings contrary to their gender stereotyping. They are aware of their exploitation and display an acute desire to change their status in society.

Regarding Hugo's novel, no research has been done on *NDP* (*Notre Dame de Paris*) from female exploitation and regeneration perspective. Beaghton analyzes and compares archdeacon Frollo with Sand's priest Magnus but her research is focused on the psychological interpretation of these two lustful priests' character. Frollo forgets his priestly duties to sexually pursue Esmeralda and within the holy confines of the Notre-Dame cathedral itself, of which he is archdeacon, he attempts to rape her. Craven compares Hugo's Esmeralda with Disney's Esmeralda and calls the later an action heroin. Craven ignores the spirited struggle of Hugo's Esmeralda which makes her stand up to Frollo till her last moment. In this perspective, Yearsley's research is somewhat akin to my point of view but he discusses only the sexual obsession of Frollo. He appreciates her resolution and firmness to stand against Frollo, calling her a romantic heroine, someone who dies for her ideals and refuses to compromise. None of these critics have viewed Esmeralda from feministic point of view and made her the focal point of their research.

This study is an analysis of the female protagonist. It is designed on the qualitative pattern, in which the excerpts from the primary texts have been used as data, and secondary sources like critics' books, journals and web sources will consolidate my point and the existential feminist insight will be applied to orient my viewpoint side by side. My study assumes that society is patriarchal where super structures like religion, law, education and economy etc. are under male control.

Therefore in patriarchal societies women are marginalized and consequently exploited.

Analysis

Exploitation is a social relationship in which certain persons are used, mistreated or unjustly used for the benefit of others. Human beings are treated as a means to an end, as an object. This is a social relationship in which one person uses the other for his personal benefits. De Beauvoir investigates the ways through which women are exploited. She notes that woman is exploited through the lies of love, devotion and the gift of herself, and the fact is concealed from her that neither lover nor husband and not even children will come up to the expectation of taking the charge of all that. She also observes that the bond that unites a woman to her oppressor is not comparable to any other. Thus de Beauvoir sees patriarchy as an deeply embedded form of exploitation in society. *NDP* deals with the themes of exploitation and social injustice prevalent in France of the middle ages. Maurice comments on the city of Paris, and pens these words: "It is a far cry from that city of Quasimodo, and Claude Frollo and Esmeralda and captain Phoebus to the town of the eighteen-seventies through which Robert Louis Stevenson so delighted to wander" and then ever conscious of the towering presence of the cathedral, remarks: "Hugo has peopled this gothic city, and, above all, this gothic church, with a race of men even more distinctly gothic than their surrounding" (216). So the social setup of the Fifteenth century France was very exploitative for women. Stephens calls Hugo a patriarchal figure whose greatness in poetry, drama, and prose is "matched by his authoritative defiance of political and social injustice…" (E447) and considers his nearly two-decade-long exile in the channel island during the second empire a manifestation of it. Lodeman also notes: "it cannot be denied that many single pieces and separate passages in his works possess a wonderful power and breathe the spirit of profound human sympathy" (101-102). In this article I have tried to find out the sort of injustice meted out to Esmeralda in society. I have also explored what are the different ways and tactics through which she is exploited.

Esmeralda is definitely one of the popular gypsies or Romani women in all literature. She is just a 16 years old girl who is journeying through this wicked world all alone as she does not know who her parents are. The first impression about her is that she is wrapped in mystery. The fact that she is a gypsy makes her an exotic other. The Medieval Parisian society had strange views about gypsies who were considered to be outsiders. They had mysterious misconceptions about their nativity, i.e. Egyptians, and about their involvement in activities like sorcery

and witchcraft. Pinsky discusses the scene in the Disney adaptation of the novel when Esmeralda helps the hunchback and is forced to flee into the church. "She asks the cleric why there is such disdain for people who are different . . . gypsies or hunchbacks" (169) and when the cleric replies that she cannot right all the wrongs of the world, but there is someone in the heavens who can, she walks "in the opposite direction of more prosperous worshippers who are praying for material and earthly rewards . . . gazing at a statue of Mary and baby Jesus, she asks for pity for outcasts like herself and her people . . . instead of wealth, fame, or love, the gypsy prays for mercy for the poor and the downtrodden, which are also the children of God" (169-170). Opera calls the Romani women a far cry from Victor Hugo's "exotic gypsy seductress," Esmeralda of *Hunchback of Notre Dame* who is a "voluptuous gypsy" and whose beauty, dance and charm attract the "fantasy of every European man". According to her, "Romani women have been struggling to regain their dignity in the face of multi-faceted oppression, some of which comes in the form of the aforementioned example of racialized objectification, others in the form of the systematic denial of basic rights" (29). In this observation, she ignores the exploitation which Esmeralda has to face in the story. She is simultaneously pursued and hated not only by Frollo, but also by the whole Parisian society. But paradoxically, the only way she is acceptable in the community is through the entertainment she provides to the patriarchs in society. In Galens' edition of *NDP* the status of the Roma is commented upon in these words: "Wherever they went, they were considered outsiders and were persecuted. Some countries enslaved them; others used them for entertainment, music and dancing being two of their gifts . . . even more severe, in great Britain, Queen Elizabeth 1 (1533-1603) actually signed a law that stated gypsies could be hanged just for being gypsies" (24). Despite her beauty and its attraction for men, she lives in the court of miracles, a dunghill of Parisian beggars. But whenever she comes out of this dunghill, she is pursued by Parisian males, particularly, Frollo, Phoebus and the likes attempt to possess and victimize her sexually.

The most prominent feature of her person is her extraordinary beauty and her dance which earn her not only coins but the attention of Claude Frollo and Pheobus as well. Particularly Frollo associates her beauty with the devil that is why he attempts either to possess or to destroy her. "Around her all eyes were fixed, all mouths agape: and as she danced, to the drumming of the tambourine she held above her head in her two pure, round arms, slender, frail, quick as a wasp, with her golden, unpleated bodice, her billowing brightly-coloured dress, her bare shoulders, her slender legs, uncovered now and again by her skirt, her black

hair, her fiery eyes, she was indeed a supernatural creature" (Hugo 82). Her being considered the other can be exemplified by Gringoire's reaction on first meeting her, "'Truly, thought Gringoir,' it is a salamander, a nymph, a goddess, a bacchante from Mount Menalaus" (Hugo 82). Particularly, her dance at the feast of fools is the most significant element of her character construction. At a festivity when the whole community is enjoying themselves, she uses the moment to earn for her some coins. Though Zarranz in her analysis of Disney's Esmeralda's character calls this dance a moment "to participate in the carnival experience" (62) yet she is alive to the fact that this "exuberant young woman" (61) shows her dance "to earn a living" and while she is "enjoying her own sexuality" she is subsequently, "succumbing to male desire" (62). In this way, Zarranz links Esmeralda's independent sexuality with her dependent economic needs. *NDP* sketches a capitalistic society, in which "All the poor of Paris are portrayed as having also been abandoned by the fabulously rich monarchy which has grown out of touch not only with needs of the poverty-stricken populous but with its subjects' humanity" (Galens 16). Coca observes about Disney's Esmeralda also that she is "the gypsy who earns money by dancing on the streets of Paris. She is identified from the start as an outcast, both due to her ethnicity and her lack of adherence to societal expectations" (11). For Esmeralda, her beauty and dancing skills are the commodities she barters with the males to earn a few coins for her survival. When in the beginning of the novel, the people rush out of the hall calling out the name Esmeralda (Hug 74), it is not out of love or admiration or even respect for her, it is because she is the cheapest maximum entertainment available. Thus the society of the *NDP* is an overwhelming patriarchal society where the males dominate, from the king who can issue orders to execute anyone who disagrees with him, to Phoebus who victimizes women through his masculine charms without caring for them in the least, to Frollo, who uses his religious influence to control the lives of Quasimodo and Esmeralda.

Religion is exploited to oppress some classes of society. In the novel, Claude Frollo is the archdeacon, who is enamoured by the beauty of Esmeralda, and wants to possess her. For this purpose, he uses all the authority he has as a church figure to pressurize Esmeralda. He gets her convicted as the murderess of Phoebus and proves her involved in witchcraft. Afterwards, he uses his influence to make her surrender to his lust. Even the novel's Disney adaptations cannot ignore the role of religion in society. According to Hammond , Byrne and McMillan note the remarkable aspect of Wise & Trousdale's Disney animation which makes it distinguished from other Disney ventures, i.e. it addresses continuous issues of organized religion within society, whereas Pinsky points out that "censorial decisions" were made to change

the identity of Frollo, the villain of the story. He observes that in 1996 version, Frollo is shown to be "a ruthless and unforgiving judge" instead of "a sadistic and unforgiving cathedral archdeacon" (2). Even the church, as it is portrayed in the novel, is not free from the dark aspects the society conveys. Brombert notes this element of the cathedral in the following words:

> The cathedral, a stronghold of religion, seems an empty shell. It is almost everything: an architectural landmark, an observation tower, a fortress, a place of refuge. But it is not a place of worship . . . the religious edifice is not merely empty; it is downright threatening. Through the open portal, the length of the church looks like a cavern or the dark entrails of a mythological monster. The rose window, at once Cyclops' eye and fateful spider, seems to cast an evil spell both outside and inside the cavernous space. A sepulchral light communicates to everything the complexion of death. It is as though the entire edifice were given over to evil practices. (65)

Cushman also points out how religion can be manipulated and engineered to meet human desires. Both in history and in current events religion has been and can be used to cause great harm. She further notes that there is within human beings not only the capacity to reflect the goodness and mercy of God, but the capacity to use God to justify their own unrighteous goals and attitudes. Claude Frollo is one such character who can use religion for his own dirty goals. He is the self righteous man who condemns and judges others. According to Cushman, the opening song of Disney's *NDP* says he saw corruption everywhere except within himself. Frollo is the greatest hater of gypsies. In the movie version, he runs down a gypsy women suspecting her to have stolen a package. But when she falls dead on the steps of the Notre Dame, he finds out that the package is actually her deformed baby. Frollo is devoid of any human sympathy. Instead of repenting, he decides to drown the baby, but he is detained by the priest and is convinced to raise the baby as a penance (Cushman n.pag.). Similarly he wants to imprison Esmeralda in order to satisfy his lust. Pinsky calls Frollo "a priest and a hypocritical church official" (167) who accomplishes his evil designs under the garb of priestly cloak. He cites Wards' words:

> The association of the church with this kind of evil leadership implies a church that is ineffective if not full of vice . . . The very thing Hugo was criticizing in the original novel. Religion . . . Appears as an impotent, irrelevant caricature .

> . . By relegating the church, and more specifically God, to irrelevancy, Disney refuses to admit a serious role for religion. (168)

Though in the novel, church is presented in its true role as a sanctuary for the outcast, like Quasimodo and Esmeralda, the men of faith are not always true to this role as exemplified by Frollo. The message of the novel is quite clear: we should never use religion for serving our purposes and exploiting the people.

The most lamentable feature of *NDP* is its depiction of a defective legal system. The archdeacon Frollo gets La Esmeralda convicted as a witch through the exploitative legal system of his time, and pressurizes her to buy her life at the cost of her honor. The novel is remarkable for the oppressive patriarchal setting, the defective system of justice, the victimization of an innocent woman as a witch and her transformation through a process of crisis. E.H. and A.M. Blackmore cover the versatile work of Hugo and translate certain portions of his work that are representative of his art. Out of the voluminous novel, they highlight the chapter on the exploitative system of justice prevalent at the time which was vehemently satirized by Hugo in the novel (65-76). As I have earlier pointed out that the 15th century society was prejudicial towards gypsies. They were considered outsiders, and often they were persecuted, some countries made them slaves while others used them for music, dance and entertainment. If ever these luckless people happened to fall under the thumb of law, they were grievously maltreated by law. In the *NDP*, Esmeralda falls a victim to such a discriminative legal system which convicts her as a murderess and witch without ample evidence. *NDP* draws a detailed sketch of such a faulty system. It points out the huge privileges and salaries that these ministers of justice enjoy, still they fail to administer justice. Particularly, it discusses the role of Messire Robert d'Esttouteville, who had not only his own judicial authority, but had a share in the king's high justice. Each head, before falling in the hands of the public executioner, passed through his hands, "And yet, with all these reasons for taking life patiently and cheerfully, Messire Robert d'Estouteville had woken up on the morning of 7 January 1482, in a sore head and in a murderous temper" (Hugo 205). It was under this ominous bad mood that first the fate of Quasimodo and then Esmeralda fell. Quasimodo was punished undeservedly for kidnapping Esmeralda and Esmeralda was convicted as murderess and witch whereas behind both these crimes the figure of Claude Frollo as the perpetrator of crimes looms large. Moore points out: "In the novel, while la Esmeralda is arrested on a charge of stabbing Phoebus, she is actually convicted under a fifth century law against night vampires, which Victor Hugo found recorded

in Collin de Plancy's Dictionnaire Infernal" (261). The lives of the poor and down-trodden were threatened with severe punishments in Paris where "at the end of each path you could immediately see the wheel, gallows or pillory" (Hugo 212).

Esmeralda's sexuality is wholly defined, controlled and exploited by patriarchy in *NDP*. She is the beautiful young girl who is envied even by the young girls of elite class like Fleur de Lys and her friends (Hugo 252). The way she laughs, moves and dances, fascinates the onlookers. The novel begins with a lot of commotion. There is the feast of the fools, where parties and plays and celebrations are being held. As Esmeralda makes her first appearance, everyone is attracted to her. Her beauty and innocence captivate their hearts. She is a pearl on the dunghill, living among the beggars and reputed for her beauty, singing and dancing among the Parisians. Esmeralda's femininity and sexuality is a matter of controversy among the critics. Zarranz points to this aspect when she writes: "In this respect, the construction of Disney's heroines has become a controversial site for discussion in terms of stereotyped femininity and sexuality following the demands of a pervasive patriarchal system" (55). In his analysis of Disney heroines, Lacroix comments on the physical aspects of Esmeralda:

> Esmeralda, the darkest in skin tone of all the characters, reflects the trend toward increasing emphasis on physical maturity and sexuality. Although smaller in frame than Pocahontas, Esmeralda retains the athleticism and strength of the previous character. She is also frequently shot in active sequences that emphasize the physical rather than the delicate frame that we see particularly in Belle. Like Pocahontas, Esmeralda appears voluptuous when compared to Ariel and Belle. She, like Pocahontas appears to be a woman, not a girl. Her eyes and hair are highlighted in the shots as in the iconography of Pocahontas. Esmeralda's physique and activity appears to be the culmination of a pattern toward increasing physical maturation and strength in the films that seems to position the characters on a spectrum of activity and sexual/physical maturation where the white women occupy the least active and mature bodies, whereas the women of color are represented as both physically mature and athletic. (221)

Again the critic refers to the attractiveness of Jasmine of Alladin which in case of Esmeralda, "resurface(s) in a more virulent form in the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*" (224).

In *NDP*, Claude Frollo is the evil character who wants to control Esmeralda's

sexuality. He is shown to be a man of dual nature. On the one hand, he is a priest of the church; on the other hand, he is the most lustful character. Yearsley investigates the reasons behind this duality of his character and proves him "as a desexualized, implying the potential for sexual reawakening. He is directed into prieshood by his parents, a quasi-castration not of his choosing. By stifling his sexuality, this "imposed celibacy" (4) is channelized into other avenues of expression like alchemy and astronomy, "and so when Frollo becomes obsessed with La Esmeralda, all the traits which he has thus far applied to science, he applies to the conquest of the gypsy" (5). He maintains, "What Frollo truly desires . . . (is) sex" (4). He proves that this desire is present from the very beginning of his narrative, but it "becomes evident once he begins lusting after La Esmeralda" (4).

As I have proved, the driving force behind Frollo is lust. While Quasimodo, the ugly hunchback loves her truly, Frollo's passion and obsession is only a carnal desire burning to be fulfilled. He "invades La Esmeralda's privacy and forces her constantly on the show . . . while Frollo obviously wants La Esmeralda to reciprocate his affections . . . Quasimodo is sensitive to her own feelings, telling her not to look at him if his ugliness perturbs her" (Yearsley 7).

De Beauvoir has traced love, devotion and the gift of herself as the main motives behind the exploitation of women. According to Barnet, *NDP* conveys a strong consciousness about the power of love as in this novel Esmeralda is exploited by male exploiters in the name of love. So love is also a mode of Esmeralda's exploitation. Esmeralda's innocent love for Phoebus, Frollo's sexual love for Esmeralda and Quasimodo's pure and almost divine love for Esmeralda intricate them into a complex web of emotions. She notes that Hugo presents idealized vision of love between a man and a woman but he also discusses the frightening quality of passion and love's potential which may lead to tragedy. She remarks: "Hugo celebrates the passionate sensuality of love, and examines the powerfully uncontrollable nature of sex and how passion provoked by sexuality can become a deadly obsession" (37). This is Archdeacon Frollo's deadly obsession which leads him to sexually harass Esmeralda when she refuses to surrender to his lascivious desire for her.

Esmeralda is exploited in the name of love. Therefore here I can also make a comparison between the types of love expressed towards Esmeralda, i.e. sensual love and pure love. Although Phoebus and Frollo are poles opposite from each other, still they are similar in one respect, their base and carnal longing for Esmeralda. Phoebus' desire is shallow, fleeting and momentary as he wants instant gratification of his desire. He wants to exploit Esmeralda as he has exploited and

used many other women. It is quite paradoxical that a pure and innocent soul like Esmeralda should be so blinded and find her ideal of love in the person of a shallow and flirtatious coxcomb. Hart comments on this foible in Esmeralda's character:

> La Esmeralda has her own Achilles heel, her own point of weakness. She desires a perfect love. And her definition of perfect love comes to her in the form of Phoebus, a vain, shallow soldier, whose own beauty inflates his ego and overshadows his heart. Whether it is the handsomeness of this king's archer that captivates La Esmeralda or it is his rank, the young gypsy woman cannot see beyond what she thinks he is to the real dangers that he presents. (31)

Esmerada is chaste and protective of her purity. But at one point she also yields to Phoebus' carnality convincing herself that the playboy Phoebus cared for her. Her succumbing to his sensual lust and dropping her guard is only a proof of how much she longed for his affection and that she did not want to lose him. The scene only proves that men are ever ready to exploit women's insecurities.

The other identical passion is that of Frollo. His desire is also sensual but it is more enduring, more consuming and relentless as it destroys not only Esmeralda but Frollo also. The first time he sets his eyes on Esmeralda, his being is torn into two. He has the conflicts of passion and duty. Hart discusses the effects of this carnal desire:

> Frollo melts at the sight of La Esmeralda. He not only is affected by her beauty, his passion for her controls his behavior. La Esmeralda has turned this great angel of intellect into a devil of lust. Because of his need of her, Frollo will abuse Quasimodo and will attempt to assassinate his rival Phoebus. He will lie, cheat, and scheme. (31)

Opposed to this is the pure love of Quasimodo for Esmeralda. His love for her is more spiritual than physical. The way he rescues her from being hanged, his day-night vigil to protect her against her oppressor, his final fight to save her and the final scene in which the skeletons of Quasimodo and La Esmeralda lie in an eternal embrace (Hugo 492), all prove his pure love for her. "Now a subject, in control of his life, Quasimodo is able to answer a question which pervades *Notre-Dame de Paris*. How should we love? It is obvious that the type of love expressed by Frollo, which is brooding, objectifying and obsessive, is an inadequate answer. Likewise,

the non-love that Phoebus exhibits towards everyone but himself cannot appeal to the romantic" (Yearsley 8).

Conclusions

The above analysis proves that women face social, economic and sexual exploitation. Society is synonymous with male hegemony. It is exploitative and discriminative. If women are outcast and unprivileged in society, they have no respect. In society they are viewed as the other and the insignificant. They are socially and economically exploited on the basis of their ethnicity, class and race. If they are the member of the working class, they are doubly exploited as they are the member of an already gendered class. Economic exploitation finally leads to her sexual exploitation. This is indicative of the fact how much economic independence is desirable for women. Women are themselves commoditized sometimes.

Society uses its super structure to victimize women. In this context, religion and law serve as cat's paw to exploit women and threaten them into subordination. Law also provides no satisfactory compensation for the injustice done to women as it involves the danger of public humiliation and exposure, which is disadvantageous to women only. Women are exploited psychologically as well. Women are easily entrapped and exploited through the protestations of love. Sense of duty and sacrifice are inculcated in their nature. Patriarchs misuse them to psychologically blackmail women.

Women's sexuality is the site where male hegemony reigns supreme. It extends from the exploitation of their physical charms to the actual control of their sexuality through sexual harassment, rape and forced marriages.

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Reclaiming the Female Body in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*

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Abstract This paper attempts a postcolonial feminist analysis of El Saadawi's novella *Woman at Point Zero* (1983) in terms of how the politics of female body, in the post(-)colonial metropolitan Egypt, subsume into predicaments like subordination in marriage, homelessness leading to prostitution, and female genital mutilation. Through the fictional narrative of her protagonist, Firdaus, El Saadawi unravels how the institution of marriage, in the Arab-African socio-cultural tapestry, has been tailored to serve the phallocentric order in which women are trained to make up for the desire of men. This, at times, results in their rebellion against social and familial norms thus pushing them into homelessness and prostitution. Similarly, psycho-sexual violence against the female child makes her fear her own sexuality — a fear which often culminates in the genital mutilation of girls, especially in the Egyptian rural culture. Such oppression against women, in private and public spaces, is bound to affect female psychology which, in turn, leads to tragedies like the one experienced by Firdaus in El Saadawi's narrative.

Key words female body; prostitution; marriage; homelessness; female genital mutilation

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Nawal El Saadawi's Feminist Consciousness

Nawal El Saadawi (1931—), in her fiction and non-fiction works, unapologetically discusses prostitution, clitoridectomy, incest and many other taboo issues—a fact

which earns both appreciation and criticism for her among her readers. In a nearly anthropological tone, she addresses the psychological consequences of women's oppression. This may be attributed to her background as a medical doctor as in her narratives, she tends to conduct diagnoses of problems troubling her characters. El Saadawi's approach to feminism can be safely categorized as radical, as she questions existing norms of her society and argues for the abolition of patriarchy on radical grounds. She is highly critical of the oppression against women legitimized in the name of religion and its various institutions. Female body and sexuality, female genital mutilation, prostitution and other taboo subjects (among Muslim societies) are what account for her standing as a radical feminist.

For Kammampoal (15), Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* is

> [A] call and an appeal to genuine Islamic religious texts to convince bigots to revisit, create and contrast discourse around religion and the outdated social patriarchal structures, which relegate the woman to the position of inferior being.

El Saadawi, through her non-fiction, has indeed been standing against socio-sexual aggression against the female child and reveals the experiences of young girls. They are taught to be afraid of their own sexuality from the very beginning of life. Similarly, she is vocal against female genital mutilation, as the practice is sometimes traumatizing enough to leave the child affected for a very long time. To El Saadawi, female genital mutilation is, in fact, an institutionalized degradation of women as it brings along a sense of intense shame to the female child. Similarly, on growing up, the girl's education is harnessed by cultural norms of shame and guilt that are sustained in her society by pseudo-religious arguments. Such an upbringing is bound to affect the psychological development of the girl; she is unable to think independently on growing up, trained to suppress her will and desire, and also make up for the desire of others in the name of marriage. This loss of self prepares her to live a life of subordination and oppression which, in cases of extremity, hovers on the edges of rebellion on the part of women. This is likely to result in their defiance to the familial and religious norms thus plunging into dilemmas like prostitution. To El Saadawi, therefore, there are numerous relations between woman as a daughter and a wife, woman as a prostitute, and woman as a slave to the man.

El Saadawi had to undergo imprisonment as a result of her efforts to publish a feminist magazine in Egypt. In prison, El Saadawi was denied pen and paper, and such a physical and intellectual captivity made her discover the importance of

revelation and self-expression. Through her personal and professional narratives, El Saadawi has been able to bring into limelight the everyday struggles of Egyptian women. These all converge into the overarching feminist goals that further address a wide array of issues. El Saadawi equates the liberation of women with the liberation of the country from the subordination of any old or new forms of colonialism. She fully acknowledges the relation between sex, politics, economics, history, and religion. Sexual aggression towards the female child, self-worth, education, freedom of expression, female genital mutilation and other similar topics have separated her from her contemporaries and earned her international fame.

Review of Related Literature

With reference to the question of female space among Arab African Muslim societies, the status of Nawal El Saadawi as a feminist is remarkable because of her revolutionary stance on the subjectivity of Arab women. For El Saadawi, feminism paves way to social change. Tarabishi is, however, critical of El Saadawi's stand which is ambiguous and strives to bring about change on secular grounds in a social scheme which clearly draws its inspiration from religion. On the other hand, Fadwa Malti Douglas in her monograph, *Men, Women and God(s): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics* (1995), celebrates El Saadawi's narratives as these are characterized by a protest against sexual violence, female infibulation, theology and other issues. The third chapter of Douglas' book is based on the relation between the physician and the prostitute in El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*. The narrative in El Saadawi's novella is designed for reclaiming the female bodyboth orally and verbally. The story essentially addresses the tension between dream and reality which comes from society, patriarchy, religion, sexuality and women centricism.

The ritual practice of female circumcision in Arab and African societies is a matter of cultural relativism. This has been the pivot of debate in Fran Oise Lionnet's essay "Dissymmetry Embodied: Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* and the Practice of Excision." To Lionnet, the discursive context of the practice is of exceeding significance against which the ideology of cultural relativism should be tested. It is the gendered cultural identity of Muslim women in many countries of the Arab world and Africa which is characterized infibulation and female excision. The practice is meant to improve and especially monitor the sexual condition of women's bodies in the African socio-cultural ethos. Moreover, Lionnet appreciates El Saadawi's role both as a novelist and a psychiatrist. To her, psychoanalysis, if not severed from socio-discursive practices, can certainly help fight against those tendencies and discourses that perpetuate female subjugation.

In her essay "Between Awra and Arab Literary Feminism: Sexual Violence and Representation Crisis in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*" (2012), Ana Ball discusses the nature of sexual violence which is foregrounded by El Saadawi in her novella. Sexual violence, according to Ball, is a crime. With respect to Arab feminist and literary discourse, the issue of sexual violence generally suffers from representational crisis. Ball mentions the term *awra* which stands for all in a woman's body which should be concealed and is deemed shameful. For Ball, the polemics of female sexual violence and its representation is the direct result of the alignment of *awra* with the female body and subsequently with female sexuality. El Saadawi's take on the female body, its sexuality, and violence against it involves the politics of second-wave feminism that struggles to speak for the sexuality of the present-day Arab women.

Saddik Gohar in "Empowering the Subaltern in *Woman at Point Zero*" studies El Saadawi's novella with a Western feminist lens. With a view that comparative feminist discourse has the potential to initiate useful dialogue with regard to patriarchal policies in the Arab world, Gohar argues how El Saadawi challenges the phallocentricity of the Egyptian metropolis which draws its power from both religion and masculinity. The novella effectively dissects canons which are culturally grounded and deconstructs regressive norms that establish and legitimize patriarchal hegemony. As a prison psychiatrist, El Saadawi interrogates how female condition and experiences are dehumanized by a culture which is typically misogynistic in its treatment of women. Nevertheless, a narrative like that of El Saadawi's centralizes the experience of the marginalized and imparts both voice and agency to the voiceless.

Woman at Point Zero: A Tale of Female Drudgery

Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* explores issues of oppression, corruption, and violence against women. The narrator of the story is an unnamed psychiatrist who happens to visit Firdaus, a murderer, who is destined to be executed the following morning. The plot revolves around the life of Firdaus as she unfolds it right from her childhood. Daughter of peasants, Firdaus was able to reach secondary school and graduated too. Nevertheless, the misery began when she went with her uncle who first molested her sexually, and then took advantage of her by making her first serve himself and later his family. She is then married off to an old miserly man who mistreats her. Thus, she is pushed into a life where drudgery awaits her while she does not receive any help from others, especially men. In the course of her suffering, she meets a number of men who abuse her one way or the other. This

makes her escape from them again and again, and we come to know why Firdaus comes to develop hatred for men as she exclaims, "…every single man I did get to know, filled me with but one desire: to lift my hand and bring it smashing down on his face" *(Woman at Point Zero* 10*)*.

Firdaus discovers that there are a scarce opportunities for a woman like her to get a respectable job. She, therefore, eventually ends up being a prostitute. She strives to establish herself respectably by joining an office but soon learns that a woman is nowhere unless she gives favors to the male superiors for getting promotions, benefits, or simply to keep her job. Such a life is what Firdaus denies as she believes in valuing herself. From all this, she learns that "…all of us were prostitutes who sold themselves at varying prices, and that an expensive prostitute was better than a cheap one" (*Woman at Point Zero* 82). Firdaus exposes the hypocrisy of many of the men who would come to her for lust. This is, in fact, a direct assault on the dual standards which characterize her society in general and men's world in particular, especially when it comes to dealing with sex workers.

Firdaus ultimately gives vent to her frustration. She has been shown falling into the same trap again and again. She murders the pimp who exploits her even when her body and honor are already on sale. Firdaus starts off as being extremely trusting and naïve but ends up realizing the folly of trusting anyone but herself. A woman suffers not because of what she does but that which others do. Firdaus' preference to death over life is an open rejection to live in such a condition: "I prefer to die for a crime I have committed rather than to die for one of the crimes which you have committed" (*Woman at Point Zero* 111).

Enslavement in Marriage

Isaka (51) discusses the endogamous and exogamous trends of marriage existing in African and especially sub-Saharan cultures where, in either case, marriage renders women powerless. The female silence in marriage, which is fortified through cultural traditions, is what one sees happening in El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*. El Saadawi deconstructs the myth of security and public safety which is traditionally associated with marriage in various cultures. The family order, as depicted by El Saadawi, is a testimony to how patriarchy is part and parcel of the family framework in Egyptian society. Women are not more than commodities which are traded off when need be, while fathers single-handedly enjoy the privilege to decide who their daughters would marry irrespective of how such decisions may tell upon the latter. Firdaus, the narrator and the protagonist of the novella, is portrayed as a woman who remains silent most of the time, though it is not that

she is insensitive to what is happening around. Her uncle's wife discusses Sheikh Mahmoud's proposal for Firdaus with her husband. The uncle's respectability proves to be a mere sham, as he greedily thinks of selling his niece off to the old Sheikh for the dowry or bride price. And thus he asks his wife,

> "How much?"
> "A hundred pound or perhaps even two hundred if he has the money."
> "If he pays hundred pound then Allah will indeed have been generous to us. I would not be greedy to ask for more." (*Woman at Point Zero* 38)

Feminist authors of Arab-African literature have projected women in the middle of family oppression. Their commoditization grows from father and kinsmen to husband and his kinsmen. Sheikh Mahmoud is an old, miserly, deformed and tyrannical man who buys Firdaus ultimately. As for Firdaus, she has to follow the current and accept silently whatever is inflicted on her. This owes to the fact that she is a daughter and more importantly a woman. Thus Firdaus, like many other girls of her class and age, is marginalized as a female subaltern. Sherifa, in this regard, observes that "The Arab states embody various patriarchal structures and Arab society clings to a patriarchal system in which women's position within and duties towards the family precede their rights as individuals" (17).

Firdaus is sent back to the uncle's house by Sheikh Mahmoud who mistreats and beats his wife for petty things. "All husbands beat their wives" (*Woman at Point Zero* 46), are the words of the uncle for Firdaus which open up an entire debate on the pathos of female subjugation. Marriages, like that of Firdaus and Sheikh Mahmoud, give license to men for inflicting physical abuse on women. In the fictional world of El Saadawi, people's lives are seized by love, marriage, and tradition. The issue of female protection, under the father or the husband, is turned on its head in El Saadawi's novella. It rather serves as a tool to keep the women ensnared, since a woman without a male 'protector' in Muslim societies is deemed totally irresponsible. As Abdullah et al. holds, Sheikh Mahmud stands for phallocentricity and also represents the repressive father figure who, among many others, causes hysteria to Firdaus. This is what Palmer (162) also upholds, since with her marriage to the repressive Mahmoud, Firdaus once again becomes a prisoner (after having been a prisoner in her father's and then her uncle's house). Mahmoud is an embodiment of the repulsive and patriarchal father figure, as he tries to tame Firdaus by beating and abusing her. In a way, he stands for the entire misogynistic and repressive order that is designed to exploit women like Firdaus.

For Abdullah et al. (105), Firdaus' desire to destroy "all men I had ever known, one after the other in a row: my uncle, my husband, my father …" is symptomatic of the hysterical vortex she is pushed into because of her traumatic experiences with all these men. The pain inflicted on her by Mahmoud travels from physical to the psychic, as she keeps the memories of these experiences in store mentally. Firdaus associates Mahmoud with pain and especially abhors the swelling he had under his lower lip which sometimes would "turn into a rusty old tap exuding drops red in color like blood" (*Woman at Point Zero* 45). Moreover, she is repulsed by the painful sex inflicted on her by Mahmoud: "At night he would wind his legs and arms around me, and let his old gnarled hand travel all over my body, like the claws of a starving man who has been deprived of real food for many years …" (*Woman at Point Zero* 45). In addition, she is destined to receive physical thrashing until she bleeds after which she is forced to have sex: "He leapt on me like a mad dog… I surrendered… my body to his body… as though life had been drained out of it, like a piece of dead wood… or a pair of shoes forgotten under a chair" (*Woman at Point Zero* 55).

These and many similar experiences with her husband compel Firdaus to believe that sex in marriage is identical to what takes place between a prostitute and his pimp. This explains why Firdaus' account of her sexual encounter with Bayoumi and Sheikh Mahmoud appears almost similar. Such drudgery on the part of married women is what stimulates Firdaus to philosophize that the least deluded of the women is the prostitute. This is because all women, in one way or the other, are prostitutes, "... and because I was intelligent, I preferred to be a free prostitute, rather than an enslaved wife" (*Woman at Point Zero* 91). Thus, it is not precisely husband or pimp in question, but the entire politics of gender inequality that influences the relationship between men and women. The female body thus becomes a site of contest for El Saadawi, where resistance can subvert the same normative power structures (characterized by male domination) that function to regulate women's subjugation in certain socio-economic schemata.

Firadus goes back to her uncle complaining about her husband's ill-treatment but is silenced by his uncle's wife: "A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband…. Her duty was perfect obedience" (*Woman at Point Zero* 44). Firdaus is compelled to agree with the idea that her status in the society cannot surpass or be equal to that of a man, and that a woman has to go an extra miles to keep her husband pleased. Firdaus, however, is not ready to accept this and argues in response comparing her uncle with Sheikh Mahmoud as the former "was a respected Sheikh, well versed in the teachings of religion, and he, therefore,

could not possibly be in the habit of beating his wife" (*Woman at Point Zero* 46). The satirical response of the aunt at this is shocking as to her it is the men "precisely well versed in the religion who beat their wives" (*Woman at Point Zero* 46). This tells that the uncle's wife too is a victim of the self-defeating concept of marriage. Marriage, in the context of tradition, is thus a system based on human suffering. Tradition, be it in the view of the Arab-African or Egyptian context, gives acceptance to women only if they manage to survive in marriage. This is what makes women accept physical violence done by their husbands, as they consider it a folly to contest the tradition. This explains why Firdaus is finally taken back to Sheikh Mahmoud who, in response remarks, "Why did you come back from your uncle's house? Couldn't he bear to feed you for a few days? Now you will realize that I am the only person who can put up with you and who is prepared to feed you" (*Woman at Point Zero* 47).

Thus, women's lives are rigorously controlled by the norms of fidelity, subservience, and religion. Religion has been twisted in favor of men thus establishing their supremacy and giving them license to ill-treat women. All a man is liable to do is just to pay the bride price and thus 'buy' the woman. Firdaus is exposed to the worst situation during her stay with the Sheikh: "The Sheikh is extremely cheap and cannot stand to waste food. On one occasion, he found scraps of food in the trashcan. After this incident, he got into the habit of beating me whether he had a reason for it or not" (*Woman at Point Zero* 44). Sheikh Mahmoud's idea of marriage and the treatment he gives to his wife is more or less similar to what Firdaus saw her father doing when she was young. Both the men have been portrayed as religious—a fact juxtaposed to how they treat their families. The slave-like labor to which Firdaus' father would subject his wife and young daughters represents how women are captivated within their own spaces of marginality. Thus, we see how Firdaus' mother had to be obedient to her husband who enslaved her and made her "bite the dust each night" (*Woman at Point Zero* 10). Firdaus, therefore, experiences abandonment: "Our hut was cold, yet in winter, my father used to … occupy my corner in the oven room. And instead of staying by my side to keep me warm, my mother used to abandon me alone and go to my father to keep him warm" (*Woman at Point Zero* 16). One, therefore, feels Firdaus challenging motherhood and the identity of her mother, since she is an emblem of slavish loyalty to her husband which Firdaus comes to loathe on growing up. The fear of her husband's wrath, or that of being thrown out of marriage simply with a divorce, makes Firdaus' mother let her children starve and fill the stomach of her husband,

> …when there was no food at home, we would all go to bed with empty stomachs. But he (Firdaus' father) would never fail to have a meal. My mother would hide his food from us at the bottom of one of the holes in the oven. He would sit eating alone while we watched him. (*Woman at Point Zero* 16)

People like Firdaus' uncle or Ibrahim (who appears later in the novella) use marriage as a means of shifting their social standing. This is what happens with Firdaus too, who is traded off in the name of marriage. Marriage and wifehood are thus agencies of socio-sexual and economic liability in a society which observes no equity in terms of male-female relations.

The Drudgery of Homelessness and Prostitution

For Therese, the figure of the female prostitute, as it appears in Arab postcolonial literature, illustrates how the nation is prostituted to the colonizer for the sake of petty gains, bands of gold and the fake wholesale import of Western modernization. Post-World War I Egypt presents a picture where many Egyptian peasants and masses from the middle class showed growing discontent with the presence of the British colonizers, especially in terms of the corruption it inflicted on the traditional family and religious structures. With the mushrooming of prostitution around the British bases and in the streets of Cairo, there also grew the contamination of the political leaders who prostituted themselves to the colonial interests. This can also be seen in the sexual corruption of the lower class women whose misery and indignity became symptomatic of the condition of the then-existing Egypt. This is what Naguib Mahfouz asserts, as the Cairo neighborhood stood almost in a distinct isolation from the rest of the surrounding vicinity. This owes to the fact that its residents came in contact with the British occupation – a contact that dragged the young men into army and women into prostitution. In case of Egyptian men, as Therese informs, it can be seen that they collaborated with and benefited from the colonial presence, while the women were expected to keep their honor "intact", thus safeguarding the burden of their culture and tradition.

In *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus represents the female peasant class in Egypt which is victimized by the rigorous native tradition. This is further deteriorated by the postcolonial corruption which is evident in the burgeoning metropolitan culture of Cairo. Firdaus' embracing of prostitution gives out two-fold significance: firstly, it stands for her own idea of female liberation; secondly, it shows how this idea of liberation betrays and thus pushes her back into the same servile space she tries to

escape. Her journey begins as a wife, moves on to prostitution, leads her to become an office worker, and finally brings her back to prostitution. To her, therefore, all women are prostitutes who sell themselves at varying prices. In this connection, Hamam (185) establishes space as one of the major issues in El Saadawi's text. Firdaus feels forced to give up on the repressive space of marriage in search of a space of her own – one where she can live and breathe. Nevertheless, she tends to look for a homely or domestic space as she clearly misses the sense of belonging in her life. Unfortunately, the spaces provided by her father and then by her husband prove to be oppressive, and this compels Firdaus to seek security on streets and roads which eventually becomes her destiny. It is ironic that the same unknown life on streets, which is frightening and subjects Firdaus to masculine gaze and evil intentions, also gives her a sense of independence —one she has never experienced in her past domestic spaces. On streets, however, what Firdaus actually finds is slavery and exploitation embodied in men like Bayoumi who enslaves her by providing her food and shelter. Firdaus unconsciously compares Bayoumi with her father: "His nose resembled that of my father. It was big and rounded, and he had the same dark complexion" (*Woman at Point Zero* 49). This makes Firdaus feel that she is subjected to yet another man who will exploit her just because she owes her basics to him. Bayoumi entertains his friends by letting them have sex with Firdaus. So, the time she spends at Bayoumi's house reminds her of the misery and torture she went through at Sheikh Mahmoud's place after marriage.

Orabueze asserts that El Saadawi's novella serves as a "means to an end… [and] a metaphor for survival and freedom… because it gives her [Firdaus] all the good things she never had as a daughter, or as a wife, or as a student" (135). This is because her experience of marriage with Skeikh Mahmoud was a most horrid one, wherein she was accountable even for the quantity of food she had been consuming. Once plunging into prostitution, Firdaus herself determines her value and obtains a space of her own. For her body, Firdaus asks for a high price and chooses rich clean clients. Nevertheless, she demonstrates resistance by making her body passive in her sexual encounters. According to Hamam (193), money acts as an agential space in the life of Fĭdaus. It stands for the power Firdaus previously lacked and later on gained in order to break free from men. Money, to some extent, gives Firdaus back that sense of self-respect which she had lost during her childhood, then with her husband, and finally during her sexual encounters with her clients as a prostitute. Moreover, as Palmer puts, it is money which "open[s] her eyes to the nature of reality and the way the world works" (166-67). Again, it is money which the fathers and husbands deny to their daughters and wives, but use to attract women outside.

Money, in El Saadawi's novella therefore, is a metaphor for male power. Firdaus' act of tearing up the three thousand pound note is emblematic of her belief that such power should be destroyed by those who are controlled by it.

Towards the end of the story, Firdaus realizes that her upward mobility is illusory. Money takes away from her all fears—be it those of the street, or the ones belonging to men. However, she soon realizes that prostitution, with all its supposed luxuries, is yet another prison or a closed space where there is neither pleasure nor freedom, "I never even left the room. Day and night I lay on the bed, crucified and every hour a man would come in" (*Woman at Point Zero* 72). Moreover, her belief that a prostitute's life is better than that of a wife or a daughter is misleading. Firdaus is badly struck by Di'aa's words that she does not deserve respect, the realization that Sharifa and Marzouk are pimps exploiting her, and that men's ego suffers when rejected by prostitutes. All this happens when Frdaus has to have sex with the policeman who threatens her with imprisonment in case she resists. Actually, prostitution turns out to be the worst form of enslavement among all the various forms Firdaus goes through. The assumption that poor women like Firdaus can secure socio-individual mobility by earning money as prostitutes proves to be wrong (Hamam 185). Marzouk, a pimp himself, Ironically offers protection to Firdaus in return of which he demands money. Until this time, however, Firdaus has already experienced the fact that for a prostitute, any kind of protection, especially when it is provided by a male, is yet another form of slavery. This is what Firdaus expresses, "I want to be one of the masters and not one of the slaves" (*Woman at Point Zero* 95). And Marzouk's response at this goes, "A woman on her own cannot be a master… can't you see that you are asking for the impossible?" (*Woman at Point Zero* 95). Firdaus couldn't possibly defeat Marzouk in his life and so stabs him to death. Hamam (195) suggests that postcolonial women writers have managed to create agential female spaces out of margins for themselves. These spaces are featured with willful acts of assertion and resistance offered by the female voice. Firdaus' is thus one such voice which emerges from the margin with certain energy which is strong enough to kill her so-called protector. Killing Marzouk is tantamount to debunking the myth of security as proclaimed by men in favor of women in Firdaus' society. Firdaus' act of killing Marzouk underlines the potential upheld by women to challenge the society and the status quo as they are no longer ready to stay silent. For Therese, Firdaus speaks from a zero point of subjectivity. The place is a completely vanishing point which is devoid of desire—a point where those in authority can no longer maintain their control of the subjugated ones. Firdaus is, therefore, destined to be executed since she refuses to submit to the

existing patriarchal order.

Female Genital Mutilation

In *Woman at Point Zero*, one finds only a passing reference to the crucial and highly sensitive issue of female genital mutilation (FGM). This may come as a surprise to the readers of El Saaadawi who has been most vocally fighting this practice. Firdaus tells the doctor briefly how she went through the painful experience. In this connection, her excision may appear a matter of little concern to many, though at this point it is deemed necessary to discuss the issue at length. There have been critics (Valassopoulos, Schroeder,) who are of the view that it is Firdaus' experience of circumcision which proves to be her primordial trauma. The phenomenon deprives her of something the quest of which shapes and conditions her destiny. Firdaus's circumcision during her childhood may appear an unclaimed experience; she is made to go through it by her mother. In fact, she had to pay for her unleashed tongue:

> So one day I asked my mother about [my father]. How was it that she had given birth to me without a father? First she beat me. Then she brought a woman who was carrying a small knife or may be a razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs. (*Woman at Point Zero* 13)

Firdaus goes down the memory lane and tells the doctor about her first sexual sensations. A sensation of sharp pleasure is what she experienced during the contact that she had with a boy named Mohammadain. Firdaus acknowledges that such sensations would come from a point of the body which remained unidentified for her. This, however, happened before her circumcision after which she could no longer feel the pleasure if Mohammadain ever touched her. This makes her realize that she has been deprived of that specific part of her body. Such an idea enables Firdaus to draw erotic sensations from her reminiscences of the encounters she had with Mohammadain. Thus, Valassopoulos asserts,

> A certain understanding of sexuality is foreclosed at the site of Firdaus' excision, which cannot be effectively retrieved. This somewhat situates her story within the framework of a lost pleasure that she continues to seek throughout the novel and that stands in for irretrievable experiences or an unimaginable life that reflects back to her unrecognizable image. (48)

Schroeder looks at the issue of female circumcision in terms of male power and female weakness. For this, a reference is made to Lightfoot-Klein's popular treatise on the subject titled *Prisoners of Ritual*, wherein the author outlines a certain view on the purposes of the practice. Just as the gods who are believed to be bisexual, human beings too are considered to be endowed with masculine and feminine 'souls' at the same time. It is in and through the procreative organs of the body that these souls demonstrate themselves. Therefore, in case of a man, the female soul lies in the prepuce while for a woman, the masculine soul lies in the clitoris. The boy, on growing up, has to shed his feminine feature through the removal of the prepuce. The same goes for the girl who, before reaching puberty, has to give up her clitoris and at times both clitoris and labia. It is only then that she is entitled to be a complete woman capable of good sex. The idea of making a woman 'complete' refers to the belief that she is incomplete. Moreover, the male and the female circumcision are entirely different—both physically and symbolically. Male circumcision is the removal of prepuce which is a highly dispensable piece of skin attached to the penis. Female excision, on the contrary, is the removal of a vital part or parts away from the female genitalia. This dispensable nature of the prepuce and its relation to the female soul reflects the dispensability of the female self. Similarly, the clitoris, being a vital organ and repository of the masculine soul, gives intense pain upon being removed and an irreparable sense of loss. This is what can be seen in case of Firdaus who, as mentioned earlier, loses the erotic pleasure after her excision. In fact, she knows that she has lost something really essential (the masculine soul) which is also the repository of pleasure. A boy, on the other hand, does not experience any such feelings upon the loss of prepuce (the feminine soul).

Firdaus, on being stripped of her clitoris, appears to be making up for it for the rest of her life. It is not only her clitoris but her entire corporeal being which is later on taken away from her and given to Sheikh Mahmoud in the name of marriage who beats, fondles and nearly rapes her countless times. Both her excision during the childhood and marriage on growing up tell her that she cannot take charge of her body. It is rather the patriarchal order of the society which is the master of her body. Firdaus simply rejects this rule and struggles to make up for the loss of this control. She tends to achieve this through prostitution. As per the conventional patriarchal view, prostitution is associated with women who do not have control over their bodies. This long-standing belief is nevertheless challenged by Firdaus, as she turns down whoever she wants and chooses the clients who she deems worthy.

Firdaus' excision results in one more loss. In addition to the loss of feelings, she is also made to suffer from the loss of speech. This is what is suggested by

Cixous (419) who asserts that censoring the female body means the censoring of breath and speech at the same time. The removal of clitoris from Firdaus' body is thus an attempt to deprive her of the power of language—a power which is then handed over to patriarchy. For Schroeder, Firdaus not only embraces her body but also the suffering which comes along thus managing to remain whole and in possession of her discourse. By turning down those who she does not like, Firdaus proves that with the wholeness of the body comes the wholeness of the discourse.

With Marzouk, however, Firdaus experiences the worst feelings. It is as if she is once again castrated, though this time symbolically. He forcibly tries to be her pimp and tries to deprive her of her independence by controlling both her body and money. Thus, she is robbed both of her freedom of choice and that of speech. This enrages Firdaus to an extent that she kills Marzouk after which she asks herself why she never stabbed a man hitherto. Firadus validates herself by resisting castration and preserving her freedom of choice and expression. The readers thus see Firdaus ending up in fearlessness. She embraces death as she comes to learn that there is nothing to be afraid of. Patriarchy did its job by taking Firadus' body (clitoris) away from her. Firdaus, however, retorted by fighting for her memory, her body, and an emancipated speech. Mutilated, fragmented and dissected by phallocentricity, Firdaus takes her revenge by beating down those who try to fill her with shame or silence. She rather makes them yield to what she desires and wills.

Conclusion

El Saadawi's novella aims at resisting the widespread and erroneous notions regarding the woman question in the Egyptian metropolis. These notions feature her society in particular and the entire Arab-African world in general. There are various socio-political agencies and institutions (like tyrannical marriages and oppressive employment for women) that reinforce such misgivings. Women like Firdaus, her mother, and Sherifa are the typical victims in El Saadawi's fictional world who, at the same time, also hold a mirror up to their society. These characters present the sorry picture of the Arab-African cultural milieu where women are oppressed, subjugated and reduced to the subhuman level in the name of culture, politics, economy, and religion. El Saadawi's way is to bring forth all the bad practices which account for female suffering for centuries and which still exist to date. To her, the backwardness of women leads to the cumulative backwardness of an entire society.

El Saadawi debunks various myths that justify patriarchy. Such myths, as mentioned earlier, are embedded in many of our cultural institutions like marriage

or female circumcision. On top of this, men use violent means to obtain and then sustain their supremacy over women, who are then forced to adhere to the prevailing code of social conduct. On the political, social, and religious plane of El Saadawi's world, women are always disadvantaged and marginalized. This gives birth to characters like Firdaus who, in search of safety and shelter, leave the misogynist household of their husbands. Firdaus' becoming a prostitute or public property is the direct result of the denial of a sense of self or a stable identity—a phenomenon which El Saadawi's female characters go through. El Saadawi, therefore, does not hesitate to present gender as a model which accounts for the misery and subordination of women in her world. Her narrative is overtly bold and visibly vocal against the norms based on realities that shape the lives, situations and day-to-day experiences of her characters.

El Saadawi's Firdaus, in the course of her narrative, demonstrates what happens when a woman is tyrannized privately and publicly. One, at this point, may safely assume that Firdaus could have been a far better human being, with an innate sensitivity and a high level of intelligence (which she demonstrates at school), if she were not subjected to the misery at the hands of various men around her. It seems as if the entire social order is in conspiracy with patriarchy both of which mutually work out female subordination. El Saadawi, through her female protagonist and spokesperson (Firdaus), openly challenges normativity which is nothing but a socially-conditioned manipulation working in favor of men and standing antithetical to women.

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“To Be Free Is to Become Almost a Stranger to Oneself”: Writing the White Woman’s Gender Empowerment and Race Disgrace in Two of Nadine Gordimer’s Apartheid Novels

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Abstract Nadine Gordimer’s apartheid fiction evinces a strong interest in the experience of white women of conscience under apartheid. This paper examines her white heroines’ struggle against their gender position to find respectable roles in life and relations with the counter sex. It delves into *Occasion for Loving* (1963) and *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966) to compare the status of these women with men, black and white. Their gender roles and relations are taken into consideration in an attempt to figure out inner capacities to challenge the patriarchal practices, at all levels, inherent in South Africa. Embarrassment in their case comes not from the fact of being females but rather from belonging to the white race. Gordimer’s fiction is an open terrain which offers feasible avenues for white women in South Africa particularly and other African societies generally to find appropriate modes of life despite their colonial heritage.

Keywords apartheid fiction; white woman; gender; race; black/ white man

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Introduction

Although Nadine Gordimer used during apartheid to think of women's issues as a secondary topic compared to the cause of the day and of feminism at the time as a trivial movement, a close reading of her novels evinces that they have a feminist thrust. Next to her main concern which is unfolding the artificial shell of the Nationalist Government, the issue of penetrating the white female psyche under apartheid is stark. This may stem from her experience as a white woman in a society which perceives women as charming household objects despite their salient competencies. For this reason, she pictures white women of conscience who challenge this stereotypical perception.

Because women are generally seen to fit the domestic realm, their contributions are usually neglected, and hence they are inferiorized. Paradoxically, Gordimer's long apartheid fiction exposes "liberal white female characters" as heroines of the public and domestic spheres. With masculine and feminine roles, her strong-willed women surpass all the expectations. This paper, drawing on the feminist theory and Fanon's psychoanalysis, and reading *Occasion for Loving* (*OFL*) and *The Late Bourgeois World* (*LBW*), assumes that Gordimer's women, owing to this, become more successful than men. It aims to bring to light other gender roles they perform apart from being struggle advocates in comparison with the roles remained for men after their deep involvement in the political debate. Moreover, it examines the nature of the relationships women maintain with men: black and white.

The White Woman / Man: "Gender" Intricacies

In most societies, women are tightly attached to the domestic sphere where they exercise the role of caregivers basically. The social scale is generally hierarchical in which they are placed at its bottom whether at the house, workplace, or other domains. This has been the case of the society Gordimer depicts in her novels and not her heroines. But, this is not to say that they are domestically inactive. Gordimer's white heroines' consciousness grows gradually as they try to form a private identity. Correspondingly, the gender roles they perform increase from one psychological stage of development to another. Bell hooks, likewise, believes that "women [gain] the strength to challenge patriarchal forces" everywhere "[t]hrough consciousness-raising" (8). Gordimer's reflections of gender roles and gender relations in her fiction change noticeably with her change in perception of the political reality of the day. She goes towards stressing the necessity of the female figure in the struggle against the hegemony of the Nationalist Government. By

contrast, Dorothy Driver attributes Gordimer's insistence on women's issues within such a turbulent atmosphere to being a "disadvantaged working group" that is "in a legally subordinate position" (33).

Before being agents in the public sphere, Gordimer's heroines as all women are thoroughly immersed in their domestic roles as wives, mothers, or daughters. And since white men are preoccupied with their political affiliations, women are obliged to be primarily caregivers. Jane flax sees the "domestication of women" as the result of a painful process through which "women learn to live with their oppression" (145). She agrees with hooks that gender roles and power relations are the offspring of the most important unit of socialization which is the family. In the family, the mothers are responsible for instructing their children in their social relations. The girls, like their mothers, have of course readiness to act in the domestic. The hot political atmosphere in this fiction widens the chasm between the white woman and man of conscience and turns their relations extremely problematic. She no more accepts this indifference to their familial life.

Liz in *The Late Bourgeois World* clarifies that "[t]he concept of marriage as shelter remained with [her]" (36). So, when she gets pregnant at eighteen years old, she hurries to marry Max though he "might not have been the man according to specifications" (36). The young Liz wanted to "live a woman's life" (36), to be a woman like her mother and to marry a man like her father. Nonetheless, all she learns from her family proves to be desperately unfitting, for the reality she is confronted with shows that men of her father's kind no longer exist. Max transfers his family duties to his wife Liz who is left to swing between the needs of a newborn baby and the political world she is introduced to trough her husband. Gordimer's portrayal of Max in the novel reveals an indifferent man whose main purpose in life is to defeat the white power. This seems belying, but Max's frequent absences because of his political activities and uncaring attitudes towards his familial life disturb the wife-husband bond. Worst, Liz has to live with, in addition to her loneliness, her pain knowing that her husband indulges in many extra-marital relations. This pushes provokes her to think of avenging herself by trying a couple of affairs: " [t]hese love affairs caused me pain, and in its context I had one or two affairs of my own. I suppose I thought of redressing the balance" (52-3). In bell hooks' view, this can be considered as a challenge to "male sexual behavior" (80).

Although *Occasion for Loving* is set historically before the other novel, it displays similar concerns. Jessie Stilwell does not belong to a revolutionary family in the concrete sense rather to a liberal-minded one "but not radical" (*OFL* 47). Whether activists or liberals, they all belong to the category this paper has referred

to earlier as people of conscience. Jessie also learns from her psychologically disturbed mother that marriage and motherhood constitute a crucial part of any woman's identity. Next to her constant search for "a highly paid, commercial job" (47), household tasks take a great deal of Jessie's time who yearns for some time of privacy. In the other side of the Stilwells' house, there is the husband Tom who is always busy with his liberal project of unfolding a true history of the continent even during the holidays. Jessie also shares with him similar sympathetic attitudes towards the blacks and their cause; yet, she has never overlooked the simplest of her tasks such as playing with their three daughters. Consequently, Jessie realizes that the life "she accepted without question as the definitive one … was not the sum total of her being" (19).

By retaining the domestic undertakings culturally assigned to them, Gordimer's white women are thus extremely feminine. From another angle, however, taking Jane Flax's claim that the public world usually prevails the domestic (162) in addition to the idea that masculinity is attached to the first while femininity to the second and that both concepts are socio-culturally employed to divide gender roles between the public and domestic spheres, Gordimer's women are thus more masculine than feminine. Men abdicate some of their crucial familial roles to women as being the head of the house. This lessens from women's femininity and adds to their masculinity. Because women master the domestic realm besides their important participation in the political debate, these women are also more masculine than men themselves. This is especially evident in the case of Liz who is more deeply involved in the struggle against apartheid compared to Jessie's liberal attitudes. And since "the whole idea of liberation and its possibilities is conceived of in masculine terms" and "[l]iberation and nationhood are contextualized within the male domain" (Sakamoto, "Nadine Gordimer" 228), white women's contribution is empowering, for it makes them assume more masculine roles. Though this contribution is sometimes guided by men, it is as dangerous as theirs since they are also assigned risky missions that may lead easily to prison. Hence, they are not exempt from the close surveillance of the government which does not hesitate to restrict their daily lives.

Adding to that, the economic power which is also by convention contextualized within the male domain is handed over to Gordimer's white women. Men's hectic political life leads their roles as the familial economic force to fade away. Women may take hold of the economic power of their families entirely as they may share it equally with men. Therefore, masculinity of the female characters in this fiction is not solely related to the political domain.

Each of Nadine Gordimer's female protagonists manifests the above criteria to a greater extent even if to differing degrees. While Tom Stilwell's liberal attitudes as a university professor remain mostly theoretical and ineffective, a woman like Jessie concretized her beliefs despite her awareness of her weaknesses as a white woman first and the constraints the white government is responsible for second. By forming a friendship with Gideon Shibalo, a black artist, she challenges herself and the race ideology that was prevalent. Shibalo fills somehow the terrible hole in the Stilwells' familial bonds; he "rounded out the group into a family" (*OFL* 212). More empowering is Jessie's contribution to cater for the economic necessities of the family. Both of Mrs. and Mr. Stilwell work to do so, but this exhibits Jessie with more masculine capacities compared to her husband.

Of the two novels under study, *The Late Bourgeois World* presents the most apparent example of the masculine capacities of Nadine Gordimer's white women in her early fiction. Max's constant absence drives him to yield his main familial task as the head of his family to his wife Liz. Moreover, because of his blind commitment, he cannot spend a long time in the series of jobs he takes. He at last stops working and frees himself completely to his revolutionary cause. The reason according to Liz is "in general, he wasn't equal to the demands he…he took upon himself" (*LBW* 18), that is political actions and familial life. Thus, the masculine task of being the economic force of the family is taken over by Liz. Normally, Max whose "father not only had been a front bencher in the Smuts government but was also a director of various companies" (25) is more powerful than the "little girl … a shopkeeper's daughter from a small town" (25) he marries. This little girl, "'little' was used as indicative of … social standing" (25), becomes more masculine while Max loses most of his masculinity and turns into a woman figure.

Liz's work as a typewriter for the COD, Congress of Democrats, away from being economically empowering is politically as well. It is her outlet to the public world. Being among the staff of such an anti-apartheid organization next to being the wife of a dangerous figure like Max Van Dan Sandt put Liz in a precarious situation similar to her husband's. To sum up, in this small family, Liz, the first to commit herself openly to the struggle against segregation in South Africa in Gordimer's fiction, dominates overwhelmingly both the public and the domestic spheres in her relation with man. She proves how much faithful to the cause she persists by keeping in work to the COD after Max's withdrawal. Her participation is more worthy than her husband's who after his great sacrifices turns to be a state witness unable to endure the torture he is subjected to. This is another instance in the novel where Max loses some aspects of his masculinity. Because both assume

different gender roles, coldness clouds their life, and they end up divorced.

In view of that, white women in this fiction perform important gender roles in their society, and their contribution in the political debate of the day is as significant as men's. These women, Gordimer sees, are a necessary vehicle that makes impossible political actions considerably smooth because they cannot be easily suspected. Certain tasks thus are only women-fitting. And sometimes, they succeed in politics more than their male counterparts. This appears strikingly in *Burger's Daughter* where Rosa is chosen to engage in the role of the fiancée of Noel de Witt. For "it was natural, no one could suspect otherwise. Noel was one of [her] father's known associates" (*Burger's* 65), the mission was successful. This intelligence in the struggle is also evident in *The Late Bourgeois World* through Liz's decision to use her senile grandmother's bank account to help an anti-apartheid banned movement.

Despite that both women and men in Gordimer's fiction perform masculine roles, the male-centric gaze of their society hardly does justice to their involvement. They are looked at as mere expedients in the struggle but never as an equal force. A possible explanation of this patriarchal attitude may be found in Jane Flax's ideas on gender and gender relations. She imputes this sexist thought to the nature of education males receive. They are taught that men "have superior powers of abstract reason (mind), to be the "masters" of nature (including bodies), and to be more aggressive and militaristic" (Flax 173). For this very reason, men appear as monitors of the resistance movement. They do not hesitate to exploit women to achieve their outlined goals under all the circumstances. The white woman, sometimes, is not only colonized by apartheid discourse in South Africa; the patriarchal attitudes males practice are perilously more colonizing. Therefore, next to the political struggle for freedom evident in Gordimer's apartheid fiction, there is women's struggle for gender equality.

Feminist literature artistically configures women as protagonists who "do not readily accept the traditional role of women as decided by society. They are ready to make their own decisions, to express this choice of personal decision-making, and are ready to deal with the consequences of these choices, actions, and decisions" (Lalwani par.4). And so are Gordimer's protagonists. This makes Gordimer's literature 'feminist' despite being overpoweringly political and also despite her denial of any feminist adherence. Gordimer's women are featured in a constant state of development — psychologically , politically, economically…— in parallel with the changing circumstances of the South African life contrary to men who by adhering blindly to a certain political dogma they move subsequently towards their

destruction. This is explicative of why these women succeed in their political and personal lives more than men do.

Not surprisingly then that Gordimer's women seek in the midst of this chaos more personal freedom and sexual liberation. Andrew Ettin sees Gordimer as "a female writer whose intense gaze is directed toward the public as well as private realms of life and one who also has depicted many socially conscious, politically involved, and sexually free female characters" (10). However, because private life refers to the right to do what you want, whenever you want, and under all conditions, Gordimer's females are seen as sexual freedom seekers since this very personal act is also overshadowed by the political system.

Though it should be the first task to be learnt in their lives, white women of conscience turn their attention towards their bodies and their personal needs only when they realize that the upheaval they are caught in cannot be ended in one day and night. Sexuality which is a trivial issue in front of the prejudices of apartheid becomes an indispensable medium to another sense of freedom, access to their bodies namely. This is more suggested by Toshiko Sakamoto in "The Politics of Place and the Question of Subjectivity in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*": "Gordimer explores in her imaginative writing her characters' bodies and their sexuality as the locus of conflict, tension, contradiction and revolt against the white familial values and the social system of apartheid" (264). From bell hooks' standpoint, a means that "calls [women] away from isolation and alienation into community" is sexuality (92). Like political activism, the body in Gordimer's fiction can be a means of empowerment and enslavement at the same time.

Thus, apart from being wives, mothers, or daughters, these females assume also the role of lovers. Gordimer's use of sexuality as a motif in her fiction is adeptly multidimensional. One cannot deny that it (sexuality) is the heroines' way to attain more amusement and to feel more liberated from the realities. But above all, it is used as a medium to come to grips with other mentalities other than the revolutionaries', with other people where "nobody expects you to be more than you are" (*Burger's* 250). Sexual relations in the novels under study have a special tint. Taking their early experiences into account, white women establish relations that can be categorized as anything except marriage. Most important is that these relations do not weigh them down.

In *Occasion for Loving*, a long marital life leads Jessie to question the "purpose of it all" (161). She becomes more convinced "that everything we think of as love — even sex — is nearly always power instead" (*LBW* 156) that makes one side under the authority of another. For this reason, she avoids sexual affairs beyond her

formal marriage. Gordimer presents the liberal-minded Ann Davis as a white female counter figure of Jessie in this novel. This young woman, contrary to Jessie's empty life, enjoys a life full of excitement without duties in the public or domestic spheres. Even to her marriage, she cannot remain faithful with the extramarital affairs she indulges in whenever it is possible.

The failure of Liz's first marriage creates fear from serious relations, yet she manages to please herself with another type of sensual life. The divorce opens up new horizons to get rid of the heavy load this sick marital institution generates. During Max's trial, she is introduced to the lawyer Graham Mill. "[H]e was like one of those doctors with whom you feel that he knows everything about you, simply from a professorial reading of signs you don't even know you exhibit" (36), Liz scrupulously describes him. He is her window to the private life she lives briefly with her husband. By means of this man, she learns how to use her body to enjoy moments of self-liberation, for in this relation she is "the one who has him, helpless" (38). This relation is liberating because it succumbs to no rule. Even if they love each other, they do not marry as they "make a point of not living in each other's pocket" (34). Their meetings are a matter of mood; they meet when they want, and they stay apart when there is no need. Liz delineates the relation she holds with Graham as:

> A sexual connection. But there is more to it than that. A love affair? Less than that. I'm not suggesting it's a new form of relationship, of course, but rather that it's made up of the bits of old ones that don't work. It's decent enough; harms nobody, not even ourselves. I suppose Graham would marry me, if I wanted it. Perhaps he wants it; and then it would all change. (37)

In fact, this relation is something new; "it's not classified" and not "labelled" (34). It is at all sides beneficial. Graham's intellect helps Liz to approach the South African political scene from another angle. She discovers another way whereby the individual remains faithful without belonging avowedly to the movement of resistance. Her job at the Institute for Medical Research can be considered as a new brand of activism. It contributes to wipe out segregation since "blood are [sic] all the same, no matter whom they come from" (37). Through her relation with Graham, Liz who has never left South Africa before gets also the chance to spend a vacation in Europe. The trip is most importantly a journey to the self through which this character learns to live a sensual life apart from all the exigencies. She learns to feel her existence as an independent human being but primarily as a woman. The

motif of journey in Gordimer's fiction reorganizes the shelves of women's selves to make them psychologically more powerful than men. Sensuality does not weaken them; on the contrary, it accords them with more alertness to the demands of their environment.

Most of Gordimer's white women of conscience endure common dilemmas that perplex them along with the readers. What to do and how to act in situations requiring their engagement is unexpected. Liz chooses willingly to carry on working at the Medical Institute dealing with all types of blood, be they black or white. A more dangerous step is her decision towards the end of the novel to aid the black anti-apartheid movement through the account of her dying grandmother. By that, she paves the way to her full political commitment. Jessie also decides to carry on meeting people across the racial line in places like the 'Lucky Star' and 'Tommie's'. The heroines' decision at the end of the novel resembles the author's perception of the dilemma of the female psyche. These women are thus able to step out of their problems whatever their nature might be. This is one of the author's indirect techniques to shed light on the brainpower of her women in order to dispel the myth perceiving them as sensitive creatures whose predicament is mostly gender.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned points and Karen Halil's evaluation of Rosa, in *Burger's Daughter*, as a male figure due to her involvement in the public spectrum and as a traveler-hero who "goes abroad, enjoys sexual trysts, tells stories" (33), the female characters under scrutiny are exceedingly qualified to belong to the same category. In better words, Jessie, in *Occasion for Loving*, next to Liz and Ann, in *The Late Bourgeois World*, are male figures whose masculine tasks, if compared with their male counterparts, are more salient.

The nature of the gender relations that white women create with white men can also be examined in the light of 'friendship' to which Gordimer does not devote enough space. The most possible explanation of this is the milieu these women dwell in which the political overcasts the personal. Forming friendships is reckoned as trivial when viewing the shortage of time and the big number of responsibilities. This fiction includes no clear evidence of the friendship we know in which both sides are committed to each other without benefits. Even the author's use of language — associates, faithfuls, members, liberals, communists… — when describing the relations that bond her characters supports this argument. Jessie Stilwell the protagonist who belongs to the liberal phase of Gordimer's fiction presents us with another reason. She could have formed a friendship with her guest and her husband's friend Boaz Davis, but because both men are of the same nature she hesitates. None of the protagonists, therefore, is able to form a genuine

friendship.

From what has been exposed so far, Gordimer's white female characters cannot be deemed as victims of their gender. They are endowed, despite all the obstacles, by a venturing spirit to reposition themselves. It is the same spirit that led the writer herself to stay in South Africa in the face of censorship laws. Gender, the novels imply, can never be taken as a rationale by women to accept inferiority. On the contrary, it is a point of departure from all sorts of fear.

White Skin, Black Skin: 'Race' Disgrace

The Nationalist Government's racist laws succeeded to separate people in apartheid South Africa into two big headings: blacks and whites. This skin-based separation denotes theoretically the inferiority of one race and the superiority of another. It practically paved the way for the 'inferiority complex' Fanon speaks about to haunt dark-skinned people in their native countries. Acts such as the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* (1949) and the *Immorality Act* (1950) outlaw any sort of relationship that may spring between the two races. In spite of this, the growing consciousness of Nadine Gordimer's white women leads them to a world other than theirs. They cross the color bar, while trying to find a meaning for their existence in South Africa, by coming in touch with other types of black male characters totally different from the servant male figure they used to know. Since the white woman and the black man are aware of all these complications, their relation becomes a worth arena of investigation.

The reasons that drive the black man to form a relationship with the white woman are numerous. Franz Fanon's experience as a black man in a white society bears great resemblance to the situation of the black man in this fiction. According to Fanon, what triggers the black essentially to access the white world is the longing for recognition to free himself from the infernal circle he is thrown to:

> I am overdetermined from without, I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance … Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea. When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle. (87-8)

In this quotation, Fanon stresses that this infernal circle is created by the 'fact of blackness.' It is " [a] solidly established myth" and its presence is deferred till "the first encounter" of the Negro with the "white man" (116). As a consequence, he

seeks assimilation to escape the ugliness forcefully associated with blackness: "I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is? " (86). All beauty, oppressed people are taught, lies in the color of their oppressors i.e. whiteness.

To change one's skin is impossible. Hence, looking for viable means to achieve this assimilation becomes the black man's main obsession. He finally envisages the white woman as the only possible form of recognition: "who but a white woman can do this for me? " (45). The white woman is the symbol of purity and innocence of her nation. She is in Robin Visel's words the "vessel for the virtues of "white civilization" in the "heart of darkness" (33). So, to be in love with a white woman is to penetrate whiteness. Fanon's black intellectual Jean Veneuse, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, articulates this persuasively:

> By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man.
>
> I am a white man.
>
> Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization....
>
> I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.
>
> When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine. (45)

The same ambition of Jean Veneuse who saw France as the appropriate direction to continue his studies possesses Gideon Shibalo, the main black character in *Occasion for Loving*, after getting his B.A. from Fort Hare. He succeeds to win a scholarship to pursue his postgraduate studies in Italy. Unfortunately, because he is black, he is denied the right to have a passport and decides to fight them. And so he does by becoming an activist within the ANC, African National Congress. Shibalo's strong desire to elude his skin color complex is encoded in the series of sexual relations he holds with white women. Her open nature, curiosity to compile knowledge about the aboriginal culture and willingness to defy all the barriers are among the factors that draw Gideon to Ann Davis. She "quickly became as good as the best of the black girls; like them, she could dance with her whole body" (*OFL* 93). This adds to Gideon's fascination with this lively woman who despite all circumstances "was herself, her splendid self, a law to herself" (275). On this ground, he tries to keep her distant from the political world; he "did not want [her] to change … He did not want to see her acquire the cunning and patient temper of a political rebel" (274-5). Ann in return might have seen the picture of the civilized black in Gideon, for he is a teacher and a painter. The 'civilized black' is an oxymoron, and Fanon, through

it, attracts our attention to another contradicting assessment standard. Whites see blackness when they want, and they purposefully ignore it for their own good. He clarifies: " [t]his procedure is quite familiar to colored students in France. Society refuses to consider them genuine Negroes. The Negro is a savage, whereas the student is civilized" (50).

This romance evolves regardless of the surrounding reality. On the one hand, Gid, as Ann prefers to call him, must not have forgotten that blackness is a lifelong biological fact. This is wryly suggested by the author through Ida, a friend of Shibalo, who while organizing his clothes "found paint on a short" and "only wondered, in her practical way, how she would get it off" (*OFL* 134). On the other hand, Ann "did not love him *across* the colour bar" (275, original emphasis) since she does not put this reality into consideration right from the beginning. When she recognizes that his blackness is a real deterrent, she steps back with her husband to England. Shibalo similarly absorbs the impossibility of escaping one's own body and race. Because "[u]nable to be assimilated … he consoles himself by associating with the dead" (Fanon 46). He turns out to be jobless and, most regrettably, a drunkard at the end of the novel.

The black man in Gordimer's apartheid fiction approaches the white woman also for the sake of involving her in the struggle. A stark example is Gideon Shibalo's relation with Callie Stow, a Scotswoman who comes to South Africa to conduct some studies. Yet, her liberal nature leads her to many political adventures and ends up in prison. Of this nature, Stow is the first woman Gideon "had desired … mentally, been drawn to her thought the process of her thinking" (*OFL* 124). She is the woman who constantly reminds him that "a black face didn't necessarily make one — an African" (178). Likewise, Luke Forsake aims basically to reopen contact with Liz for "[p]olitical reasons" (*LBW* 79). Liz, by the time Forsake asks for her help to transfer money from abroad, is already "out of that sort of circle [meaning politics] long ago" (86). Despite this, he insists on her to accept the proposal as he is entirely aware of the failure of the whole mission without the assistance of an experienced white woman. It is an allusion to the outstanding role white women of conscience play in the struggle in the side of both white and black men. This is accentuated by Liz: "[p]erhaps he's talking now in the language I don't understand … telling them he's found a white woman who'll do it" (90).

Sympathy also brings the white woman and the black man closer in Gordimer's fiction. She identifies with the black man as a challenging step to the patriarchal discourse of apartheid. This relation sometimes exceeds mere friendship to be sexual. So, next to being servants, black characters are portrayed as friends, siblings

and, in most intimate cases, lovers. Since these women come to light in a white-male-dominated society and the black man is dehumanized by the laws of the same society, both of them see the white man as their rival.

Jessie Stilwell gets acquainted quickly with Gideon Shibalo's presence in her house and her own life in particular. A kind of friendship grows between the two since Jessie envisions in him a conduit of accompaniment and subversion of the white life standards she does not choose but, like all the whites, she finds herself in the midst. She points: "none of us knows how much getting free of the color bar means to us" (*OFL* 258). The color line in South Africa creates two worlds: one whose people are gifted with "a silver spoon clamped between … jaws" (286), the other is occupied by people who "were born and lived and died before they could come to life" (276). It is the latter that Gideon does not hesitate to describe in his conversations with her. Gideon's situation is reminiscent of the mine workers' Jessie survived nearby during her childhood without being even slightly aware of their suffering. Led by her curiosity and sympathy, she drives through the township Gideon had been raised in. The mode of life was terrifying to Jessie who "found fear in herself at the idea of being allied to this life" (276). Jessie becomes more sympathetic towards Gideon, for he is now not only the victim of a discriminatory system or his white beloved but a whole white colonial society of which she is one.

Taking this into account, this relation can be categorized as a kind of refuge from the disappointment incurred by their own world. For Gordimer's white women of conscience are embarrassed by the segregationist practices of their government and all white people, they abandon all sorts of relations with them. The reaction of Jessie while reading the letter received from the "local residents" after her return from the beach with Gideon is indicative of this; she wonders: " [w]hy is one always having to be so ashamed for these people … I'll never go there again" (293). In the township Ann visits accompanied by Gideon, she finds a refuge from the white gaze that manacles her personal life. The small cottage she sleeps in is magical. She " [wakes] up in the morning with the happiness of waking in a foreign country" (232).

This obscuring relation is also a resort from the curse of their whiteness. Aiming to discover black Africa, Gordimer's white heroines come to understand gradually that their whiteness is the source of their alienation in what is considered as their country. Though they are people of conscience, their whiteness epitomizes the white colonial power. It is a turning moment in their lives when they espouse the alternative of active engagement to eradicate apartheid. Liz passes mistakenly by the industrial area of the city and stops watching a black man conversing with a group of black girl-workers. When their faces meet, he looks "as though [she] wasn't there

at all" (*LBW* 21). Committing herself to the struggle again without laying her yoke neither "on Freud" nor "on Jesus" (12) is her decision to evade these feelings of estrangement.

Whiteness in Gordimer's fiction symbolizes isolation to the white woman and man likewise. In *A World of Strangers*, her second novel, the protagonist is a young Englishman named Toby Hood who despite the strong friendships he maintains with many black men still feels an outsider in South Africa. He concludes that "under a white skin" one cannot get except the "sense of loss" (*A World* 146). It is the same plight the author, a woman of conscience, found herself in the midst. She reveals through her article "Across Time and Two Hemispheres": "I was becoming aware of my growing up in a society, my country, where there was no connection recognized between ourselves, the whites, and the surrounding blacks" (111).

The gap apartheid laws generate between the races exasperates the image of the black man as an 'other.' The mysterious black body as a result becomes a source of fascination, and any connection with it satisfies this sense of enthrallment. Robin Visel interprets this attraction as being merely sexually oriented. She writes: "[f]or her [Gordimer's] heroines, "blackness" is linked to sex" (34). Fanon's experience in France reveals also that " [f]or the majority of white men the Negro represents the sexual instinct … The white women among the whites … view the Negro as the keeper of the impalpable gate that opens into the realm of the orgies, of bacchanals, of delirious sexual sensations" (Fanon 136).

To Jessie, the show of mine dancers is past-revealing. The dancers evoke the picture of the black with his sweat working in the mines, the picture of "a man whose muscles moved independently, like a current beneath the surface of his skin" (*OFL* 32). She acknowledges to Gideon that the black man was "[t]he very first man, the man of the [early] sex fantasies" (258). The grouping of two different bodies is more fascinating for Jessie. She stands watching Ann and Gideon serenely for a long time while sleeping together. In the side of the black body, the white body loses its charisma; Gideon's body has "a shine going down the curve that followed the groove of the spine to the short, gleaming roundness of the buttocks" (254). Ann's growing consciousness of his skin color leads her to appreciate him as a black object first and as a man second. She touches his body with infatuation: "the dark positiveness of his skin … she dwelt on it in secret as soon as she touched him" (183). This stirs up to mind Fanon's white acquaintance's remark to him that "the Negroes … have tremendous sexual powers … They are really genital" (Fanon 121).

Gordimer's attitude towards the issue of sex and politics and their relations to

each other in her fiction remains vague and open to criticism. *The Late Bourgeois World* examines such a critical question. The political impersonated in Luke Forsake, a black character, undertakes a sexual tone to speak with Liz "suggesting that he would like to make love to [her]" (*LBW* 82). Trying to convince herself with his plan, the sexual alternative leaps suddenly to Liz's mind. In case she accepts to be actively engaged in the political scene again, she thinks "it's quite possible he'll make love to [her] …That's part of the bargain" (94). It is not crystal clear if one is the direct upshot of the other, or they are reciprocally interrelated. In a milieu where the political always diminishes the personal, it is very logical to presume that the sexual is no more than the reverberation of the political. However, the answer Gordimer provides to Nancy Topping Bazin's question if "women take political risks for sexual reasons" adds more elusiveness to the whole subject: " [y]es, well, I don't know whether one can generalize about that" (585).

The black man helps the white woman markedly to know herself and to get a satisfactory self-image. Yet, from another angle, due to her skin color prerogatives, she is the active partner. Apparently, Jessie is the most conscious of the two protagonists of this reality. Resembling all the blacks, Gideon Shibalo's helplessness is discernible: "[y]ou had always to do things for them because they are powerless to do anything for you" (*OFL* 207). By closely looking at Ann and Gideon's romance, it can be easily noticed that the white woman is more active physically and mentally than her black partner, for she is the decision maker. Luke Forsake's vulnerability because he cannot afford Liz with nothing save for sexual pleasure, "it's all he's got to offer [her]" (*LBW* 94), puts her in a vantage position. "The lack of self-esteem as an object worthy of love" is one of the paramount factors that trim down the black man's mobility in this relation if not "inhibits and falsifies" it (Fanon 55).

In this regard, all the sorts of relations that grow between the white woman and the black man are doomed to failure. Other novels demonstrate that the reasons are numerous. No matter their allegiance to the black cause, all the whites are bound to "the superior living standards of white civilization" (*LBW* 27) not necessarily politically or economically but basically culturally. Dominant is the component of racial supremacy between the black and the white characters in Gordimer's fiction despite their willingness to suppress or at least escape it. While both hooks and Flax show how human beings are enslaved by their gender, Fanon believes the human being is above all things the slave of his race: "[t]he Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation" (42-3). So, the cross-racial relations do not usually succeed, especially romances, for this complex heightens the misconceptions

between the partners.

Conclusion

Comparing the gender roles and power relations the white heroine of Nadine Gordimer's apartheid fiction forms with the black and white man, the paper has elicited the subsequent remarks. Whereas the formalities connecting the white woman and the white man are generally dictated by the standards of their society, she voluntarily tends to be with the black man. The last in all the cases is short-lived, yet it permeates her memory. It constitutes a pivot in her life towards development at all levels. The white man allows her to pierce the public sphere and so does the black man. But whilst the first is a rival, the second is a victim by means of his "fact of blackness," a factor that leads usually to countless, disastrous effects. The woman's consciousness increases gradually to figure out the complexity her skin color enormously inflicts on her living in South Africa. She is not embarrassed by being a female rather by belonging to the white minority. Hence, she becomes culpable on account of her white skin albeit being a woman of conscience. In arguing that the white woman is not a weak partner to her white counterpart, the paper tallies not with the claims of many critics. Her challenging spirit enables her to step out all the incarcerating societal norms to be stronger than him in diverse occurrences. In both cases, she is a stranger to herself. With the white man, she is absolutely so because she confronts herself first by eliminating her apprehensions. She defies all the taboos and the picture of the traditional woman. Thus, for she reconstructs a new self-image, she is a stranger to her old self in a positive sense. With the black man, the strangeness is the ramification of her attempts to deny all the privileges endowed by her skin i.e. to be a stranger to her race. To be able to live in her country, she must free herself from the sense of being the victimizer. Accordingly, *Occasion for Loving* and *The Late Bourgeois World* offer feasible avenues for white women in South Africa particularly and other African societies generally to find appropriate modes of life despite their colonial heritage.

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Images of Legendary Figures, Genre, Toponymy: The Study of Mary Stewart's Arthurian Romance

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Abstract This paper focuses on Mary Stewart's Arthurian Saga pentalogy that represents the most significant stage in her writer's career. For a comprehensive study of Stewart's Arthurian Romance, the descriptive and historical methods in the collection and systematization of language material are applied. The study also reviews some elements of analysis and synthesis. The author of the article has made an attempt to specify the genre of Stewart's Arthurian Romance and analyse the main characters of the novels (Merlin, King Arthur, Mordred), with particular attention being paid to the place names that are considered from historical, geographical and linguistic points of view. The novels straddle the boundary between the historical novel and the fantasy genre. It is proposed to employ the new term 'historical-fantastic novel' to define the genre of the Arthurian pentalogy. M. Stewart combines a traditional idealization of the Arthurian legend, a detailed historical setting, and a vivid form of characterization. The novelist proposes the realistic depiction of Merlin: he is an ordinary human, having the visionary ability, but not a magician. Stewart's King Arthur is definitely idealized and portrayed as a wise politician and a fair ruler. Mordred is depicted as a pawn of fate following the path of self-destructive behaviour. In the novels native Celtic and Latinised Celtic toponyms are used along with modern English geographical names.

Key words Mary Stewart; Arthurian legends; fantasy; toponyms

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Introduction: Mary Stewart's Arthurian Pentalogy

Mary Stewart (born Mary Florence Elinor Rainbow; 17 September 1916—9 May 2014) is a popular English novelist whose first books were published in the 1950s. They are considered romantic suspense novels. These novels are known for their settings, many in some exotic locations: Greece, Spain, etc. However, Mary Stewart is best known for her Arthurian Romance. All the five novels—*The Crystal Cave* (1970), *The Hollow Hills* (1973), *The Last Enchantment* (1979), *The Wicked Day* (1983) and *The Prince and the Pilgrim* (1995) portray Dark Age Britain (the fifth—sixth centuries). The characters of the novels are the heroes of the Arthurian legend—Merlin, King Arthur, Ygraine, Mordred, king Vortigern and others.

M. Stewart started writing her novels at the peak of her writer's career. The novels aroused keen interest and quite favorable responses in English and American literary criticism. For example, such researchers as Beverly Taylor, Elisabeth Brewer, Raymond Henry Thompson and others gave highest assessment of M. Stewart's novels. In Russia Mary Stewart became particularly popular after a Russian literary scholar Valentina Ivasheva first published a short review of the first three novels. V. Ivasheva called Mary Stewart "the best model of a British intellectual and a patriot" (Ivasheva 5). In her review V. Ivasheva noted that "at the beginning of the 1970s the problem of 'Englishness' was set in an unexpected form and great artistic expression by Mary Stewart, one of the most popular contemporary English novelists" (Ivasheva 6). The term "Englishness" relates to England, its people and culture. This term refers to the quality, state or characteristic of being English, to the features of the English national identity, which have distinguished the English people from other peoples for many centuries. For V. Ivasheva Mary Stewart contributed significantly to the process of English identity formation.

The British Empire had colonies and other territories around the world. At its peak, the British Empire stretched over one-fourth of the earth›s surface. England was the largest empire in the world. However, in the twentieth century the British faced with the demise of their country on the world stage. Great Britain lost its colonies and faced with the Americanization of its society and with the prospect of integration into Europe. Moreover, some people in postwar-Britain began to look more closely at their national identity and their national history. Therefore, I think, Mary Stewart looked back upon the remote legendary past of King Arthur to show the former might and greatness of England.

Her husband, Sir Frederick Stewart, was Chairman of the Geology Department of Edinburgh University. He was a geologist and a historian. Sir Frederick Stewart conducted archeological excavations and learnt a lot about archaeological excavation sites at locations inhabited during the Dark Ages. There is no doubt that M. Stewart was aware of the results of the excavations.

Defining the Genre of the Arthurian Romance

M. Stewart has successfully combined the legends with the historical background, employing the data of modern archeological research. The novelist tries to link the legends with some historical facts. As I have said, M. Stewart's Arthurian novels straddle the boundary between the historical novel and the fantasy genre.

A professor and Arthurian scholar Raymond Henry Thompson interviewed Mary Stewart in 1989. At that time of the interview, M. Stewart lived in the village of Loch Awe in Scotland. Thompson asked her a question: How do you perceive your four Arthurian novels in relation to your other work? The novelist said: "I'd always wanted to write a historical novel. One of my main interests, as you will notice in my modern thrillers, was Roman history. I'd been to look at the Roman sites in England many a time, and tried to recreate things in my mind. Thus when I finally decided to write a historical novel, Roman Britain seemed the obvious place to start" (Thompson, *Taliesin's Successors*). As can be seen from the above, Mary Stewart regards her novels as historical ones.

Stewart's Arthurian novels have received a wide range of interpretations by literary scholars. British literary critics Beverly Taylor and Elizabeth Brewer state that Mary Stewart's "first three Arthurian novels are considered as quasi-historical novels" (13). While analysing *The Crystal Cave* they admit that "the characters are depicted in terms of modern psychology and moral attitudes, and set against the background of a romanticised fifth-century Romano-British society" (303). The researchers stated that "Mary Stewart's trilogy, in idealizing Arthur and making him a romantic hero, belongs to the older tradition of Arthurian literature, though in placing him in a fifth-century setting she takes advantage of recent scholarly research" (305).

The Russian researcher V. Ivasheva classifies Stewart's novels as historical. In addition, Raymond Henry Thompson comes up with a similar suggestion. In his book *The Return from Avalon* he views Stewart's Romance as "historical novels" (33).

The question I would like to raise in the article is "Do M. Stewart's Arthurian novels belong to historical fiction?" Mary Stewart pays special attention to the

image of 'local colour'. She depicts the life of the Early Middle Ages and explores the way medieval man perceives the world. The novelist paints the nature and landscape in bright colours. Thus, Mary Stewart directly follows the literary traditions built on by Walter Scott, the founder of the genre of the historical novel. Stewart's desire to reconstruct the past in all its originality is inspired by English Romanticism.

Describing the events of the remote past, M. Stewart pictures some historical figures, kings Vortigern and Ambrosius, queen Clotilde, that are minor characters in the novels. Fictitious characters are main characters in Stewart's novels. This is what relates Stewart's novels with Walter Scott's novels. Thus, it should be noted that there are some elements of the historical novel in M. Stewart's novels.

Currently, most of researchers consider that M. Stewart's Arthurian Romance belongs to the fantasy genre. An Arthurian scholar Dr. John Joseph Doherty thinks that Mary Stewart wrote a fantasy series. The researcher assumes that the novels are grounded in historical fact in a well-realised fifth-century Britain. Thus, they would seem to belong to the historical genre. Dr. Doherty states that by choosing Merlin as a narrator M. Stewart has written a fantasy series'. Kristina Hildebrand in *The Female Reader at the Round Table: Religion and Women in Three Contemporary Arthurian Texts* writes the following: "Mary Stewart has written a large number of works, but her Arthurian novels are the only ones which may be defined as fantasy" (68). The Russian literary scholar and translator Evgeny Zharinov also thinks that Mary Stewart's novels belong to the fantasy genre. However, Zharinov notes that "both Walter Scott and John Tolkien can be considered as the prominent figures in the fantasy genre" (320). Zharinov believes that "by continuing the romantic literary traditions of W. Scott and J. Tolkien, some contemporary authors, who write fantasy books, combine both the literary historical mystifications of the 'Scottish romanticist', and the mythological arrangement of the Oxford professor" (321).

It is beyond argument that Stewart's novels have some fantasy genre elements. According to the rules of the fantasy genre, Mary Stewart's novels depict the past events. The novelist tells about the age of chivalry. The novels are based on the Arthurian legend. In addition, there is always a quest that is a mandatory, primary element of the fantasy genre. In mythology and literature, a quest is a journey towards a goal. It serves as a plot device and frequently as a symbol. In literature, the object of quest requires great exertion on the part of the hero who has to overcome many obstacles and travel a lot. For example, in *The Hollow Hills* Merlin learns that Magnus Maximus (also known as Macsen Wledig), Western Roman Emperor, possessed a sword. Then, Merlin sets out in search of the sword

that he finds in a temple of Mithras in Wales. In fantasy, there is a well-known scheme of the quest, for example, Frodo Baggins's quest to destroy the One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings*. Thus, a quest is an important element of the fantasy genre. Nevertheless, Stewart's novels lack some primary plot elements of the fantasy fiction.

Many works within the fantasy genre take place in imaginary worlds where magic and magical creatures are common. Fantasy fiction uses magic and supernatural phenomena as a primary plot element. Elements of the supernatural and the fantastic are mandatory elements of fantasy books. However, in Stewart's novels there are no supernatural and fantastic elements, no magic neither witchcraft. For example, Merlin uses his engineering skills to rebuild Stonehenge, not magic power. Merlin also helps King Uther Pendragon enter Tintagel Castle by stealth, not by magic power. "There was no enchantment about our entry into Tintagel, only disguise, and human treachery" (Stewart, *The Hollow Hills* 24).

In addition, in the novels there are no mythical and magical creatures or beasts: dwarfs, goblins, elves, dragons and others. As usual, such mythical creatures exist in almost all fantasy books. Therefore, I think that M. Stewart's novels do not belong to the fantasy fiction genre. It is quite difficult to categorize her novels neatly. I think her novels are not "pure fantasy." The novels can be classified as the novels with a peculiar genre that combine the historical novel and fantasy genre. Some researchers think Stewart's novels belong to historical fantasy. Nevertheless, I do not agree with them because historical fantasy is a sub-genre of fantasy. Historical fantasy incorporates fantastic elements (such as magic) into the narrative. However, there are no supernatural and fantastic elements in Stewart's novels. In my research, I have come up with a new term "historical-fantastic novels."

In M. Stewart's romance, there are also some elements of the Gothic novel. Incest is a frequent theme in the Gothic novel. At the start of his reign, King Arthur unwittingly commits incest with his half-sister Morgause, who becomes pregnant with Mordred. The description of the dark and gloomy castles of Morgause and Morgan le Fay is also an element of Gothic fiction. In addition, Mary Stewart continues traditions of a "bildungsroman"—"novel of formation," "novel of education," or "coming-of-age story." The author focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonists (Merlin and Arthur) from youth to adulthood.

The Main Characters

In the first three novels of the pentalogy, Merlin is the protagonist and narrator. According to the legend, Merlin is the great magician and wizard, the guardian

of Arthur. Merlin uses his magic arts to help those he is protecting. His father is believed to be an incubus, a demon in male form who often lies upon sleeping women in order to have sexual intercourse with them. Merlin's mother is a mortal woman.

In Mary Stewart's version, Merlin's father is Aurelius Ambrosius, the Roman war leader. Therefore, Merlin is Arthur's cousin, because Aurelius Ambrosius is Uther Pendragon's brother. This is a very interesting and realistic interpretation of the legend.

Stewart creates the figure of Merlin by showing him an ordinary human. Stewart's Merlin is not a magician but a prophet, "the voice of the god." Merlin is nothing without the power of the god: "I had found myself to be an empty husk; blind and deaf as men are blind and deaf; the great power gone" (Stewart, *The Hollow Hills* 36). Merlin is upset and depressed when he is deprived of his communication with the god. Kristina Hildebrand points out that "many of the magical acts of the traditional Merlin are changed into feats of skillful engineering" (Hildebrand 68). One should emphasize the realistic depiction of Merlin in Stewart's Arthurian Saga. British researchers B. Taylor and E. Brewer have also noted this realism in *The Return of King Arthur*.

The image of the legendary King Arthur and his name is linked to one of the turning points in the history of Britain. His image as well as images of other characters in Mary Stewart's novels are depicted amidst Ancient Britain after the Romans left it. Arthur is one of the main characters in the three novels: *The Hollow Hills*, *The Last Enchantment* and *The Wicked Day*. King Arthur emerges from the pages of the novel *The Last Enchantment* as a mighty monarch.

It is known that the Romans left the British soil a rich cultural heritage. Mary Stewart supports the version according to which the name "Arthur" has a Celtic and Roman origin. "This is a name meaning 'Bear' in Celtic… I tried the names over to myself, in Latin and then in the Celtic tongue. Artorius Ambrosius, last of the Romans… Artos Emrys, first of the British…" (Stewart, *The Hollow Hills* 168-169). Thus, Mary Stewart combines the Roman and Celtic origins in the image of King Arthur. From the moment of his conception until the enthronement, Stewart creates an aura of romance and mystery in the image of King Arthur. "Even then his was a personality that gathers legend as a drip-stone gathers lime" (Stewart, *The Hollow Hills* 350).

According to a Russian researcher G.A. Kozlova, in the relationship between Merlin and Arthur "M. Stewart implements the traditional features of the Bildungsroman ('novel of formation, education, culture', or 'coming-of-age story'),

and its main theme closely echoes the relationship between Galapas and Merlin as well as between Belezius and Merlin" (104). However, the novelist comes from the fact that the education of a wise ruler must be different from the prophet and teacher education. Merlin does not try to teach Arthur as once he was taught by Galapas. Art, music, medicine, knowledge of machines—all this passes by the young Arthur. Like Merlin, Arthur has a love of learning and foreign languages. Therefore, in Brittany communicating with the residents of the mountains, Arthur begins to study the ancient language of their ancestors. In the image of King Arthur from his early age, we can observe the distinctive features of the true knight and ideal ruler, who dearly loves the people of Britain. The very presence of King Arthur gives strength to the wounded, and comfort to the dying.

In *The Hollow Hills* young Arthur appears as a brave warrior, full of ideas and plans related to the upcoming battles. However, he has to wage wars against his enemies not so much as gaining his cherished goals or seizing new lands but defending the independence of Britain and bringing peace and calmness into the lives of his fellow citizens. It should be noted that in contrast to Merlin, the romantic image of young Arthur is disconnected from ordinary people.

Mary Stewart accompanies the acts of young Arthur with the romantic symbols of goodness and light: Arthur is portrayed in a white coat sitting on a white horse. The novelist embellishes the image of King Arthur and subtly examines the path of his spiritual quest, creating a believable character. Stewart definitely idealizes the legendary king and the role that he played in the history of Britain. Idealizing and making Arthur a Romantic hero, M. Stewart continues the ancient Arthurian tradition—she depicts the king as a strong, wise and fair ruler.

King Arthur is a main character of *The Last Enchantment* where he is represented in a different way than in *The Hollow Hills*. The image of King Arthur overflows with pride and confidence, experience and maturity come to him. He is capable of weighing the consequences of his own actions and take an unbiased look at the real world.

Arthur is represented as an astute, visionary and true leader who is busy at implementing his public administration plans. He embodies the formidable greatness of the monarch. The image of the warrior king is replaced by the image of the fair king who is inspired by a higher purpose to defend his country. Like his mentor Merlin, Arthur is quite indifferent to Christianity. The ceremony of the coronation according to the Christian tradition he perceives as a mandatory procedure that he has to undergo in order to win recognition from the public. Arthur's primary focus is on the stalwart devotion to his people and the protection of the national interests

as well as respect for customs, traditions and beliefs.

It is worth noting that King Arthur serves as a protector of ordinary people, on the one hand, and the "Sword of Justice" to the nobility, on the other hand. Thus, the Society of gallant Knights of the Round Table established by King Arthur is a sort of Supreme Court. The representatives of the nobles and rulers who violate the laws of the kingdom, and neglect the interests of the people are severely punished. For example, King Urien of Gorre is depicted as a ruler who break the state laws. King Arthur is merciless to those whom he sees as a threat to peace and security.

A Russian literary critic G.A. Kozlova states that in *The Last Enchantment* "Mary Stewart's writing skills as a novelist of deeply psychological line are disclosed in the internal characteristics of the characters, the psychological motivation of their actions, which leads to deepening of the lyrical element in the novel" (126).

The greatness of a wise ruler is combined in the image of King Arthur with the cardinal virtues - prudence, fortitude, temperance, justice. In *The Last Enchantment* Arthur is represented in the image of a humanist king whose philosophy of life lies in the following idea: ."".. But a man must do right, even to his own hurt" (402). Mary Stewart especially focuses on wisdom and noble qualities of King Arthur: "There was something in the smile that did not speak of youth and power at all. But of a wisdom perhaps greater, because more purely human ..." (332). Therefore, he is reconciled with the absence of his heir; he forgives his wife Guinevere and his friend Bedevere, considering them innocent in their fatal love. King Arthur realizes the depth of his own loneliness and finds the strength and serenity to accept it. The novelist tactfully describes the tragic loneliness of King Arthur. His loneliness is the result of unhappy marriage and life. Prophecy of Merlin concerning the misfortune in Arthur's marriage to Guinevere has come true: the first Arthur's wife dies during childbirth, Arthur's second marriage is unhappy—Guinevere remains childless.

In *The Wicked Day* the image of King Arthur should be viewed through the lens of social and political relations with the rulers of other countries (Theodoric—a ruler of the Western Roman Empire, Childebert—a Frankish king, Justinian—a Byzantine Emperor). This is a significant achievement of the novelist in a realistic interpretation of the image of King Arthur. Mary Stewart perfectly reveals the dignity of King Arthur as a politician. For example, during the negotiations with Cerdic, the king of the West Saxons, Arthur is portrayed as a subtle diplomat. "For a beginning, the discussion kept mainly to home matters, trade and markets, and a possible revision, in the future, of the boundary between the kingdoms. Only as a corollary to this, the talk turned eventually on the possibility of mutual military

aid" (259). In *The Wicked Day* Arthur faces complicated internal struggle and tries to overcome hostility to his illegitimate son, Mordred, caused by the realization that Mordred should be his "punishing sword of Destiny." Stewart describes King Arthur as a very cautious and prudent man. He learns Mordred usurped the throne, concluded an alliance with the Saxons and took the Queen Guinevere from Camelot to Kaerleon. Arthur accepts it with dignity and exercises much forbearance.

Thus, the image of King Arthur created by Mary Stewart is complex and multifaceted. In world literature, there are numerous versions of the image of the legendary king—a warrior, a defender, a deceived husband, a wise old man, a despotic king, etc. King Arthur in Stewart's novels does not resemble any of those images. He is portrayed as a wise politician, a humanist king, a fair ruler, as well as a lonely man. M. Stewart "presents Arthur as a strong, competent and just king" (Taylor, Brewer, *The Return* 305). This image of King Arthur is in no way divorced from the literary tradition, but on the contrary, it is a logical continuation of replenishing and enriching it with qualitatively new philosophical and psychological motifs. Such is the image of King Arthur as seen through the eyes of Mary Stewart.

Another character of the Arthurian Legend is Mordred (Welsh: Medraut or Medrawt), the protagonist of the novel *The Wicked Day*. Mordred is best known as a notorious traitor who fought King Arthur at the Battle of Camlann, where he was killed and Arthur fatally wounded. In Scottish tradition, there is sympathy for Mordred. For example, in *The Chronica Gentis Scotorum* (*Chronicles of the Scottish People*), the first substantial work of Scottish history, that was written by a Scottish chronicler John of Fordun (XIV c.), Mordred was regarded as the legitimate heir to the throne of Britain. According to John of Fordun, Arthur was an illegitimate child, while Mordred was the legitimate son of Lot and Anna, who is Uther's sister. Making reference to Geoffrey of Monmouth, John of Fordun states: "Geoffroy, however, writes that Modred and Galwanus were the sons of Anna, sister of Aurelius, Arthur's uncle. He says: Loth, who, in the time of Aurelius Ambrosius, had married his sister, of whom he begat Galwanus and Modred […] I believe it be nearer the truth that Modred […] was Arthur's sister's son" (102-103).

In *The Wicked Day* Mary Stewart portrays Mordred as a pawn of fate unlike many tales that paint him as the villain. Mordred is able to make some improvements on himself but he follows the path of self-destructive behavior.

In *The Hollow Hills* Arthur sleeps with Morgause before she marries Lot of Lothian. This makes Mordred her eldest son, whereas in the legend he was her youngest. In *The Last Enchantment* Merlin says that he never met and spoke to Mordred. Thus when M. Stewart wrote *The Wicked Day*, she could not let Mordred

meet Merlin.

It is interesting to note that M. Stewart visited Orkney as part of her research, when she was writing *The Wicked Day*. The writer placed the home of Mordred's adoptive parents near the shore. She mentioned that Mordred gathered birds' eggs, and it is a very commonly known fact that the Orkney people have always gathered gulls' eggs for eating (Thompson, *Taliesin's Successors*).

Using Toponyms

I view the author's use of place names as historically-based. In the novels native Celtic and Latinised Celtic toponyms are used along with modern English geographical names. In the article the place names are considered from historical, geographical and linguistic points of view. In my research I apply the following terms of place names: toponym, the general term for any place or geographical entity; hydronym, a name of water object (rivers, lakes, seas, bays, etc.); oikonym, a name of a settlement (town, village); oronym, an element of relief (mountains, plains, forests, islands, etc.).

The British Isles have a variety of toponyms. Many languages and cultures have had an impact on geographical names including the Anglo-Normans, the Anglo Saxons, the Romans and the Vikings. I pay particular attention to the historical aspect, considering a place name as a source of information to study settlement of a territory, and the linguistic aspect, regarding place-names in their evolution from ancient to modern times.

Each novel is provided by a map of Britain with marked locations of towns, forts, as well as historic areas. At the end of the novels ("Author's Note") Mary Stewart gives her views on the issue of place names: "In a period of history when Celt, Saxon, Roman, Gaul, and who knows who else shuttled to and fro across a turbulent and divided Britain, every place must have had at least three names, and anybody's guess is good as to what was common usage at any given time" (Stewart, *The Crystal Cave* 490).

Mary Stewart's main principle in usage of place names is to make the story clear. Sometimes the novelist gives the current names along with old ones taken from the maps of the Dark Ages and the Roman Empire: "Maesbeli, near Conan's Fort, or Kaerconan, that men sometimes call Conisburgh" (Stewart, *The Hollow Hills* 496). Thus, M. Stewart includes native Celtic, Latinised Celtic and modern English place names.

The novels are set primarily in the British Isles, partly in Brittany, Gaul and the Middle East. All the toponyms in the novels can be roughly divided into three

groups. The first group covers the place names mentioned in connection with King Arthur in the chronicles, legends and Arthurian Cycle of Romances. The second group includes the British place names and the toponyms of Brittany, not directly related to the Arthurian legend. And, finally, the third group consists of the geographical names outside the British Isles and Brittany, and having no direct connection with the Arthurian legend. Let me consider the first group.

According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Tintagel is a place of King Arthur's conception and birth. King Uther Pendragon is disguised by Merlin's magic as Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, and enters Tintagel and sleeps with Ygraine, Gorlois' wife, and then Arthur is conceived. The researchers have had difficulty explaining the origin of the word "*Tintagel*." This word derives from the Cornish language (the first element "*tin*" means "fortress," the second element may have an outdated form of a proper name). *Tintaieol* is an Old English form. Nowadays Tintagel is a small village on the north coast of Cornwall. There are the ruins of an ancient castle dating from the twelfth century. The remains of fortifications relating to the Dark Ages (the fifth — sixth centuries) and the twelfth century have been found in the course of archaeological excavations.

Cornwall is the place associated with many Arthurian legends. In *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* the word "*Cornwall*" derives from the Brythonic language. The Old English form "*Cornwallas*" is a hybrid word: the first element of which comes from the Celtic word "*Cornovii*"—the name of the tribe, meaning "the people living on the Cape"; and the second element "*walas*" ("*wealas*") is the Old English name of the Celts, meaning "Strangers" (cf. *Br* Kernéō; *W* Cernyw (n. Cornwall), Cernywaidd (adj. Cornish)) (56).

On the map of Great Britain, there is no exact match of the historical Camelot, while other geographical names of the Arthurian legend more or less coincide with actually existing place names. Mary Stewart identifies Camelot with the hill near South Cadbury. The novelist also associates the legendary Camlann, the place of the last battle between Arthur and Mordred, with that hill. By placing Camlann, like Camelot, near South Cadbury M. Stewart in favour of her idea indicates that "recent archaeological excavations of the hill showed that in Arthurian times there was a strong fortress, perhaps even Camelot" (Stewart, The Last Enchantment 455).

Avalon (or *Ynys Afallon* in Welsh) is a legendary island featured in the Arthurian legend. It first appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain* as the place where King Arthur's sword Excalibur (Caliburnus) was forged and later where Arthur was taken to recover from his wounds after the Battle of Camlann. Etymologically, Avalon comes from the Welsh word "*afalau*"

or "*afallon*," which means "apple." Since the end of the twelfth century, Avalon has been associated with Glastonbury Abbey, a monastery in Glastonbury, Somerset. Some etymologists think that the original name of Glastonbury was Glastonia, derived from the Celtic word "*glaston*" ("blue-green," or, more precisely, "woad"—a flowering plant from which a blue-green dye is produced). During Roman times, the area was known as Glasnonium—Celtic Latinized place name (the Celtic stem + the Latin ending *–ium*). The modern English form "*Glastonbury*" is the result of distortion introduced by the Anglo-Saxons. They called the inhabitants of Glastonia "*Glaestingas*," and then attached "*byrig*" ("city," "town") to the word, which gave *Glaestingabyrig*. There is also a hypothesis that "*Glast*" or "*Glasteing*" could be the name of the settlement's founder (Chekhonadskaya, *Svyatoi Gilda* 122). Mary Stewart identifies modern Glastonbury as Avalon, mentioning at the same time the Celtic name of the area—*Ynys Witrin*: "[…] the Island was called Ynys Witrin, the Isle of Glass. Sometimes, now, men call it Avalon" (Stewart, The Last Enchantment 229). Ynys Witrin is a Celtic name. It can be translated from Welsh as "glass island."

I have gradually come to consider a second group of place names—namely, geographical and topographical names of the British Isles and Brittany, which are not directly associated with the Arthurian legend. They are both modern toponyms and the place names taken from the maps of the Dark Age and those of the Roman Empire. This group is the most numerous one represented by native Celtic, Celtic Latinised and modern English place names.

The first substrate layer of British place names is Celtic in origin. It is difficult to judge about the Celtic toponymy of the British Isles in the pre-Roman period, since there are no geographical maps of this period. The information about the Celtic toponymy can be found in the writings of Ptolemy, Tacitus, and Caesar. In Stewart's novels there are such Celtic place names as Caer Bannog, Caer Eidyn, Caer Mord, Caer Y n'a Von, Bryn Myrddin, etc. For example, Caer Bannog in Old Celtic means "the castle of the peaks" (Stewart, *The Hollow Hills* 498).

According to a Russian historian M.S. Sadovskaya, a small group of Romanized Celtic nobility, only a small percentage of the population, belonged to the bilingual community, and the interaction of the Celts and the Romans was mostly limited (Sadovskaya 19). This explains the fact that the majority of geographical names of Roman Britain remained Celtic, and was only partially latinized. Oikonyms (names of towns and villages) were also latinized, while names of rivers, lakes and mountains were mostly Celtic. However, the Romans and the Celts had language contact for a long time (from 43 to 410 A.D.), which could not

but affect the formation of Roman Britain's toponymy.

One of the most important elements in Celtic-Latin toponymy is "*dunum*" ("fort," "fortification"). Apparently, it was a form of Celtic "*dūnǫ́s*" (neuter, stem + *-s*), the Latin form is "*dūnum*" (neuter). M. Gelling supposes that "*dunum*" in the so-called "Vulgar Latin" was an independent form borrowed from Celtic (140). About 16 toponyms were formed from this element in Britain. The element "*dunum*" was spread out over a huge geographical area—Britain, Gaul, and even Northern Italy. For example, in Stewart's novels we can find the oikonym "*Camulodunum*" (*C* "Camolos"—the god of war and "*dunon*" ("*dunos*")—"fortress"). In this oikonym the Latin ending *-um* is added to a Celtic stem.

There is no doubt that the construction of towns and roads by the Romans was a great progress in the material culture of the Celts. Towns could appear on former tribal settlements and markets, for example, the oikonym with a Latin component "*venta*" ("market"). In the Arthurian novels we can find the oikonym "Glannaventa" (*C* glanna, *L* venta), in which the second element is of Latin origin. This place name of the Roman period provides information about the development of trade. According to M.S. Sadovskaya, Romanization of the Celtic traditional culture affected only a small percentage of the population. She explains this by noting that "the freedom-loving Britons could not accept the culture of the conquerors" (18). Oikonyms of Celtic origin, formed by Latin endings *-um* (*-ium*) and a hybrid ending *-onium*, are regarded as Latinized Celtic place names based on the theory of a Russian philologist T.N. Melnikova (223). Among the Latinized Celtic place names found in the novels by M. Stewart, Celtic-stem oikonyms with Latin endings *-ium* (Segontium, Luguvallium, Bremenium, Blestium), *-um* (Eboracum, Glevum, Brocavum, etc.) and hybrid ending *-onium* (Bravonium, Viroconium) are the most frequently used. The culture of the ancient Celts is reflected in teotoponymy (toponymy motivated by the names of gods and religious rituals). The Celts were polytheists. The most revered Celtic god was the god of war, who was called by several names—Belatucardus, Camulos, Coccidios (Mars in Roman mythology) (Oman 25). So, this name is found in the place name Camulodunum.

Mary Stewart makes use of another oikonym Luguvallium that is located within present-day Carlisle, Cumbria. In *The Hollow Hills* the young Arthur was first involved in the battle between the Saxons and Uther Pendragon's troops that occurred near this place. This oikonym is a borrowed Brittonic place name reconstructed as Luguwalion which means "city of Luguwalos," Luguwalos being a masculine Celtic given name meaning "strength of Lugus" (Jackson 39). Luguvallium comes from the name of a pagan god Lug (the patron deity of

smithcraft, music, and poetry in Irish mythology) and the Latin word "*valeo*" ("strong," "healthy").

Oronyms are presented in the novels by the names of the mountains: Snowdon (*W* Yr Wyddfa), High Cheviot, etc.; the names of islands: the Isle of Mona, the Isle of Thanet; the names of forests: the Celidon Forest, the Wild Forest. The names of almost all the regions and areas found in M. Stewart's novels are of Celtic origin, for example, Dumnonia, Cornwall, Rheged, Elmet, Strathclyde, Dyfed, etc. Dumnonia (*OE* Defnas) comes from the Celtic word "*dumnonii*" ('deep'). It refers to the deep mines located in Devon. The etymology of such toponyms as Dyfed, Guent, Gwynedd could not be revealed. P.H. Reaney supposes that these toponyms come from the name of tribes (48). Ethnonyms (place names applied to an ethnic group) are widely represented in Brythonic toponyms.

Moreover, the novelist presents modern English toponyms: Winchester, York, London, etc. For example, a modern place name often found in the novels is the oikonym "York." Mary Stewart also uses the ancient name of this city—Eboracum, but much less frequently. Eboracum is a Latinised Celtic oikonym. Using the term suggested by T.N. Melnikova, we can identify this oikonym as a "suffixal hybrid with a Latinised patronymic suffix" *-(i)acum*. Eboracum is derived from the Celtic personal name "Eburos." T.N. Melnikova convinces that the oikonyms with patronymic suffixes come from the names of the tribal leaders (109).

The third group of toponyms consists of geographical places located outside the British Isles and Brittany. These place names have no direct connection with the Arthurian legend. For example, we can see such well-known names of cities and countries as Constantinople, Rome, Athens, Gallia, Italy, Greece, Jerusalem, Tours, Orleans, Paris. However, only Jerusalem and Tours are cities where the events in *The Prince and the Pilgrim* take place. Thus, the other toponyms are only mentioned in connection with the adventures of the characters. Describing the journey of Merlin to Byzantium and the East in *The Hollow Hills*, Mary Stewart gives geographical names of Ancient Times—Corinth, Pergamum, Antioch, Massilia, etc.

Summing up the analysis of place names in M. Stewart's novels it should be noted that the language contacts between the Britons and the Romans, and later between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons, lead to the fact that the Celtic elements have left an imprint on the British toponymy. Although the overall number of Celtic borrowings in the English language is relatively small. This in turn means greater dependence of toponymy on language contacts, compared with the other layers of vocabulary, for obvious reasons: place names are directly linked to displacement of tribes and ethnic composition of the population.

Conclusion

In my research, I have come up with a new term "historical-fantastic novels" to define the genre of the Arthurian pentalogy, although the novels are widely viewed as a blend of fantasy and the historical novel.

Merlin, the protagonist and narrator in the first three novels of the pentalogy, is presented as an ordinary human, not as a great magician and wizard. Mary Stewart proposes a very interesting and realistic interpretation of the legend. In world literature, there are numerous versions of the image of King Arthur. In Stewart's novels, Arthur does not resemble any of those ones. He is portrayed as a wise politician, a humanist king, a fair ruler, as well as a lonely man.

Mary Stewart has formed her own style over the years of intense creative work. The novelist truly brings the "Dark Age" to life in her novels, and aims at recreating the mindset of those distant times using the expressive language. "The spirit of Dark Age" has been created by means of a few typical linguistic features of the time described. Mary Stewart employs native Celtic and Latinised Celtic toponyms along with modern English geographical names. Due to the non-English vocabulary, the author presents the "local colour" of the Early Middle Ages. Mary Stewart is primarily guided by the sense of proportionality and congruity.

Contractions

Br—Breton
C—Celtic
Corn—Cornish
L—Latin
OE—Old English
W—Welsh

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Non-Parochial Inclusive Nationalism in Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*

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Abstract Tagore expresses his dissatisfaction with the western ideology of nationalism since it erases local cultures, promotes a homogeneous national culture and leads to violence. Being a true humanist, he wards off sectarianism and casteism in his novel *Gora* to advocate syncretic nationalism through the secular image of Bharatvarsha. He propounds the idea of assimilating and accommodating nationalism which is universal in its outlook and which outshines the narrow version of Hindu nationalism. This nationalism essentially carries the spirit of Indianness.

The paper studies *Gora* in light of Indra Nath Choudhuri's understanding of Tagorian nationalism, according to which the construction of Tagore's liberal or "non-parochial inclusive nationalism" (Choudhuri) is based on different aspects, such as social justice, adjustment of races and unity, universalism, humanism, faith in inheritance and Indian civilization. The paper explores these aspects as the foundation of nationalism in the novel and claims that Tagore outrightly rejects communal nationalism for its narrowness, self-centricity, exclusivity and aggressiveness; his idea of nationalism is heterogeneous, inclusive and humanistic; it promotes "universal ideas" "without a loss of national identity".

Key words Inclusive Nationalism; Syncretic Nationalism; Universal Nationalism; Patriotism; Hindu Nationalism

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Introduction

Tagore actively participated in the initial phase of the national movement that swept

through Bengal during the first decade of the twentieth century. The immediate political reason that activated this movement, referred to as Swadeshi[1] (literally meaning 'one's own country'), was the then Governor General Lord Curzon's decision to divide Bengal in 1905[2]. "But it marked the culmination of a Hindu nationalism that had been gathering steam since the last decades of nineteenth century" (Chattopadhyay 2).

At that time, Tagore introduced the Rakhibandhan ceremony to symbolize the underlying unity of undivided Bengal.

> Along with other nationalist leaders, he [Tagore], at this point of time, had used Hindu rituals for mass mobilization, and he defended Hindu social institutions and statutes, even reconfiguring caste as a consensual and rational division of labour that secured social harmony. In the same way, he also endorsed brahmanical gender practices like widow immolation as consensual. (Sarkar 41)[3]

With the passage of time, Tagore's differences with other Hindu nationalists grew to the extent that he saw the Muslims as equal compatriots[4]. As the movement progressed, he became more critical of "the upper class and caste Hindu nationalist leadership which unthinkingly commanded and coerced low caste and Muslim peasants to burn cheap foreign cloth while at the same time doing little or nothing for their welfare"[5] (41).

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1 The Swadeshi movement had an amount of Muslim participation, but in spite of this the main tenor of the movement was predominantly Hindu. See Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010), 355-377. (Foot Note No. 5 of Chattopadhyay).

2 The partition of Bengal led the Muslims to form their own national organization on communal lines. The Hindus were not in favour of this partition, whereas the Muslims were. The Hindus believed that the partition was an attempt to "strangle nationalism in Bengal, where it was more developed than elsewhere" (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica). Bengal was reunited in 1911, but it resulted in resentment among the Bengali Muslims who thought that the partition was in their favour and the resentment lasted until the end of the British rule which ended with the partition of Bengal in 1947.

3 On this, see Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-08*, Delhi, 1973. (Foot Note No. 15 & 16 of Tanika Sarkar's paper "the Intractable Problem" 46)

4 See, for instance, "Bijoya Festival" (1905), cited in S.C. Sarkar, *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays*, Delhi, 1970. (Footnote No. 18 of Tanika Sarkar's paper "the Intractable Problem" 46)

5 *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* by Sumit Sarkar and 'Questioning Nationalism: The Difficult Writings of Rabindranath Tagore' in *Rebels, Wives, Saints* by Tanika Sarkar. (Footnote No. 20 of Tanika Sarkar's paper "the Intractable Problem" 46)

Tagore realized that the western idea of Nation is violent; it has a self-destructive tendency and makes one selfish and exclusive at the stake of the other's freedom. It blindly spreads a homogenized universalism (Choudhuri, "The Concept"). Such is the case with the narrow version of Hindu nation and nationalism also. In *Gora*, which was serialized in a literary magazine *Probasi* from 1907 to 1909, the novelist has elaborately explored the shortcomings of the Hindu nationalism "which had briefly but intensely allured him" (Chattopadhyay 2).

In the novel, the idea of Indian nation and nationalism is woven around Hinduism and the ideology of the Brahmo Samaj. Throughout the novel, Gora, the eponymous protagonist, envisions Bharatvarsha as a primarily Hindu nation. This is an attempt on Tagore's part to give a voice to the ideology of his contemporary society that asserted its Hindu identity during the colonial period. The protagonist's Irish lineage, in the novel, helps him unfetter his Hindu identification and see the assimilating nature of Bharatvarsha; the anagnorisis in the novel leads to self-realization, "a vast truth" (Tagore 475). "The good and bad, the joys and sorrows, the wisdom and follies, of all of Bharatvarsha" (475) come close to Gora, who consequently learns "what a mother's lap means" (476). The idea of Bharat Mata in a secular avatar, who welcomes one and all with open hands, dramatically dominates and outshines Hindu nationalism in the ending of the novel and advocates secular, inclusive nationalism.

Nationalism or Patriotism in *Gora*?

Tanika Sarkar writes that *Gora*, unlike *Anandamath*, is not based upon "the image of a freshly coined Goddess of the Motherland" and "an act of violence against Muslims of India" (37). In her opinion, the novel "rejects the identification of the country with Hindu disciplinary institutions and it refuses to transvalue the land as a goddess. With these two moves, it breaks open the lock between Hindu nationalism and Indian patriotism and it creates a space that belongs to patriotism alone" (37-8). She believes that "nationalism was invariably a project of power and self-aggrandizement, of exclusion and incipient imperialism" for Tagore (38). This paper counter-argues that Hindu nationalism in *Gora* takes the shape of secular nationalism with Indianness at its core, thus the novel doesn't create a space for "patriotism alone". The Hindu goddess is presented in the garb of a secular human avatar; she is Annapurna and Jagaddhatri in the form of Anandamoyi. Secondly, the criterion of "violence against Muslims" is not an appropriate benchmark to distinguish nationalism from patriotism in the modern–day world when nationalism is being understood as an inclusive and syncretic ideology also.

First and foremost, Sarkar ignores that Gora personifies the land as Mother who, according to him, is "calling" him and he must "go where Annapurna is sitting, where Jagaddhatri is waiting" (Tagore, *Gora*[1] 327). In the ending, Gora discovers that 'the mother' for whom he has looked for everywhere has been at his home all this time in the form of Anandamoyi, whom "Tagore paints … as Mother India" (N. R. Choudhury 63).

> Ma, you are my only mother. The mother for whom I have looked for everywhere–all this time she was sitting in my house. You have no caste, you do not discriminate against people, you do not hate –you are the image of benediction. You are my Bharatvarsha… (Tagore 477)

The novelist glorifies the assimilating, loving and non-discriminatory nature of Bharatvarsha, the motherland, whose human representation is manifested in Gora's mother, an epitome of love and care. Contrary to Tanika Sarkar's view that "the goddess disappears as the mother returns" (45) in the ending, Gora, in fact, finds the embodiment of the 'national' goddess in his own mother. The mother with all her attributes has been present from the beginning; it is Gora who lacks the vision and wisdom to see 'the mother' in his mother throughout the novel except in the ending. On the contrary, Binoy realizes very early in the novel that Anandamoyi is the "face of his motherland" (Tagore 19). He says, "May the radiance of affection of her face protect me always from all the failures of my mind. Let this face be the image of my motherland, let it direct me towards my duty, let it make me steadfast in performing" (19). Thus, the land, a non-living entity, is viewed and transvalued as the mother, who is a human representation of the divine consciousness of Annapurna and Jagaddhatri.

It is also noticeable that the necessary ingredients for patriotism, according to Tanika Sarkar—geographical integrity, historical continuity and cultural unity, promote Hindu nation and nationalism also. Patriotism and nationalism, which are primarily sentiments and which take birth in the mind, cannot be 'unlocked' mechanically and demarcated by lines on the basis of "act of violence against Muslims of India" (37). Sarkar delimits the scope of nationalism in India as a solely anti-Muslim project, whereas it cannot be ruled out that Tagore's inclination to "Indianness, embodying some unique qualities", or love for a homeland in *Gora*

1 All subsequent references to this source will be given in the texe with the writer's surname and page number only.

is considered to be "an ethical concept fundamental to all nationalism" [1](Mukherji 381).

Undoubtedly, Tagore has launched a fierce diatribe against the western idea of nation and nationalism and favoured "one world" with universal humanism and "inter-civilizational alliance" in most of his writings (Quayum 34). However, he does not portray anti-nationalitarian sentiment in *Gora*. It is clear from the conclusion of the novel when Gora finds 'the mother' in his own mother, "who is the image of benediction" (Tagore 477) and in whom Bharatvarsha is now embodied. Here, Gora does not speak of the world but of Bharatvarsha, and the idea of Bharatvarsha, as Nina Roy Choudhury states, is "identified with faith, religion, tradition, customs and all manner of indigenous values and ideas" (60). Such Indianness is at the core of the Indian idea of nation and nationalism.

Non-Parochial Inclusive Nationalism

The idea of nationalism is very flexible and protean in character; it changes with displacement in time and space. Gangeya Mukherji appropriately applies the term 'open texture'[2] to nationalism. Today, the critical analysis of Tagore's views and perspective reveals that Gurudev was not against nationalism as such, but he was against its violent aspect. Sen calls Tagore's attitude to nationalism "dual". He says, "Tagore remained deeply committed to his Indianness, while rejecting both patriotism and the advocacy of cultural isolation" ("Foreword" XX). Tagore, in fact, does not reject nationalism, but "calls for a humanitarian intervention into present self-seeking and belligerent nationalism" (Quayum 48). Kedar Nath Mukherjee writes, "His nationalism was international in outlook for he was the lover of humanity" (17). Indra Nath Choudhuri maintains, "…Tagore didn't reject nationalism but formed his own understanding of it by studying what was authentic in his country's history. "

> He [Tagore] thought i) it was essential for us to fight against social injustice rather than political freedom, ii) to work for an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them and yet seek some basis of unity, iii) not to accept violent and exclusive patriotism as our final spiritual

1 Max Hildebert Boehm, 'Nationalism', in Edwin R.A. Seligman et al. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York: OUP, 1996. 234-235. (Footnote No. ix of G. Mukherji's paper)

2 "Waismann's idea of open texture, more generally used in the philosophy of language, indicates that notwithstanding definition as applicable category, there still remain possibilities of a definition being inadequate, although remaining different from vagueness insofar as the definition may be fairly accurate in actual situations" (Mukherji 374).

> shelter but seek refuge in humanity and iv) hence his motto for Viswabharati, (the university which he founded in Shantiniketan) was *yatra viswam bhavet eka nidam* where the world meets in a nest; v) not to accept the concept of violent nationalism from the west which would mean selling our own inheritance and vi) Tagore never wanted the idea of the Indian nation to supersede the idea of Indian civilization. Tagore, as said earlier, believed in non-parochial inclusive nationalism (unself-critical Indian nationalism: Nandi) and also in patriotism which rejected violent nationalism hence he could make such a statement that I am not a patriot — I shall ever seek my compatriots all over the world (letter of Tagore to Andrews). This kind of a statement created a false impression in the minds of a large number of Indians who even attacked him and [he is] still being attacked for the 'insufficient nationalism' expressed in his song 'Jana gana mana' which became the national song of India. However, Western nationalism which became a strong basis of a nation-state became illegitimate for him as explained in detail by Ashish Nandi. Both Tagore and Gandhi created a moral universe and made it a part of politics and gave a bigger lofty meaning to nationalism. ("The Concept")

This paper analyses *Gora* in light of Indra Nath Choudhuri's views on Tagore's approach to nationalism and claims that *Gora* voices Tagore's idea of non-parochial inclusive nation and nationalism.

Preferred Social Justice to Political Freedom

Gora depicts a constant conflict between human desires and social expectations. The protagonist, Gora, advocates the observance of all the rules of society, as society is the expression of the worldly aspect of Dharma. He says, "Otherwise society will be ruined … if we do not submit ourselves to society completely through rules, then we obstruct the deepest purpose for which society exists" (Tagore 408). He believes that one should obey society without judging it. On the other hand, the Hindu society emerges as a system inimical to human relationships in the novel; it suppresses personal interests of man for some vague and unconvincing collective welfare; it marginalizes those who challenge its mechanical authority. The conventions of the contemporary Bengali society appear to be mere pretentious and unnatural; they sideline a noble figure such as Anandamoyi. The society acts as an anti-individualistic system that restricts Gora to express his love for Sucharita (141). It acts as a threat to human concerns; both the Hindus and the Brahmos do not send their children to Lolita's school due to socio-religious reasons (278-81). The

society's grip is so powerful that Binoy finds it impossible to "declare" that he does not belong to the Hindu community (316). "[T]he samaj is bound to pass judgment" on everyone (272); there is no escape. Krishanadayal realizes that the society must not be "upset" at any cost (32).

Understanding the dominating nature of social life in India, Tagore says, "In fact, our history has not been of the rise and fall of kingdoms, of fights for political supremacy…Our history is that of our social life and attainment of spiritual ideals" (*Nationalism* 35). He believes, "Our real problem in India is not political. It is social" (64). Thus, he gives more importance to social justice than political freedom; he is more interested in global unity and the demolition of internal social evils of the country. He says, "Freedom in the mere sense of independence has no content and therefore no meaning" ("The Religion" 157) and "freedom would have no meaning, if one oppressive power was replaced by another, replicating the structures of hierarchy. The issues of caste and gender discrimination had to be tackled first, to promote social and religious harmony among the various sections of Indian society" (Aikant 57). In the novel, Poresh Babu, a mouthpiece of the novelist, regrets over the anti-humanitarian aspect of the Hindu society which "insults human beings, discards them" (Tagore 420), whereas Gora praises the Prophet of Islam for his vehement fight against social injustice. Gora reminds the old Muslim man, who is whipped in face by a British, of the prophet's message:

> [H]e who submits to injustice is also guilty- he causes wrong-doing to grow. You may not understand but take it from me, being meek and tolerant is no dharma. It only encourages the wrong doer. Your prophet Muhammad knew this; therefore he didn't go about in the guise of a meek person to preach his religion. (103)

There is a strong protest against social injustice in Tagore's writings.

Tagore's "Where the Mind is Without Fear", a famous song in his *Gitanjali*, echoes his ideal vision of India. In the novel, Gora raises his voice against the injustice done to the villagers of Char Ghospur by the police. He bluntly tells the magistrate that the villagers "are not rogues. They are only fearless and independent in spirit- they cannot suffer injustice silently" (180). He himself does not bow down to social unfairness; he raises his voice against oppression as he believes that "according to the principle of right action in our tradition, it is the king's obligation to do justice. When he is unjust to his subjects, he violates this principle" (184). Gora "vigorously" beats up the policemen who rough up the boys for mistakenly

having taken water from the reserve tank (184). To protest against the legislative system which has "become a market place for buying and selling of justice" (185), he refuses to take any legal recourse.

Gora's attitude to casteism is dual. He does not make any distinction regarding caste when he mobilizes young men for physical culture and group games. However, he follows the ritual laws of pollution and purity in his own conduct and diet. He does not see "any contradiction in this because the Bharatvarsha of his dream" is "based on an indestructible order wherein these distinctions" are "divinely ordained" (M. Mukherjee "Introduction" XV). Later on, Gora discovers the downside of following the caste system, which curbs individual freedom and is responsible for social disparity in the name of Hinduism. In Char Ghospur, Gora finds it intolerable "to safeguard his caste by eating food provided by that evil hearted tyrant Madhav Chatujjye" (Tagore 174). It then pains him to see that purity has become an external matter in Bharatvarsha; he remarks, "What terrible anti-religious practices…" (174). Rising above "what is right and what is wrong", he, under unavoidable circumstances, feels compelled to eat and drink in the house of a Hindu barber who has given shelter to a helpless Muslim boy (175). Nevertheless, it is only in the ending of the novel when Gora dramatically transforms altogether and symbolically voices Tagore's message of social equality by demanding a glass of water from Lachmiya, a Christian maid.

Tagore's idea of nationalism essentially carries the spirit of social equality amid sectarian tensions that attempt to divide human beings. Anandamoyi, a representative of Tagore's humanism, says, "[N]obody is born on earth with a caste" (15). She advocates equality and asks her husband, "If you are of such superior caste and so beloved of Bhagavan, why did he allow you to be humiliated first by the Pathans, then by the Moghuls, then by the Khrishtans?" (32). For Tagore, it reveals, there is no justification for the caste system. The novelist believes that a society must be flexible to welcome changes with time. It is of no use to follow oppressive customs blindly. Gora realizes that oil-pressers, potters and other low caste people in the villages perform their tasks with the strength of custom. However, they are scared and helpless, and they are unable to assert their right to live with human dignity. "Under the threat of penalties, and through sectarian quarrels", they regard "prohibitions as the highest truth" (432). In their society, there is no unity, and the society merely obtains "compliance through threat of punishment" and does not "come to a member's assistance, when needed" (433). Customs become an impediment to achieve social liberation. Consequently, Gora, who staunchly upholds and advocates customs among educated people, attacks them in the village.

For Tagore, society is made for man, not vice-versa.

The satirical portrayal of Haran Babu, Abinash and Hindu-hitaishi Sabha (Society for the Welfare of Hindus) reveals Tagore's concern as a humanist who rejects all sectarian divisions (7). The novelist is clear that "it can't be desirable that human beings should narrow themselves out of regard for society; instead, it is for society to constantly broaden itself out of regard for human beings" (378).

Adjustment of Races and Unity

Gurudev does not favour the political assimilation of all nations; he believes in social accommodation that gives opportunities to all nations without merging their national identities and that also promotes unity at global level. He envisions peace and unity at intra-national as well as international levels. In this context, Tagore gives the example of India. Tagore says, "She (India) has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist, and yet seek some basis of unity" (*Nationalism* 65). He adds that this basis has been brought by our saints such as Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others, who preached the lesson of one God to all races of India" (65). Gangeya Mukherji quotes from Tagore's "Swadeshi Samaj":

> …realization of the one in many, attaining unity in diversity- this is the inherent quality of Bharatvarsha…Since India possesses this quality, we will never imagine any society to be our enemy and be fearful. With ever new conflicts we will aspire for the expansion of ourselves. Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians will not die fighting each other in the case of India- here they will discover a harmony. This harmony will not be non-Hindu; in fact it will be Hindu in its essential sense. The limbs and organs of this harmony may come also from alien countries; however its life and soul shall be Indian. (qtd. 381)

Tagore understands that pluralism and diversity are the key characteristics of India, even though there is overall unity. He emphasises the combined role of the 'little' and 'great' traditions in shaping what he loosely defines as the Indian nation (Chakrabarty 94).

Tagore advocates harmony and mutual understanding within and outside nations. There ought to be a note of acceptance. "Tagore puts it; a culture could reflect 'universal ideas,' 'without a loss of national identity'" (Choudhuri, "The Concept"). Gora, "an idealized representative of Tagore's syncretic nationalism"

(Chattopadhyay 1), says:

> Hinduism has, like a mother, tried to make place in its lap for people of various opinions and views. That is, it has looked upon human beings of this world as human beings, it has not counted them as members of a group. Hinduism accepts the ignorant as well as the wise-accents not just one form of wisdom but the many sided expression of wisdom…It is through such variety Hinduism seeks to realize oneness. (Tagore 357)

What Gora observes and feels is not the religion of the Hindus, but the essence of the land or, in other words, the Indianness of India or Hindustan. In Bharatvarsha, "the white European identity of Gora rather than signifying 'foreignness' becomes instead the metaphoric equivalent of the nation with all its diversities and differences. It dissolves the binary of white European otherness and Hindu national self-fashioning" (Chattopadhyay 4).

Tagore is in support of social accommodation and assimilation. The social history of India is a witness that the foreigners had been dealt as human races in spite of cultural differences until the British arrived as a ruling body of men who kept their identity separate and refused to get accommodated (*Nationalism* 34). Tagore regrets that races which are ethnologically different have come into close conflict in this country now. In *Gora*, the novelist has portrayed the post-1857 period, which is a period of rising discontent against the unforgiving outlandish British rule. He criticizes the loss of individual self-esteem in the colonial rule which is indifferent and self-centered, if not oppressive, and which has not come to India with open arms to embrace Indians, but with the claws of colonialism and imperialism to snatch away what belongs to India. Social accommodation is replaced with competition and conflict when the English people emerge as a materialistic colonial power ruling from the distant lands. Consequently, Gora uses English, which is deemed as a much-valued accomplishment in a colonial society, to criticize the English ways of the samaj. Tagore shows the negative effects of this sort of economic, cultural, political and psychological invasion; he favours the harmonization and unity of races through social accommodation and assimilation without the loss of national identities across the world.

Gora is sure that the smouldering "ashes of the sacred fire of countries" will undoubtedly observe rising flames, "transcending the immediate time and place, and kindle a fire throughout the world" (Tagore 356-7). In spite of his patriotism and love of his race and people, the writer advocates universal love and fraternity as

essential for all-inclusive growth. Societies such as India's can redeem themselves by adopting the principles of "sarvadharma samabhava" (deference to all religions) or the Upanishadic dictum of "vasudhev kutumbakam" (the entire world as one family) (Aikant 55). Tagore argues, "…I have no distrust of any culture because of its foreign character. On the contrary, I believe that the shock of the outside forces is necessary for maintaining the vitality of our intellect" (qtd. in Dutta 221). Furthermore, he states that "all the elements of our culture have to be strengthened, not to resist the culture of the west, but to accept it and assimilate it" (222).

Humanity: Against Exclusive Patriotism

Tagore is unique in his attitude towards nationalism; he inaugurated the meeting of the Congress party in Kolkata in 1896 by singing "Vande Matram" to his own tune, whereas he criticized militant nationalism[1] in Japan in 1916. He is primarily a cosmopolitan, universalist and humanist. He says that he has outgrown the teaching that the idolatry of the nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity (*Nationalism* 83). He makes it clear that he is not against any race, but the idea of the Nation which is "least human" (41). His idea of nation and nationalism is essentially humane.

Gora, which is basically a novel of discussion and not of action, exemplifies Tagore's human-centric approach. When Binoy feels the lack of human affection and company, "liberating the country or preserving the community" does not seem "true and clear to him" (Tagore 19), and the food in the kitchen of Anandamoyi, discarded by Gora, appears "nectar" to him (20). The novelist says that no matter how loudly Binoy supports a principle in the course of a debate, in practice he cannot place human beings higher than a principle (18). Binoy does not take tea and he gave up eating bread or biscuits baked by the Muslims some time ago. But, his emotional sensitivity makes him ignore Hindu customs to avoid hurting Poresh Babu's family (52). Interestingly, he himself is in a dilemma regarding "how far he had accepted them [customs] as principles and how far on account of his great affection for Gora" (18). Even Sucharita's "upbringing under Poresh Babu's influence had liberated her from being bound by any communal narrowness", and "Haran Babu's steadfast advocacy of Brahmo belief was painful to her natural humanism" (93). For Tagore, humanism is supreme and indispensable.

Tagore advocates love over the tensions of religion, sect and society through the characters of Poresh Babu and Anandamoyi. Poresh Babu's "refusal to observe

1 Tagore in his *Nationalism* remarks, "Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing, which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles" (74).

the boundaries of Brahmo and non-Brahmo jurisdiction while discussing scriptural and other matters" is an epitome of the writer's unfaltering support for humanism (94). Poresh Babu, the novelist's spokesperson, says, "Sectarianism makes one forget the simple fact that human beings are human beings first. It sets up an entirely society made distinction between Brahmo and Hindu and blows up the distinction into something larger than universal truth" (295); he rejects casteism as a source of "inordinate hatred between man and man in our country" and a "kind of contempt of one man for another, insult by one man of another" (155). Along the same lines, Anandmoyi asks Sucharita, "Is there no community, Little Mother, which ignores minor differences and brings people together on major arguments? Have communities been created only to carry on a quarrel with Ishwar?" (313). She asks her husband, "Aren't Khristians human beings?" (32). Notably, Anandamoy's name symbolically represents the bliss ('blessed with ananda', joy) of being humane.

For a humanist like Tagore, the very idea of motherland transforms from a non-living entity to a living human being. Binoy finds the image of the motherland in Anandamoyi, who is loving and benevolent. He says, "Let this face be the image of my motherland" (19). Gora realizes the same in the ending of the novel when he tells Anandamoyi, "You are my Bharatvarsha…" (477). To Binoy, Aanandmoyi is "the personification of all mothers in the world" (205). The personification of the motherland in Anandamoyi is the novelist's attempt to demystify the metanarrative of Bharatvarsha, which, according to him, is with us in the form of our loving mother. Anandamoyi exemplifies Tagore's idea of truth embodied in humanism; she believes that there is no perception of caste within a man's heart- "and it is there that 'Ishwar' brings men together and also comes there himself" (229). Anandamoyi feels that "nobody is born on earth with a caste" (15). It is through her character Tagore constructs the secular image of Bharatvarsha. She discards Gora's idea of Dharma (16).

Through the Boul's message, Tagore refers to 'freedom', which in the context of the novel becomes freedom from the shams of religion. He disapproves of Gora's view that "the heart is a great thing but it can't be placed higher than everything else" (16). Binoy, Tagore's messenger, is "largely influenced by the dictates of his heart" and he cannot "place human beings higher than a principle" (18). The novelist says, "The honour of humanity had to be saved" (342).

Sectarianism belittles humanity and human relationships. For Panu Babu, "it is not a great matter to abandon Sucharita", but he "cannot allow the prestige of the Brahmo Samaj to be lowered" (250). Tagore is of the view that "natural view of things" is lost by entering one particular community (373). Labonya and Leela,

who are privately most excited about Lolita's marriage, "put on grave expressions," as they remember "the stern duty of a Brahmo household" (430). Besides, Gora's negation of his feelings for Sucharita "was a wrong committed against human nature and that is why Gora's entire inner self had turned away from the preparations of the ceremony" (470). Tagore is concerned about man's key position and dignity in the world. He attaches a lot of importance to the fullest expression of man's true nature.

Universalism in Nationalism

For Tagore, universal nationalism is "an inclusive plural concept of a nation which goes beyond the idea of exclusive nationalism and where the whole earth is a family" (Choudhuri, "The Concept"). Gurudev was aware of the downside of exclusive nationalism that it would "breed imperialism" and imperialism would "bring destruction of nation" (K. Mukherjee 269). In *Gora*, the focus is on the secular image of Bharatvarsha, which doesn't discriminate and which embraces one and all irrespective of one's caste, colour and creed. In the ending of the novel, Gora's freedom from the narrowness of hyper or communal nationalism helps him view his motherland beyond sectarianism or any kind of religious groupism, and he says, "Today I am Bharatiya. Within me there is no conflict between communities, whether Hindu or Muslim or Krishtan. Today all the castes of Bharat are my castes" (Tagore 475). "With naked consciousness", Gora is able to realize "a vast truth" beyond his imaginative image of Bharat "that was without problems or distortions" (476).

Tagore is against exclusive nationalism that is based on the policy of Nation-State, popularized by the western view of the world. This type of nationalism makes one self-centered and egotistic; it encourages belligerent nationalism or, in other words, imperialism; it snatches away one's freedom and it has a self-destructive tendency (Choudhuri, "R. Tagore" 14). Tagore's Shantiniketan, which was very close to his heart and soul, was an implicit reaction to exclusive nationalism. It was planned to provide a point of confluence in India to the world community. As India, according to Gurudev, is essentially secular and accommodating, the idea of Shantiniketan was conceived to promote international cross-cultural relations. In *Gora*, the writer makes it clear that the idea of being Indian has nothing to do with one's lineage; through the example of Gora, he asserts that even the child of an Irish couple can be a true Indian. Thus, Gora becomes a true Indian when he becomes aware of his Irish descent and understands the true spirit of India. Gora says, "I have taken birth this morning, with an utterly naked consciousness, in my own Bharatvarsha. After so long I have fully understood what a mother's lap means"

(Tagore 476).

Tagore's idea of nationalism is not ethnic. He rejects "the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism" (*Nationalism* 34) also. Consequently, for him, India is "not territorial (*mrinmaya*) but ideational (*chinmaya*)" (Choudhuri "The Concept"). Indianness is a perception of unity in diversity and humanistic insight for him. Thus, Tagore's idea of nationalism is a section in the wide concept of universalism. He dreams of a commonwealth of nations in which no nation (or race) would deprive another "of its rightful place in the world festival" and every nation would "keep alight its own lamp of mind as its part of the illumination of the world" (Aikant 62). In his view, "[t]here is only one history- the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one" (*Nationalism* 65).

No Western Model of Nationalism

Tagore, a peace-loving man, renounced the knighthood after the Jalianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. He didn't want the Indian patriots to imitate the western type of nationalism, which was violent in nature, at the stake of the Indian idea of human unity and fraternity.

In his works, Tagore acknowledges differences between the Indian sense of life and the western lifestyle in terms of culture, social values and tradition. He pays due homage to India and Indianness. In his essay "Prachya-o-Paschatta Savyata" ("The Civilization of the East and the West"), he says, "Man can attain greatness both under society and state. But it would be wrong if we think that building up of a nation in the European mould is the only nature of civilization and the only aim of humanity"[1] (qtd. in K. Mukherjee 247). Tagore opines that India has her own ideals and it will be unwise to imitate the West. Society is in the center of India's civilization, whereas politics is at the core of western civilization. Tagore wisely[2] chooses the Indian idea of non-violence and fraternity as the base of his concept of nationalism.

Gora is coloured in Indianness. The characters, places, beliefs, lifestyle, manners, customs, norms, values and even aspirations present a panoramic picture of the Bengali society in those days. Gora claims, "Whatever is ours, we shall uphold proudly and forcefully to protect our country and ourselves from humiliation" (Tagore 28). He adds, "All that we want is to feel in every inch that we

1 Tagore*: Prachya-O-Paschatta Savyata, Rabindra Rachanavali*, Vol. XII, P. 1061. (Footnote No. 2 of K. Mukherjee)

2 Tagore also rebelled against the petty traditions and customs of society (K. Mukherjee 46). He was influenced by Rammohun Roy.

are ourselves" (28). Amid social tensions that are mainly created by the Brahmos and the colonizers, the image of Bharatvarsha- full in wealth, full in knowledge, full in 'Dharma'- is always imprinted on Gora's mind. Gora is able to look through the misery, weakness and sorry condition of his own land and perceives some great and essential truth (57).

In the novel, Tagore emphasizes that the legacy of Indian norms and values must be inherited; India cannot afford to imitate western nationalism at the stake of its inherited legacy. Thus, Tagore does not give narrative space to the western idea of militant nationalism in the novel and espouses his idea of nationalism in light of Indian culture, values and norms. Tagore says: "We in India must make up our minds that we cannot borrow other people's history, and that if we stifle our own we are committing suicide. When you borrow things that do not belong to your life, they only serve to crush your life" (*Nationalism* 71).

Importance of Indian Civilization over Indian Nation

Tagore describes civilization as "the expression of some guiding moral force" that has evolved in the society "for the object of attaining perfection" ("Civilization" 621). He finds the Sanskrit word 'dharma' the nearest synonym for 'civilization' in his own language. He notes, "Through 'a-dharma' (the negation of dharma) man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but perishes at the root" (622).

Tagore does not want the concept of Indian nation to outshine the glory of Indian civilization. Indian civilization centres on the society; it carries forward the legacy and heritage of the past. Since it is unwise to the greatest extent of man if he has no idea about his past and future, Tagore lays emphasis on "the interdependence and intimate connection of the past, present, and future" (K. Mukherjee 59). To reject the past of Bharatvarsha is to "dishonour truth"; it is a form of atheism to Gora in the novel (Tagore 356-7). For the novelist, the idea of Indian nationalism is based on the values of Indian civilization.

Gurudev believes that exclusive nationalism is "the training of a whole people for a narrow ideal" ("The Nation" 549); it leads them to "moral degeneracy and intellectual blindness" (549). This is only "a passing phase in a civilization" or "temporary mood of history" (550). In the coming age, "the true spirit of freedom will have sway" (550).

In *Nationalism*, Tagore criticizes exclusive nationalism and claims that "nationalism is a great menace" (74) and "India has never had a real sense of nationalism" (70), as she has accommodated different races. He defines 'Nation' as

the political and economic union of a people organized for the mechanical purposes of greed and self-interest. The political aspect that was earlier restricted to the professionals in society, crossed "the boundaries with amazing rapidity" when the political power spread its wings with the help of science and brought in "harvests of wealth" (37). The idea of western Nation-State works on the principles of divisions, mechanics and materialism, whereas the virtuosity of Indian civilization lies in the fact that it wants to bring unity in diversity. Tagore adds that a government by the Nation is neither British nor anything else. He calls it an applied science and compares it to "a hydraulic press, whose pressure is impersonal, and on that account completely effective" (43). Indra Nath Choudhuri says: "Tagore said, form yourself into a nation (nation with a small n) to mean society which was relevant to humanity and stop the encroachment of Nation with a capital N to mean a nation-state or the nations of the West…" ("The Concept").

According to Tagore, the East and the West are complimentary to each other because of their different positions and attitudes upon life (*Nationalism* 41). The British could positively shape the destiny of India by bringing here their tribute to life. With the process of give and take, one-sided domination could be over. In fact, rather than accepting the social aspect of India, the British tried to replace it with the political state and thus disturbed human relations. It led to moral degeneration and intellectual blindness. Tagore calls it 'Crisis in Civilization' in one of his speeches. The constructive spirit of the West should not be mistaken for the destructive Nation of the West. The spirit of the West has brought the people of India, who are different in races and customs, closer through common law which has given us a sense of "universal standard of justice" (44). However, the benefit of the western civilization was offered to Indians in a "miserly measure" by the Nation of the West (45). It is the policy of the nation-state to exploit more and to give very little in return, just what is minimum for sustenance. In the fields of education and industries, little assistance was offered to the Indian people who were labelled as backwards. The western nationalism represented by the British in India didn't have social co-operation at its center. "It has evolved a perfect organization of power, but not spiritual idealism" (46). Tagore adds, "… the western Nation acts like a dam to check the free flow of western civilization … " (46).

It may be said that Tagore, keeping in view the dialectics of nation and civilization in the western world, does not want nation and nationalism to supersede the idea of civilization in India. Nation is a "new institution" ("The Nation" 551); it is short-lived, whereas civilization has successfully survived the tests of time. The concept of pluralism or Indian unity, a characteristic of Indian civilization, was

basically a product of medieval India. This fact was shared by both Gandhi and Tagore. Besides, Man's world is essentially a moral world. The cult of Nation has dehumanized him to be a mechanical man. Tagore's concept of civilization is broad and it encompasses ideal lifestyle. Nation (due to its inclination for a cut-throat economic and political competition) represents 'Adharma', whereas Civilization means 'Dharma'. India's civilization is spiritual; it is known for "its inclusiveness, its all comprehensiveness" (Tagore, "Spiritual Civilization" 735). "Aliens were assimilated into the synthesis; their widely differing modes of thought and life and worship being given their due places in the scheme by a marvelous interpretative process" (735).

In *Gora*, Tagore's idea of Hindu nation is superseded by the civilization of India, which is assimilative and which is also underlying Tagore's idea of nationalism. Indian civilization is based on unity, whereas the communal view of Hindu nation advocates the division of people on the basis of castes and religions. In *Gora*, the idea of Hindu nation is shown as a hollow institution of power in the contemporary Bengali society. Abinash takes Gora's penance ceremony as an opportunity for the Hindu community "to proclaim its power today" and to "create a great sensation" (347). He terribly fails to realize that Gora basically relies upon Hinduism to glorify the oneness of Bharatvarsha. The novelist shows that Hinduism with its narrow divisions cannot lead to the unity of India; it cannot be the real basis of a nation. Thus, the ending of *Gora* marks a shift from Hinduism to Indianness and glorifies Indian civilization.

Conclusion

Tagore was temporarily inclined towards the movement for the revival of Hinduism and reposed his faith in Hindu religion and society as a means of uniting the country. However, shocked at the communal violence and the exclusion of the Muslims and lower castes from the traditional Hindu Samaj, he rejected the ideology of Hindu revivalism.

In his novel *Gora*, Tagore shows the perils of hypernationalism that is grounded in communal politics; he advocates non-parochial nationalism, which is social, syncretic, extensive, homocentric, indigenous and civic.

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Distorted, Relegated and Colonised: Reconceptualising Ogun as the God of Justice in Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice*

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Abstract The effort to name and ascribe duties to African gods using Eurocentric knowledge can lead to violence, hence causing them to be tagged negatively. Due to the imperial distortion of African history, the people were made to believe that they need civilisation, salvation, and reconstruction. The colonisers had to convince Africans that all that emanated from the continent was filled with 'darkness' and therefore needed to be civilised, reconstructed and humanised by Europe. African myths and religions suffer from this deceptive move by the Europeans and the gods are often relegated to being wicked and unjust. In this paper, which attempts to correct such erroneous beliefs, the focus is on Ogun, the Yoruba god of war, who has been subjected to mistaken identity by scholars, researchers and critics. It is against this backdrop and misrepresentation of Ogun that the authors delink from the notion that the god is a vengeful and obstinate god. They conclude that Ogun is not a god who engages in reckless devastation of life, as is commonly argued in literature criticisms of the Ogun figure, but a god who seeks justice when wronged. Decolonial thought and its view on 'unthinking' Eurocentric epistemologies on Africa are used to unpack Ogun's characteristics as a god of justice in Ododo's *Hard Choice.*

Key words Ogun; coloniality; decolonial turn; Yoruba mythology; Nigeria

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Introduction

This paper is written from a decolonial epistemic perspective as emphasised by scholars (Mignolo 2007; Ndlovu-Getshani, 2013), which is a critical theoretical approach that initiates an epistemic break from Eurocentric knowledge. A decolonial epistemic perspective refers to the intervention that seeks to challenge modernity brought by colonialism, thereby placing African subjects at the centre, to understand their subjectivity as ways to counter modernity and its tenets (Sithole vi). In this paper, Ogun, the Yoruba god of war and iron, serves as a misinterpreted African subject by scholars due to the influence of modernity.[1] Ogun is a subject of global attention and has been widely researched by scholars such as Soyinka (1990), Barnes (1997), Adu-Gyamfi (1997) and Poynor (2012), who were largely influenced by modernity and therefore constructed Ogun as a stubborn, wicked, unfriendly and sometimes paradoxical god. For example, Poynor argues that "Ogun is a paradox. Although founder and champion of civilisation, he is the terrifying and violent god of war, the ferocious maker of weapons, charms and medicines that strike, wound and kill" (14). The use of the words violent, ferocious and terrifying might be misleading and one could be persuaded that Ogun does nothing but kill and cause commotion in the community. Therefore, this paper explores the decolonial interpretation of Ogun and his contribution to asserting peace in Ododo's *Hard Choice.*

Applying a decolonial epistemic perspective, Ododo's thinking and ideas in *Hard Choice* are examined as they contribute to understanding Ogun's identity and subjectivity in the postcolony.[2] Subjectivity denotes the way in which knowledge

1 This will be based on the themes explored in the play to acknowledge what the Yoruba people believe about Ogun. The word 'Yoruba' serves in this paper as a range of similar or analogous cultural practices among people who claim south-western Nigeria as their ancestral home (Adeuyan 72). Although the ethnic group regarded as Yoruba is also found in the diaspora, for example in Ghana, Togo, Benin, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Leroy 132; Eades 4), for the purposes of this paper, the Yoruba people are seen as those that migrated within the south-western part of Nigeria. Adopting the word 'Yoruba' in this paper does not suggest that the Yoruba people, both in south-western Nigeria and in the diaspora, all share the same experiences merely by virtue of the fact that they are from the same roots.

2 The term 'postcolony' has been coined by Mbembe to refer to how "state power creates, through its administrative and bureaucratic practices, a world of meanings all on its own, a master code which, in the process of becoming the society's primary central code, ends by governing - perhaps paradoxically – the various logics that underlie all other meanings within that society" (Mbembe 3).

practices are informed by conditioned ways of knowing and understanding an individual or group of individuals' lived experience (Sithole vi). In this paper, Yorubaland is seen as the postcolony, where Ogun is subjected to a series of definitions and interpretations that are guided by principles of modernity. It is pertinent to note that the Yoruba people moved to their present abode before the colonial masters' advent, and one of the researchers learned about the Yoruba god from participating in Ogun festivals and listening to Ogun myths from elders.[1]

Decolonial epistemic perspective also gives freedom to knowledge that has been distorted, bastardised, ignored and rendered irrelevant by the Euro-North American kind of knowledge. In Sithole's words, a decolonial epistemic perspective "privileges the subjectivity of the subject from its own existential locale and it is foregrounded outside modernity emphasising the fact that there is no monolithic knowledge, but what is referred to as ecologies of knowledges" (vi).[2] This theoretical approach assists in understanding some key factors that decoloniality addresses, such as locus of enunciation, coloniality of time (in this case colonialism, postcolonialism, precolonialism), subjects and subjectivity.

Relevant here is the locus of enunciation, which refers to the writer or researcher's point of view or basically the subject.[3] This means that where a person stands is where he/she thinks from. Locus of enunciation explains that a person thinks from a certain position. Mignolo on 'Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity' posits that knowledge should not be determined by those that are not positioned where the subjects are (Mignolo, *Delinking* 460). The argument in this paper is that the knowledge about Ogun has been mainly dictated by what scholars are meant to believe about the god. As such, Mignolo suggests an "epistemic shift from the loci of enunciations that had been negated by the dominance and hegemony of both the theological and ego-logical politics of knowledge and understanding" (460). In

1 Being a part of the Yoruba community had a tremendous influence on my knowledge of Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and war. Choudry suggests that in order to understand ideas, we have to take history seriously (7). In line with Choudry's opinion, the Ogun myth is a well-researched field in books, novels, and poems (Barnes 1997). Choudry also argues that "direct access to resources and intellectual involvement" (9) with research materials helps in gaining knowledge about a particular field. Participation in the Ikere Ekiti Ogun festival from childhood assisted me in gaining more knowledge about the god of iron.

2 The notion that beliefs are an integral part of our identity while knowledge and ideas are exterior to Africans or ex-colonised is seen as biased. As such, Bonaventura de Sousa Santos posits that "we (ex-colonised world) are what we believe, and we also have ideas" (Santos 68).

3 This is defined as the geopolitics of language; place from which knowledge is created and articulated (Mignolo, *Geopolitics* 61). The ways in which knowledge is being colonised will also be looked at from the angle of Yoruba *oriki* (panegyrics).

this paper, a decolonial epistemic perspective is utilised to expose three kinds of coloniality in *Hard Choice*, namely coloniality of being, knowledge and power.

According to Mignolo, "decolonial thinking is already about thinking otherwise and assuming from the start a de-modern thinking as well. To de-colonize means at the same time to de-modernize and de-modernizing means de-linking from modern Western epistemology, from the perspective of which the questions of 'representation' and 'totality' are being constantly asked" (*Global* 143). Mignolo explains that to de-modernise does not mean going back in time; it means understanding that coloniality still exists in scholarly discourse. Decoloniality asks one to forget the generally accepted juxtaposition as modernity's 'dark other' and to accept that the confusion caused in the world today is because "some people regard others as inferior" (144).

The main argument in this paper is to delink from the argument that Ogun is a bloodthirsty god. Ogun's feature as a bloodthirsty god is a characteristic that is well represented in scholars' studies that might have been influenced by modernity. Ogun's association with blood has been constantly misinterpreted in texts. For example, Adu-Gyamfi concludes that some Ogun principles such as the warriors do not relish the taste for animal blood, but a taste for human blood, which describes Ogun's ferocity in war and association with his fierce nature (79). This is in contrast to what the Yoruba people believe. In the Yoruba cosmology, it is believed that when Ogun is unhappy or vexed, he makes requests that pertain to bloodletting. This is a form of warning to his people who will not wish to break any code of conduct for fear of Ogun demanding blood sacrifices. It is also believed that the request is to maintain law and order in the society.

Adepegba further highlights the reason for the association as a precaution against accidents caused largely by the use of iron implements. In his words, "Ogun can even prevent death involved in using metal implements – knives, hunting tools, weapons of war, cutlasses, spearheads, swords and guns – as well as present day dangers of death or accident by motor vehicles" (110). Ogun's association with bloodshed is misleading to individuals who could hasten to conclude that Ogun is fierce or wicked. However, the significance is that on occasions that might lead to bloodshed, a faithful adherent of Ogun will gain the god's support and will be saved from any unfortunate circumstance.

Ododo's *Hard Choice* presents a marital communion between the Nigerian Igbo community of Emepiri and the Igedu community of Yorubaland. This relationship is achieved by instituting a traditional royal marriage ceremony between the families of the Emepiri Kingdom's Eze Okiakoh and King Iginla of

Igedu land.[1] The play opens at the traditional wedding ceremony between Azingae, the Princess of Emepiri, and Oki, the Prince of Igedu. As a result of this cultural union during the traditional wedding, the people of Igedu have the support of Ogun as their god, as much as Emepiri has the backing of Oguguru. The influence of these African gods is evident in the manner in which the traditional wedding is performed. The ceremony continues until three men in masks, commissioned by Chief Ubanga, a chief in the Emepiri Igbo Kingdom, interrupt the ceremony and make off with King Iginla's crown. Owing to the missing crown, King Iginla, the groom's father and his entourage are unable to return to their Yoruba community. The abduction of the crown causes a tense atmosphere in the Emepiri Kingdom as both communities, who are supposed to be celebrating a marital union, divert their attention in an attempt to locate the royal object. In their Emepiri refuge, the Yoruba monarch and his chief warlord, Bashorun, plan to wage war on Emepiri if the Emepiri rulership fails to retrieve the crown. From this synopsis, the question that begs answering is therefore: how does Ododo reconstruct Ogun in view of the primary setting of the play being an Igbo space? Ogun is embodied in this play mainly through the characters of Bashorun and Prince Oki and his characteristic, in this instance, is principally as a god of justice.

Bashorun, an Embodiment of Ogun Principles of Justice

While colonial 'knowledge' of Africa conveniently scatters comforting myths of Africa as a vacant prehistoric wilderness to be benevolently colonised by the white man in his saintly 'burden' to save the pagan from darkness, it is 'knowledge' that is bereft of truth but pregnant with racism in its Eurocentric spin to dispute the humanity of Africans to justify the crime of colonialism (Mpofu 108).

In *Hard Choice* Bashorun is presented as an African subject who represents Ogun in the society. The knowledge that Ogun is swift to come to the aid of his people and able to rid the community of corruption has been distorted. The Yoruba people have been made to believe that the god kills recklessly, and he is wicked. The Eurocentric knowledge that the people now have about the god is that he only kills through accident and iron implements. Therefore, the truth about the god, as a god of justice, is being distorted. Ogun represents strength, and all iron implements belong to him. The imperialists' knowledge tends to appear 'saintly' in the sense that all festivals and worship to Ogun are regarded as barbaric and outdated.

1 The Oba is the monarchical head of a typical Yoruba community, while the Eze has the same status in the Igbo community. 'Community' here refers to a group of people within the same geographical space.

The keyword 'Ogun' is not mentioned in the play *Hard Choice*; instead, Ododo uses characters from Igedu to project how the Igede people construct Ogun as a god of justice. An example of such a character is Bashorun, the grand commander of the Igedu army. While defining the concepts of strength, courage, peace and war, Ododo highlights certain Ogun features in his representation of Bashorun. This representation reflects elements attributed to Ogun by the Yoruba people. Bashorun might not be directly referred to as Ogun in the play, but his actions and determination to execute justice on the Emepiri Kingdom for abducting the Igedu crown symbolises principles of justice associated with Ogun.

Bashorun is a hunter and the warrior leader of the Igedu community. Hunters and warriors in Yorubaland are characterised as Ogun's symbols among the people (Ojo 1063).[1] As Ojo observes, "He (Ogun) is the god of iron and of war and therefore, the god of hunters and soldiers" (1063). Bashorun is a fearless warrior whose courage and strength makes the Igedu community rely on him for the recovery of the crown. The following lines from scene three of the play are informative:

> *In a hideout.* KING IGINLA *is surrounded by two of his chiefs and his son* OKI*, with an attendant fanning him.* BASHORUN *comes in agitated.*
>
> BASHORUN: How is he?
>
> CHIEF AJAO: Still visibly shaken, Bashorun. He has refused food these past two days.
>
> OKI: Any luck?
>
> BASHORUN: I'm afraid not. I saw Baba Onifade before I set out early this morning from Igedu. He consulted ifa [sic] and reveals that the crown is now in the custody of some fiery gods fuming with anger. If not recovered in seven days from now, he dies. (*Points to the king. Shocking expressions by all present.)*
>
> CHIEF SHAMU: You're the Bashorun, the grand commander of Igedu army, what do we do? In a foreign land, we have all been humiliated; we cannot go home without the crown; what is a masquerade without his mask?
>
> ATTENDANT: Facekuerade.
>
> CHIEF SHAMU: Shut up, is this a time for careless jokes?

1 The worship of Ogun is popular amongst hunters, who believe that he resides in their implements and what Robin Brooks describes as "habitation of Ogun" (Brooks 167). The Yoruba people believe that Ogun is present in all iron implements, and a gathering together of metals can symbolise the presence of Ogun in the meeting.

ATTENDANT: It is not a joke, sir. A masquerade without a mask is a facekuerade.

CHIEF SHAMU: I say, shut up; you fool *(*ATTENDANT *murmurs.)* Please Bashorun.

BASHORUN: My war commanders are already on the alert. They are preparing our warriors for the ultimate; war, if it comes to that. In the main time [sic], I have sought audience with the Eze later in the day on the missing crown. (*Hard Choice* 20)

More arresting than anything else in this excerpt is the fact that Bashorun had to represent King Iginla in Igedu and still have the time to travel to Emepiri. Since he is the second in command to King Iginla, Bashorun's strength in seeking the good of his community cannot be overemphasised. Similar to Ogun's characteristic of being a fearless warrior is Bashorun's martial nature, which is associated with hunters in Yorubaland. In Yorubaland, In Yorubaland, no one in Bashorun's position can falter in defending the community against potential aggression. Bashorun, the grand commander of the Igedu army, has the huge task of finding King Iginla's crown because without it the king will die. Bashorun is therefore ready to wage war against the Emepiri should the Emepiri elders fail to locate the crown. Like Ogun, Bashorun is enraged by the theft of his master's crown, which is the ultimate sign of disrespect, not only to the king, but also to the entire Igedu Kingdom. His anger towards the disrespect shown to royalty and willingness to protect his people are comparable to Ogun's readiness to battle with those who disrespect him. As shown in the quotation, Bashorun tenders his readiness to combat the miscreants from Emepiri and prepares his army for war (*Hard Choice* 20).

From a decolonial perspective, Bashorun's fierceness embodies Ogun in a positive way. This is in contrast to Adu-Gyamfi's submission that Ogun has a "destructive explosion of an incalculable energy" (106), depicting him as an unpredictable god of war and destruction. Bashorun's decisive will reconfigures Ogun, not as a god of "destructive explosion" but as a god of immense willpower. As Kumar remarks, "Ogun has a strong willpower to rescue his adherents" (39). Babalola supports Naveen Kumar's assertion when he argues that, "Ogun is a heroic figure, who is strong enough and violent enough to bring dread into the hearts of people, yet protective enough to render them grateful for the benefits that are a product of his strength" (168). Ogun's heroic characteristics are attributed to people who show determination, "courage and strength – which are attributes dominant in Ogun's imagery" (Drewal 239), in helping their people. Ododo portrays Bashorun

as a courageous man, "the generalissimo and akogunmogun of Igedu army" (*Hard Choice* 23). Bashorun is the heroic figure to whom the Igedu people now turn as their Kingdom faces demise; he is the physical representative of Ogun who will rescue the community from annihilation by retrieving the crown from Emepiri. He emphasises his determination in the utterance, "[M]y war commanders are already on the alert" (20). Knowing his position as the representative of Ogun in the community, Bashorun shows his readiness to combat the enemy of his people.

Bashorun organises his armed forces to recover the crown from the Emepiri Kingdom, in terms of his position as the war general of the Igedu Kingdom. This relates to Azeez's interpretation of Aare Kurunmi in *Kurunmi* by Ola Rotimi as the Ogun principle, since Kurunmi is also a "generalissimo" in this text (Azeez 104). Yoruba people also give surnames to people who show Ogun characteristics in their lineage, such as Balogun (a war generalissimo). The act of according names in honour of Ogun is intended to preserve the people's knowledge concerning the god. In scene three, Bashorun depicts himself as the "generalissimo" (*Hard Choice* 23), who has been assigned the role of the messiah to recover the Igedu crown and restore Igedu pride.

The Ogun principles in *Hard Choice* range from administering justice, encouraging truth-telling and combating corruption, to exposing evil plans. Bashorun embodies all these principles in how he handles the theft of the Igedu crown. He interrupts the gathering of Emepiri chiefs and fires gunshots in the air to signify both the anger of Ogun against the Emepiri Kingdom and Ogun's backing in his visit. The gun, being a weapon of iron, conjures the image of Ogun deploying his tools to wage battle against his transgressors. Bashorun laments during his confrontation with the Emepiri council of chiefs that "the Igedu aristocratic structure is about to crumble because of a security breach in your domain. You betrayed friendship and humiliated the crown essence of Igedu Kingdom" (23). Bashorun projects the abduction of the Igedu crown during the traditional wedding ceremony of Prince Oki and Princess Azingae as not only a humiliation to the Igedu aristocracy, but also a betrayal on the part of the Emepiri council members. As a representative of Ogun, Bashorun submits that the god of justice detests betrayal (see Ojo 1063) and therefore there will be grave consequences if amends are not implemented.

Bashorun refers to war to remind Eze Okiakoh and his cabinet members about Ogun's wrath to be visited on the Emepiri community if the Igedu crown

is not located (*Hard Choice* 23).[1] This is evident from the conversation in scene four during Bashorun, Takute and Shamu's confrontation with the Emepiri chiefs. Consider Bashorun's words during the confrontation:

> BASHORUN*: (Approaches EZE OKIAKOH frontally.)* I am Bashorun, the Akogunmogun and generalissimo of Igedu armed forces. The Igedu aristocratic structure is about to crumble because of security breach in your domain. You betrayed friendship and humiliated the crown essence of Igedu kingdom, why Eze Okiakoh, why?
>
> EZE OKIAKOH: Bashorun, the incidence of the abducted crown is indeed an unfortunate one. My chiefs and I have been brainstorming on how to recover it and save ourselves this mutual embarrassment.
>
> BASHORUN: Good to know, but your highness, your search is rather too slow for us. In case you don't know, the life of our king hangs on that crown. If in three days it is not recovered and surrendered, we shall be left with no other choice but to match [sic] on your kingdom and recover the crown ourselves. I believe you know what that means. In one word … WAR! *(Turns and leaves with his men. The others remain speechless as the message sinks.)*
>
> EZE OKIAKOH: Summon the royal dibia at once! (*Hard Choice* 23)

From a modernist perspective, war is a battle of nations for power and supremacy (Hanson 19). Modernists understand war to be a battle for dominating peoples or territories. In the decolonial context of Ododo's play, war serves a different purpose. In this play, Ogun is not projected as merely a god of war engaged in conquering communities for selfish interest. Ogun's association with war is always for specific purposes. In this regard, Bashorun's adoption of war is not a reference to a domination battle, but a war in honour of a Kingdom and preserving a king's life. Bashorun's threat of war is to exact justice and to defend the people's honour and their king's. It must be emphasised that Bashorun does not declare war on Emepiri irrationally, but warns Eze Okiakoh and his council members of the imminent danger facing them because of their betrayal. Bashorun's emphasis on 'war' signifies that Ogun's anger is imminent. Because Ogun is the god of war, Bashorun visualises Ogun as being the only deity who can retrieve the missing crown when dialogue between the two communities has failed. In his words, "if in three days it is not recovered and surrendered, we shall be left with no other choice but to match

1 Ogun is a mighty warrior and a blacksmith, the keeper of the secrets of iron (see Fai 44; Omatseye 538; Azeez 105). These characteristics make him a deity of iron and war.

on your kingdom and recover the crown ourselves. I believe you know what that means. In one word … WAR!" (*Hard Choice* 23). Thus, Ogun is constructed here as a god who pursues war only as an alternative to dialogue, who engages in warfare only when every other peaceful method of resolving conflict has failed to yield the desired results.

Bashorun's role in administering justice, encouraging truth-telling, combating corruption and exposing evil in an Ogun-like fashion is further evident when Oki brings an apprehended Chief Ubanga before King Iginla and Eze Okiakoh. Chief Ubanga claims innocence about the missing crown, but under pressure he admits to abducting Igedu's crown as a protest to the marriage of Princess Azingae to a Yoruba Prince who will become the next king at Eze Okiakoh's death. In his confession, Chief Ubanga refuses to mention his co-plotter, but after Bashorun threatens him with a dagger, an Ogun instrument of justice, Ubanga reveals that he has been working in conspiracy with Queen Amaka. Note Bashorun's intervention when Chief Ubanga refuses to tell Eze Okiakoh who his accomplice is:

> CHIEF UBANGA: I'm not persuaded, your highness. The gods and God will never approve that an Igedu Prince becomes the King of Emepiri Kingdom. Unfortunately you're the only one who thinks otherwise just to keep faith with some unguided promises made behind your council of chiefs. This is a state affair and not a domestic one. Besides, it wasn't my idea. Yes. We planned a protest, but abducting the crown wasn't part of the plan.
>
> EZE OKIAKOH: If I may ask, whose idea?
>
> CHIEF UBANGA: I am under oath not to disclose.
>
> BASHORUN: *(Before now, he has been trying to contain his anger and he is now enraged; moves to jerk CHIEF UBANGA up.)* Enough of this impudence and foolery; who is behind this humiliation?
>
> CHIEF UBANGA: Please be gentle with me.
>
> BASHORUN: *(Tightens his grip and draws a dagger.)* I say who?
>
> CHIEF UBANGA: *(Looks at EZE OKIAKOH).* The Queen … Your wife, Your highness. *(All react and confused silence descends.)*
>
> BASHORUN: *(Throws CHIEF UBANGA down and commands his warriors.)* Take him into detention. *(They move in smartly and lead CHIEF UBANGA away. Bashorun leaves the scene and motions PRINCE OKI to come with him. Evocative traditional instrumental music fills the atmosphere. The two kings take in the situation and in terrified dignity turn backing each other and move out in opposite directions followed by their aids* [sic]. *Fade out.)*

(39-40)

Bashorun's actions here help us to further understand Ogun principles in the play, which in turn confirms the construction of Ogun as the god of justice. First, Bashorun forces Chief Ubanga to tell the truth about his involvement in the abduction of the crown. In response to Chief Ubanga's claim to be "under oath not to disclose" the name of his accomplice, Bashorun threatens him with his dagger, thereby forcing him to admit his alliance with the Queen. The dagger, being an instrument of iron, connotes Ogun's very presence and influence over this truth-telling incident. This suggests that Ogun exacts justice not only by waging war, but also by initiating truth-telling where the tellers bear witness against themselves as deserving whatever punishment is meted against them. Then, by arresting Chief Ubanga with the instruction, "Take him into detention", Bashorun eliminates a corrupt influence in Emepiri, making room for the restoration of honest governance within the Kingdom. Lastly, Bashorun plays a crucial role in exposing the wickedness of the Queen. His intervention forces Chief Ubanga to name the Queen as an accomplice in his evil deeds. Bashorun's demonstration of these Ogun principles reverses the demise that was to be visited upon Emepiri. Omojuwa states the following about Ogun: "[W]hat constitutes offences to Ogun include the breaking of covenant, lying, falsehood, wickedness and stealing. Whoever is guilty of any of the moral offences would incur the wrath of Ogun. This could manifest in form of accident, untimely death, wound and injuries" (Omojuwa 89). Thus, Bashorun's action to detain Chief Ubanga for "lying, falsehood, wickedness and stealing" configures Ogun as a god who punishes transgressors deservedly, not undeservedly.

Conclusion

Many Africans no longer want to participate in festivals in the honour of African gods. Their knowledge has been clouded by the Eurocentric idea that African gods are wicked, and their associated worship or festivals are barbaric. The history and myth of Africa have been distorted by the colonisers. They have also 'murdered' their knowledge in what Bonaventura de Sousa Santos called "epistemicide" (Santos 92). The distortion of history and slaughtering of African knowledge shows that the colonisers have succeeded in emptying the "heads of self-confidence and the hearts of the emotional stamina" (Mpofu 109) of the African people. As Africans, we have been made to believe that the ways that we worship our gods are foul, violent, stupid, backward and without direction. Thus, our knowledge of African

gods and associated myth needs to be reconstructed and refined. This paper, has demonstrated that Ogun is not an aggressive, bloodsucking, warring or arrogant god, as representations influenced by modernity depict him, but a god of justice, truth-telling, honest governance and courageous leadership. Being a play set in an Igbo geographical space, *Hard Choice* also suggests the transcendentalism of Ogun as he operates beyond Igedu land to exact justice for his people. The collaboration between Emepiri and Igedu Kingdoms in locating the Igedu crown forges a partnership between Oguguru, the Emepiri god of oaths, and Ogun the Yoruba god of justice, which eventually leads to conflict resolution and a continued alliance between the two Kingdoms. In many ways, both Ogun and Oguguru function according to the same principle of taking what is rightfully theirs, even if it involves shedding human blood.

Ododo's representation of the Yoruba and Igbo cultures corrects the erroneous notion that African gods are bloodthirsty gods just eager to kill. Ododo portrays Ogun and Oguguru as enforcing honest governance, courageous leadership and truth-telling, compelling its readers and viewers to revisit their heritage and rekindle interest in what is African. Decoloniality helps us to understand how to delink from views that present African cultures as barbaric and outdated. Decoloniality assists us in seeing that African gods do not take pleasure in reckless killing; they only become angry when what is due to them is intentionally denied. Ododo's representation of Bashorun as the embodiment of Ogun principles of justice in *Hard Choice* helps us to understand that African gods work for the good of their communities, not for selfish individualistic interests. They detest deceit, betrayal, lying, disloyalty and corruption. By contrast, they come to the aid of those who display strength, courage and determination for the common good of their community.

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