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This issue of *Explorations* is dedicated to the fond memory of

Mohammad Safdar Mir (Zeno)

(1922-1998)

(Teacher, Columnist, Poet, Playwright, Scholar)

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Editorial

What good is research if nobody reads it? The question has haunted me over the past few years as I have pondered how *Explorations* might become more readable. As its historical orientations are broadly conceived, *Explorations* publishes a series of essays from a diverse field of literary genres, and over the past several years, the journal has received more and more inquiries from scholars who are interested in publishing their research essays in the journal.

As it happens, *Explorations* marks several firsts. It is the first time, to my knowledge, that the journal publishes articles on African drama. It is the first time also that the journal is publishing a research essay on a living Pakistani poet's most recent poetry collection.

Changing times alter us emotionally, psychologically, and even academically. It has always been a formidable challenge for humanity to fight the contemporary challenges on the one hand, and on the other to continue the legacy of critical thinking and research work by giving shape to complex and innovative ideas. The researchers' effort in conducting research and the reader's response constitute a part of this critical tradition. As research is becoming more experimental and diverse, researchers' task is to share their insights with other scholars and researchers of the global world.

The research essays in this volume offer fresh perspectives on African and continental drama and post-colonial and indigenous writing. Muhammad Shoaib's essay is on reconstructing a post-colonial self in Wole Soyinka's play. One of the essays analyzes the play *The House of Bernarda Alba* within the theoretical framework of Foucault's panoptical prison. Another essay explores the exegesis of national schizophrenia in African writer Ben Okri's short fiction. Sufia Humayun's essay highlights traces of objectification and the self-objectification of women in the selected poems from Rizwan Akhtar's latest collection *Lahore, I am Coming*.

At *Explorations*, we are determined to continue the legacy of research and wish you all the best for your academic endeavors through *Explorations* 2018.

Warm Regards,

Salma Khatoon

Associate Editor

Resisting and Subverting Indigenization as a Strategy to Reconstruct a Post-Colonial Nigerian Self in Wole Soyinka's Play *The Lion and the Jewel*

Mohammad Shoaib

Abstract

In the second half of the twentieth century, one of the main dilemmas faced by the newly-freed states was whether to look to their ex-masters for political, cultural, and economic growth or to return to their own cultural, linguistic, and epistemological identities which had been disrupted as a consequence of encounters with the hegemonic colonial discourse. This research paper on Nigerian author Wole Soyinka's play *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959), underscores how the text subverts the hegemony of the English language, its literary canon, and its cultural apparatus through an encounter with the local culture. There is an urge on the part of the post-colonial Nigerian people to define themselves against the cultural and linguistic identity imposed on them by the colonial discourse. The paper employs textual reading as a research method to analyze the role of characters, images, cultural practices, and linguistic devices as strategies of constructing a counter-discourse that would eventually subvert the indigenizing urge of the colonial discourse. Through an analysis of the encounter between the Western and Nigerian values represented by Lakunle and Baroka respectively, the paper discusses the subversive role of indigenizing strategies.

Keywords: Indigenization, tradition, Soyinka, African drama, subversion

Indigenization is the process of making some language, practice, or idea native to some community. In the post-colonial African context, indigenization, as Chantal Zabus defines, "refers to the writer's attempt at textualizing linguistic differentiation and at conveying African concepts, thought pattern and linguistic features through the ex-colonizer's language" (3). Indigenization has given rise to "a deepening sensitivity to the rich potential that exists in local customs and behaviours peculiarly driven by indigenous traditions" (Adair 405). The concept of Indigenization avers that knowledge should be reflective of the local culture, behaviours, and practices. It should be embedded in and respond to its immediate cultural context. Cultural productions like drama and

fiction are popular witnesses to the process of the Indigenization of European languages and arts in Africa.

Wole Soyinka is a contemporary Nigerian dramatist, poet, novelist, and literary critic. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986, the first Nigerian to receive this accolade. In his works, Soyinka "seeks to make the worldview of his native Yoruba relevant to his work as an artist who uses Western forms" (George 267). He brings into visibility the rich cultural heritage of Africa, especially his Yoruba society. According to Olakunle George, Soyinka intends to show that African people have rich cultural traditions and systems of thought that can be considered an alternative to Euro-American traditions (269). MolefiKete Asante contends that Afrocentric art can develop the African world from the viewpoint of Africa as a subject, rather than an object (134). Soyinka's plays help to develop a Nigerian theatre that brings into the spotlight the imposition of European civilization on Africa (Reddy 186). "I have long been preoccupied with the process of apprehending my own world in its full complexity", Soyinka comments in his *Myth, Literature and the African World* (9). Most of Soyinka's dramaturgy is inspired by his native Yoruba culture and traditions. His characters are stubborn about their cultural identity and do not want it to be violated by any outside force. His plays are part of the larger project of Afrocentricity which, in Asante's words, is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives prevails; "it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is in their ethical behaviour" (2).

Set in Ilujinle, a Yoruba tribal village in Nigeria, *The Lion and the Jewel* enacts an encounter between the colonial epistemology represented by Lakunle, a progressive westernized schoolteacher, and traditional Yoruban culture represented by Baroka, the polygamous village chief. The centre of attraction for both men is Sidi, a beautiful village girl also known as "the

jewel." Lakunle is the incarnation of Indigenization as he wants his land and people to change on the European lines. The play points out that Indigenization can be subversive —when it involves a slavish imitation of western concepts of justice, freedom, gender roles, and education.

To subvert Indigenization in the African cultural context, African authors enact an encounter between Indigenization and Africanization. In his seminal essay on post-colonialism "Of Mimicry and Man", Homi K. Bhabha argues that mimicry is sometimes unintentionally subversive. He is of the view that mimicry is a kind of performance that exposes the artificiality of all symbolic expressions of power. In other words, if a person from a colony, desiring to mimic the colonizer, becomes obsessed with some particular codes associated with the colonizer, his performance of those codes might show how hollow the codes are. In Soyinka's play, Lakunle serves as a mimic man of the European civilization. He takes delight in imitating the language, dress, food habits, and culture of the white man. He believes that the only way for his village to move forward is to modernize on the pattern of Lagos, an African town developed on the European model. Baroka, the village chief, is the symbol of African culture and values. Sidi symbolizes the post-colonial Nigeria, desired by both Lakunle and Baroka. She is the incarnation of subversive Indigenization of the European models of development in Africa.

Baroka does not want his village to cut away from their traditions. He fights against the modernization of his village through the construction of railroads. The Public Works Company starts a project of the railroad in Ilujinle by felling trees. When Baroka comes to know of this plan, he tries to stop this project to keep his village intact against the onslaught of Western modernization. He bribes the surveyor with money, hens, and a goat and the surveyor packs up and leaves the village, declaring that the place is not suitable for a railroad. In this way, Baroka succeeds in maintaining the traditionality of the village. On the other hand, Lakunle holds the

opinion that the railroad would have brought much-needed development in the area on the pattern of Lagos and other developed areas in Africa. He thinks that progress, adventure, success, civilization, and international fame were within the grasp of Ilujinle, but the party was spoilt by the village chief who wants to maintain his hold on this village by keeping it uncivilized and undeveloped.

This process of Indigenization versus Africanization extends to customs related to marriage. The play identifies some prevalent cultural practices of Yoruba society that seem to be threatened by the influence of European culture. The main dispute between Sidi and Lakunle concerns Sidi's demand for the bride price. It refers to a ritual of paying an amount of money, often decided by the elders of both families, to be paid by the groom to the bride. The Yoruba society considers it a matter of social acceptance of their girls. If a girl gets married without bride price, it is assumed that she is not a virgin. Due to this, Sidi insists on having a bride price. She resists the Indigenization of the Western culture of marriage. When Lakunle asks for Sidi's hand in marriage, Sidi says that she will marry him, after he pays her bride price as is required in the Yoruba culture. If Sidi does not demand a bride price, her virginity will be doubted by the village people.

SIDI. I shall marry you today, next week

Or any day you name.

But my bride-price must first be paid...

Lakunle, I must have

The full bride- price. Will you make me

A laughing stock?...

Sidi will not make herself a cheap bowl for the village spit. (8)

On the other hand Lakunle, the western-educated teacher counters this sort of practice in his village as unacceptable. He does not agree with the idea of bride price as he considers it inhuman and immoral. He wants a wife who will be his equal, not his slave or a commodity. In the last part of the play when Lakunle comes to know that Sidi has lost her virginity to the Bale, he still wants to marry her provided she does not demand bride price. But Sidi tells him that she has married Baroka as he will pay her bride price. Sidi's marriage to Baroka resists the Indigenization of the British marriage customs in Africa.

The colonization of Africa disrupted the social and familial harmony of Africa by introducing the European and Christian ideas on gender roles in African society. Traditionally, African women had a much stronger role in society than their European counterparts. Soyinka points out how women under European influence become the object of male desire. Sidi challenges Lakunle's views on women inspired by his European education. Lakunle tells Sidi that women are the weaker sex as scientists have proved that women have smaller brains than men. Sidi retorts,

SIDI. Is it a weaker breed who pounds the yam

Or bends all day to plant the millet

With a child strapped to her back? (6).

Lakunle's attempt at the indigenizing European way of romance is also foiled by Sidi. She is disgusted by Lakunle's way of kissing on her lips. To this Lakunle replies that this is the civilized way of romance; this is the way Christians kiss their wives. When Lakunle describes Sidi's beauty

in biblical terms by calling her Ruth, Rachel, Esther, and Bathsheba, Sidi is infuriated at these strange names. She says that her name is Sidi, and she does not need any funny names for her beauty.

Controlling the education system of the colonies is perhaps the most important strategy of making the colonized people internalize their inferiority. Thomas Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" (1835) underscores the colonial policy of controlling the education system of colonies. "[W]e must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Ashcroft et al. 430). The school in *The Lion and the Jewel* stands for the colonizer's attempt at making the Nigerian people adopt the European ways of acquiring knowledge. Though the school is located at the center of the village, its significance is subverted through Sidi's encounter with Lakunle. Sidi thinks that Lakunle, with his European education, is only going to alienate the local children from their own culture and society.

The British colonizers in Africa and other parts of the world used the English language as an instrument of authority and established a power system based on the linguistic superiority of English and suppression of the native tongues. However, the post-colonial writers have challenged this hegemony of English. They subvert it by using different strategies like appropriation and abrogation. What results is the subversive Indigenization of English. Elleke Boehmer (1995) states that it is important to create a situation in which several versions of 'Englishes' can exist together. This approach will break the hegemony of British English to constitute a kind of language that is no more traditional English (210). Soyinka uses English, but he appropriates it to his native culture in such a way that his language becomes a palimpsest. It is English, but it is embedded in the African culture and language. The communal language is simple and imagistic. The characters in

the play do not know the word for the camera, for example, and so they call it a "one-eyed box", and a motorcycle is called a horse with "only two feet" (11). It is this simple language that Soyinka shows to be most powerful. He shows the re-establishment of an indigenous African language as a strategy to re-appropriate cultural identity. He blends the English language with the Nigerian sensibility. He recreates English in a way that does not always obey the conventional rules of syntax and grammar. "I feel that English language will be able to carry the weight of African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral but uttered to suit its new African surroundings" (Achebe qtd. in Mair xviii). In the words of Gilbert and Tompkins:

> Altering the stylistic hierarchies of Standard English expression is one of the most politically useful modes of subverting its authority…. Inflating or deflating rhetoric, exploiting grandiloquence, or incorporating aspects of the oral tradition—such as proverbs—into the dramatic text are just some of the more common ways of destabilising 'English' to ensure that other languages (and their correlative cultures and histories) are voiced. (181)

The dramatist uses many native transliterated words in italics without translation or glossary. It is up to the readers and audience to understand their meanings from the context. The words like 'agbada' and 'popinjay' are integrated into the texture of the English language. The British way of greeting is indigenized but with a morphological appropriation. Hence, "good morning" becomes "guru morin" as used by Baroka (16). Such examples highlight the juxtaposition of the native idiom with the English language which the native speaker of English may not be able to recognize.

Establishing the importance of the native languages is part of the creation and assertion of the post-colonial Nigerian self. According to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "[t]he choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to people's definition of themselves in time and space" (4). The richness of the native language is contrasted with the shallowness of English crammed by some so-called educated people of Africa. The superiority of the English language as claimed by Lakunle is subverted in the play. Lakunle takes delight in using big English words in his speech. He is under the illusion that the use of English words makes him stand out among his countrymen. But in reality, he is scorned by Sidi for it. He only makes himself a laughing stock by his English. Lakunle uses a torrent of adjectives to criticize the custom of paying a bride price:

LAKUNLE. A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated,

Rejected, denounced, accursed,

Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,

Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant.

Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable. (8)

Sidi is amused by all his words but does not understand what he wants to say. She asks him if he has emptied his bag of words. To this, Lakunle replies that he has only the Shorter Companion Dictionary and he has ordered for the longer one. It becomes obvious that Lakunle does not have a complete grasp of English, despite all his flaunting. The purpose of the use of complicated words on the part of Lakunle is not the expression of his ideas but to impress his audience, especially Sidi. But Sidi only scorns Lakunle for using complicated English words. She tells him that he has made himself a laughing stock by using big English words with no meaning. The play further

subverts the poetic language as used by Lakunle and privileges local wisdom in the shape of idioms and proverbs. To contrast herself and Baroka, Sidi uses similes embedded in her culture. She says that Baroka's face is like "a leather piece/ Torn rudely from the saddle of his horse" (22). Lakunle uses poetic expressions to praise and impress Sidi, but she is unable to understand these expressions. When Lakunle complains that no one understands his poetry, Sidi's reply is embedded in the local wisdom:

> SIDI. If the snail finds splinters in his shell
>
> He changes house. Why do you stay? (6).

Western technology has helped the colonizers gain and retain control of third world countries, and a camera is an important tool exploited by the colonizers. It helped to subject the body of the colonized 'savage' to the European gaze. Brent Harris spotlights the role of camera and photography in the construction of the colonized other in the minds of the European public:

> The advent of photography in the mid-nineteenth century coincided with a rapid expansion of colonialism that was to culminate in the 'Scramble for Africa'…. The different colonial powers all used some form of discourse to justify their domination over foreign territories, foreign peoples and foreign bodies, and photography played an important role in this endeavour, particularly in regard to the construction of colonial identities. (20)

The significance of the camera as a colonial tool of objectifying the African body to the colonial gaze is subverted by Soyinka. A European photographer captures Sidi's beauty in his camera and returns to Ilujinle with a magazine containing Sidi's pictures. Sidi's joy knows no bounds on discovering that she has become more famous and powerful than the Bale Baroka who is given a very small space at the corner of a page in the same magazine. In the picture, he is shown standing

next to a village latrine. Sidi even tells Lakunle that she may not be marrying him as her fame has already reached Lagos and beyond. When Baroka's head wife Sadiku comes to her to ask her hand for Baroka, she refuses the proposal citing her images in the magazine as proof of her superiority. Sidi seems to internalize the colonizer's definition and view of her body. She becomes self-conceited and seems to move away from her society. For her, the camera proves a liberating tool and she, for the first time, seems to take possession of her body. But she seems ignorant of the European gaze that has turned her into an image to be fantasized about. At the same time, the camera portrays a reductive picture of Baroka. It seems that the old order represented by Baroka is losing space. Baroka's gaze is contrasted with that of the camera. The camera is subversively indigenized in the sense that it only helps to strengthen Sidi's ties with her native culture and traditions. Instead of alienating Sidi from her culture and especially Baroka, the camera leads to their union. It is only through Sidi's photographs in the magazine that Baroka looks at the real beauty of Sidi and decides to marry her.

Instead of rejecting the European model of photography, Baroka uses it in a way that is subversive of European superiority. Postage stamps which Baroka plans to print with Sidi's pictures on them represent the modernization of Nigeria. The European idea of development is indigenized but in a subversive way as it is not the Europeans but the village chief himself who will oversee the project. The stamps offer a model for progress without disrupting the traditional way of life in Ilujinle. Unlike railways or unions, which seem to be forced on the community, the postal system represents a way to indigenize the European notion of progress and modernity without disrupting the current way of life. Stamps are a Western invention, but Baroka can exploit them for his benefit. Above all, they offer him a way to woo the beautiful but stubborn Sidi. In this

way, he can defeat the Eurocentric approach represented by Lakunle. By agreeing to Baroka's plan, Sidi will become famous, but her lot will be controlled by Bale himself.

The African arts like music and dance are frequently referred to as a part of the African self. Soyinka indigenizes the dramatic form but in a subversive way as his drama is not a simple imitation of the European form. Rather, he adds many elements from the African culture to introduce his brand of drama. He fuses tribal myths, folklore, dance, and music with the Western dramatic tradition. "As a culturally coded activity, dance… renegotiates dramatic action and dramatic activity, reinforcing the actor's corporeality, particularly when it is culturally laden…. In this way, dance recuperates postcolonial subjectivity by centralizing traditional, non-verbal forms of self-representation" (Gilbert and Tompkins 239). After the news of Sidi's photographs in a magazine is broken, there is an enactment of the arrival of the outsider in the village. The elements of communal dance and music are very conspicuous during this enactment.

Dress, food, and eating ways are great signifiers of cultural identity. In the process of constructing a post-colonial Nigerian self, European dress code and eating ways are contrasted with the indigenous ones. Lakunle's attire is very funny as it does not fit his body. "He is dressed in an old-style English suit, threadbare but not ragged, clean but not ironed, obviously a size or two too small" (1). When the play opens, Sidi is seen carrying a pail of water on her head. Lakunle considers this way of carrying water "unwomanly." Lakunle then criticizes Sidi for her inappropriate dress as her breasts are visible. Lakunle tells Sidi men of the village will subject her to their "lustful eyes" and "lewd jokes" if she dresses like this (5). It shows Lakunle's disapproval of traditional African attire. His ideas of modesty and appropriate dress have been formed by his European education. Sidi responds by telling Lakunle that she has already folded her garment high and tight because of his objections. Instead of indigenizing colonial food practices, the characters

stick to native food culture. Lakunle tries to lure Sidi by mentioning European foods and ways of eating which, in his opinion, are superior to the local ones. He tells Sidi that unlike the Africans they will sit at the table and eat their food on breakable plates. They will eat with forks and knives, not with hands as the uncivilized do. Lakunle further says that Sidi will be a true modern wife, and she will not have to wait on her husband at the dining table. In the scene enacting the visitor's entry into the village, the European beverages are contrasted with the local ones. The visitor enters with a flask of whisky. He takes many swigs. But soon his foot slips and he disappears. Later, Baroka offers him the local brew which he tries reluctantly but then drinks profusely. A gourd of palm wine is brought to seal the agreement between Baroka and the white surveyor.

Conclusion

This research paper has attempted to highlight the resistance to and subversion of the indigenization of the European culture and language through an explication of characters, language, cultural practices, and images in Soyinka's play *The Lion and the Jewel*. The play shows a dismantling of the hierarchical relationship between the European colonizer and the African people by returning to the pre-colonial reality to create a post-colonial Nigerian self. The play serves as a milestone in post-independence Nigeria that imbibes the influence of the colonizer with a spirit of resistance to foreground the native culture and traditions.

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Inside the Panoptic Architectural Vision of Bernarda Alba's House

Mahnoor Nasir

Abstract

This paper analyzes the play *The House of Bernarda Alba* by the Spanish author Federico Garcia Lorca within the theoretical framework of Foucault's panoptical prison. Lorca's play depicts Bernarda Alba's house as a prison where Bernarda's daughters are constantly under the surveillance of the matriarch. Bernarda's role in the play is akin to a prison guard who has internalized the values of patriarchy and thus reinforces those ideals upon her daughters. Meanwhile, her daughters are unable to find an escape from the house where they have a conscious awareness of being under the watch of their mother and other women appointed by her to keep an eye on the daughters. Within this power structure, Lorca has managed to inject the play with hope. Despite knowing her mother's nature, Bernarda Alba's youngest daughter Adela finds herself a lover thus creating friction between the static world of her mother and her dynamic and ambitious nature.

This paper further illustrates the need for understanding the tokenship of respectability that is promised to women who uphold harmful structures. Such women play the role of custodians of patriarchal values in the absence of men. They do so to such an extent that they internalize those values, whereby they are unable to manage and sustain meaningful relationships with other women.

Keywords: Fredrico Garcia Lorca, patriarchy and panopticon, House of Bernarda Alba

Introduction

"…unhappy families are conspiracies of silence. The one who breaks the silence is never forgiven."

-Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal, Jeanette Winterson

▪

Federico Garcia Lorca's play, *The House of Bernarda Alba* is, perhaps, one of his most poignant plays in terms of accurately depicting the "invisible ways in which women are harmed" living under specific circumstances or geographical space (Lecea). The title of the play is the first indicator of the influence of architectural determinism on the life of not only Bernarda Alba, but also her five daughters, her mother, and various other women who are engaged inside the house as

servants. Moreover, the Spanish playwright has intended the Three Acts as "a photographic document" which further manipulates the structure, and therefore illuminates the thematic concerns of the play (Lorca 50). The photographic documentation of the house of Bernarda Alba (a tyrannical woman aged sixty), provides readers the panoptic optics to look inside Bernarda's panoptic vision through which she controls and maneuvers her daughters' lives to an extreme extent, and, drives one of them to commit suicide. Additionally, Lorca's description of the house throughout the three acts further adds to Foucauldian "Panopticism" that dominates the lives of these women. This paper will analyze the architectural determinism of Bernarda Alba's house as a panopticon serving the role of an institutional structure under patriarchal surveillance assumed by the matriarch of the house. In addition, it will problematize the side effects of surveillance culture on the psyches of women who are constantly being observed inside their own homes.

To draw the foundations of Bernarda Alba's house as a panoptic, it is essential to first determine the nature of this Foucaldian concept that will provide the framework for this paper. The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, theorized the concept of the panopticon in his famous book called *Discipline and Punishment* which was first published in 1975. The central concern of the book itself is to historicize the concept of the penal system and its evolution throughout time. In the chapter called "Panopticism", he thoroughly explains the idea of a panopticon which he borrows from the ideal prison that was proposed by Jeremy Bentham in 1971.

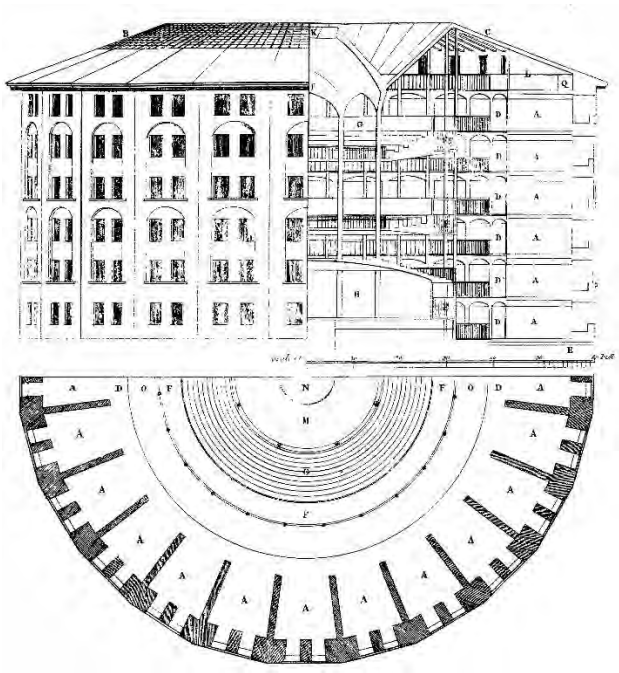

Fig. 1 J. Bentham, *Plan of Panopticon,* 1791

While elucidating the architectural determinism of surveillance structures, Foucault draws on Bentham's proposed plan for a prison that was an attempt to reduce or eliminate the need for guards. The concept of the panopticon is a tower with a circular shape, six corners, and "pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring" (Foucault 200). The central tower is surrounded by cells that are illuminated from the sunlight passing through the windows and a guard is placed in the central tower to watch the captives. These cells could be occupied with "a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy" (444). Foucault goes as far as to say: "They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and recognize immediately…Visibility is a trap" (444-445).

This trap of visibility is spread throughout Bernarda Alba's house who keeps a close eye on her daughters and micro-manages their lives lest they make decisions of their own and do something that brings her dishonor.

La casa de Barnarda Alba/House of Bernarda Alba, is a play written by Lorca in 1936. Lorca was never able to see the play being performed, as he was murdered the same year, and it was much later in the year 1945 that the play premiered for the first time. One of the thematic concerns of the play is the complicit violence on women within a patriarchal society, and the strange ways through which women participate in sustaining violent structures against each other as they become tools of surveillance for patriarchy. It is the same "retrograde conservatism which would end his life" the same year as he wrote his play (Lecea). For a long time, Lorca's assassination remained a mystery, until 2015, when official documents regarding his murder came to the surface. Those documents stated that Lorca was "persecuted for his beliefs". Furthermore, these also included phrases used for him, such as "socialist" and "freemason", and also included rumors about him being a "homosexual" involved in "abnormal practices" (Kassam). It can be concluded that as a homosexual man, Lorca did not fit the socio-political and sexual norms of Spanish society. However, it would be reductionist to assume that the reason Lorca's plays feature the struggles of women is that his homosexuality made him relate to women more than men. Oftentimes, the heterosexist analysis of Lorca equates "men who love men with women who love men" (McDermid 10). For the sake of objective research, it is, then, essential to understand that Lorca's plays cannot be reduced to an exploration of identity but must be understood as a commentary on the conservative traditional values of Spain which regulated the lives of men and women. Similarly, the scintillating quality of his tragic play, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, lies in its umbrella realm which encompasses love as the transcendental force which overcomes "the

queer other-realm where desire may be censored" (17). This means that even as the panopticism of surveillance in a conservative society induces a state of hyper-awareness among people, it is impossible to impose an unnatural control on human desire and the differences that exist in human nature. However, it is important to first analyze the quintessential qualities of the panopticon which determine Bernarda's house as a prison in its architectural form.

As discussed before, the play is intended as a pictorial document that puts a spatial limit on the set of the play from the very beginning. This note from the author is not a coincidence or without meaning because photography and images hold a strong position in architectural vision and dramatists or playwrights are not indifferent to that significance. Bertolt Brecht said that with the printing of images that served the purpose of historicizing, it was "less than ever" that the "mere reflection of reality revealed anything about reality" (Borden 61). However, at the same time, neither architecture nor the people engaging with the photograph of a certain geographical organization of a space can neglect the importance of an image. It is an act of "mechanical reproduction of surface appearance" which is poignant with meaning and substance (Borden 74). In other words, Lorca has presented to us an image —of architecture, of a family, and of society that captures not only Bernarda's family but also her panoptic vision. We know that we have a telescopic insight into Bernarda Alba's house which naturally excludes the possibility of any knowledge of the landscape around the house except through passing comments. In a particular instance, Bernarda calls the village cursed for it lacks a river (Lorca 157). She further states that it only has wells and one can never know if they are drinking poisoned water, so death looms in the air. The play opens in a "very white room"; the second scene is set in a "white room", and the third act also takes place within "four white walls", which are "lightly washed in blue" (151-187). This description of the house and the limitation of a vibrant color palette creates the awareness that the

interiors of the house are drab and lifeless rather than reverberating with vibrancy. This description of the house is borrowed from Frasquita Alba's home who is the real-life inspiration behind Lorca's play. It was around the age of eight that Lorca went to live in the region of Granada where he encountered the experience which would, in later years, inspire him to transcribe his memory into a play. Lorca would visit his aunt, Matilde, where he would eavesdrop to catch the "conversations that were held on the other side of the wall" (Arroyo). This house, now open to the public, was: "dumb, cold world under an African sun, a tomb of living people under the inflexible splint of a dark three-headed dog", as he would describe the situation to his friend Carlos Morla Lynch (Arroyo).

Fig. 2 *Casa le Frasquita Alba*

This description enhances the visual imagery that one concludes from reading the text itself. It was in correspondence with an actress named Margarita Xirgú that Lorca was inspired to write about the life of Frasquita. In recalling that woman and her house, he also said that she was an old widow with an "inexorable" control over her unmarried daughters. He described the daughters as "private obedient prisoners" with whom he never talked when he was a child. On the other hand, he saw

them "go by like shadows, always in silence and always dressed in black" (Arroyo). In other words, the people who became the prototypes for characters in the play were nothing short of prisoners who lived in an exaggerated performance of mourning under the dictatorship of a tyrannical mother. The house with white walls where women clad in black clothes lived brings to the surface the role of architectural determinism on human psychology. The house of Bernarda Alba is a panoptic prison and it becomes, "This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed placed, in which slightest movements are supervised, which all events are recorded…all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism" (Foucault 197).

However, it is not merely the architecture of the house which gives Bernarda's house the effect of prison because, according to Foucault, the cells are inspected carefully by the syndics, and eventually the prisoners end up internalizing the power. This is the case at the Bernarda house where akin to the inmates, the daughters never know when they are being watched but live with the knowledge that they are being observed, nonetheless (Foucault 201). Furthermore, this practice reinforces the automatizing of power to a point that the person who knows they are being watched "assume[s] responsibility for the constraints of power" and "plays it spontaneously upon himself" (202). This awareness of being under observation garners a sense of self-surveillance through which the subject Otherize themselves as the sense of dichotomy between "self-as-object and Other-as-object" is created (Vaz 34). Foucault has often borrowed the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of the Other and the look which is created through the gaze of the subject. For Foucault, Sartre's look "always remains at the periphery of the structure" that is panopticon as it mirrors the functions of the look (34). To further illustrate the Otherization of the daughters that takes place in the panoptic house of Bernarda Alba, the French feminist, Simone de Beauvoir's

introduction to her book, *The Second Sex*, plays a significant role. She uses the Hegelian master-slave dialect that was the basis for Sartre and later on, for Foucault for studying the relationship between women and society. She argues that the society is "male and man defines woman" always in "relation to him" (Beauvoir 16). She contends that "the category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself" (16). The Other is formed in relation to a subject whose consciousness is internalized by the object and consequently, they turn the gaze inwards. They watch themselves from the similar standpoint of the Subject rather than being or becoming the subject. Daughters of Bernarda have also Otherized themselves as they have internalized, not only Bernarda's or Poncia's but also, each other's gazes. They watch themselves and each other. The architectural nature of the house as a panopticon has also imprinted prison on their psyches and leads to the consideration of architectural determinism. It is imperative to consider whether the design of the house plays its role in affecting the psychological behavior of the women and if so, to what extent is it justified to assign that role to interiors of the house. In a journal article published for the NCBI (National Center for Biotechnology Information), Alex Marmot explores the importance of design that can "make a real difference to people's lives" and maintains that the behavioral response of the public plays a fundamental role in design activity (Marmot 252). Similarly, the panopticon is a structure that is used for "monitoring and disciplining human behavior" (Yong et al.). It can be concluded that there is a dialectical relationship between architecture and people who encounter or live in certain spaces.

The mother also plays the role of a watch guard who inspects her daughters and servants as if they are inmates. It is through Poncia, a servant who has worked for Bernarda for many years that we first hear about the prison-like environment created by Bernarda. As the play opens at the funeral of Bernarda's husband, the servants express their hunger and Poncia tells them that they

can take a "fistful of peas" because "she won't know the difference today" (151). These lines indicate that the woman of the house has a strong observation that can detect even the most minuscule of discrepancies in the amount of food that is available at home. In the same scene, we realize that Bernarda has kept her mother, an eighty year old woman, a captive, and she is "locked up tight". Poncia and other servants' dialogues highlight Bernarda's tyrannical lifestyle and make preparations for what is to come (151). Bernarda's house is her "domain" where she has employed Poncia as a watchdog too. Moreover, she does not allow men inside her house and we hardly see her express any sentiment about the death of her husband. Poncia also exclaims that her "poor husband" has finally found good rest that further outlines the characteristics of the woman who runs the house (152). Additionally, the women who have come to mourn at her husband's funeral further usher the character drawing as they call her "worse than wicked" and claim that her tongue is sharper than a knife (155). With such qualities, it is almost natural to see Bernarda as an inspector inside her house. Just as Foucault describes the nature of the inspection, in the house of Bernarda "inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere" (Foucault 195). Moreover, Poncia plays the role of the syndic as she confesses that she is the watchdog who reports the daughters' activities to the higher authority, that is, Bernarda. After the death of her husband, she orders that the house will observe mourning for eight years and "not a breath of air" will come inside (157). She further ordains that they will live in "sealed up doors and windows with bricks" (157). In the same breath, she tells her daughters that they must prepare for their hope-chests even though there have not been any proposals or means for the five daughters to have come across potential partners, thus, appropriating insensitivity towards the mourning procession for the late man. There is also a limit as to how much distance they can cross even if they are to go outside. When Adela wants to go out for a walk, she makes it clear that she is going "as far as the gate" to stretch her legs (190).

This is one of the only two times that the sisters leave the confinement of the house and both of the times it is Adela. In the first instance, she dresses up in a "green dress she made" on her birthday and goes outside to yell at the chickens to look at her, and in the second instance, she initiates her plan to go outside for the walk (163). Adela poses a threat to the silent and passive life that the daughters of Bernarda are leading inside the home. She is the radical force of resistance who refuses to abide by the restraints imposed on them. The sisters also have their separate rooms which act as the "separate cages" or "small theaters" where they wish to escape the gaze to no avail (Foucault 200). Adela, when vexed with Martirio, lashes out by postulating that her sister follows her everywhere and "looks in my room to see if I'm sleeping" (Lorca 173). She also complains about Poncia, the servant woman, to her face, by telling her in an acrimonious manner that the most she can expect of her is to "lock myself up in my room" and "not open the door" (174). Adela's comments further highlight the architectural value of the house as a prison cell which confines Alba's daughters and reduce their lives to those of prisoners.

This further imposes the architectural value of the house and its prison cells as playing a significant role in the theme as well as the behavior of the five daughters.

Bernarda has five daughters, Angustias, Magdalena, Amelia, Martirio, and Adela who are all, except Angustias, described as ugly for their lack of inheritance. Angustias, born of Bernarda's first husband, has inherited her father's wealth and is, therefore, excluded from being called ugly by Poncia. This is an important remark on the social standards of beauty for women in rural Spain which decided the fate of unmarried women. Angustias, at the age of forty, finds a prospective husband due to her inheritance. Her daughters are aware of the fact that they cannot even hope to be married as long as they live like encased dolls in their prison house. There are muted comments through which Bernarda imposes patriarchal values on her daughters. For instance, when

Magdalena complains about sitting in a dark room all day long, the mother says that this is what women are for. As a response, Magdalena says, "Cursed be all women" (158). Moreover, the repression of women under Bernarda's surveillance can also be seen through the treatment of the mother whose voice screams to let her out. At another instance, the commentary on social norms becomes enhanced through an exchange of dialogue between two of the sisters:

> AMELIA. But isn't a man like that put to jail?
>
> MARTIRIO. Because men help each other cover up things like that and no one's able to tell on them. (Lorca 1. 162)

This is an important exchange that highlights the nature of surveillance which excuses heteronormative cisgender men when they do not conform to the social values. On the other hand, women can never find such leniencies especially because they are not only inspected by society but also by other women around them who function under what Audre Lorde called "master's concerns" (Lorde 203). The first concern, while reading the play, is to question the nature of motherhood that has taken an unrecognizable form, and next is to critically notice the relationship between the sisters who betray each other. Both Magdalena and Adela flirt with their eldest sister Angustias' fiancé, Pepe el Romano without any regard for her feelings. In the first act, Magdalena claims that she'd "give something to see her happy" for she still has her "illusions" (163). However, contrary to her statement, she turns against Adela as both of them fight over the love of the same man, Romano, who only has eyes for Adela but his mind is occupied with Angustias' inheritance. She is also the one to tell on Adela for wanting to run away with Romano. These instances nudge towards the stereotype that claims that women are women's enemies. However, upon thorough pontification, it is easy to understand that a woman, sometimes, becomes a "token torturer" who "put[s] on male guise and perpetuate misogyny" (Jarobe). This is a concept

introduced by Mary Daly who says that the token woman is a "powerful tool of the patriarchy" and gives the example of "female torturers of political prisoners" (Daly). At the end of the second scene, a daughter of a neighbor is being chased after aborting a child that she gave birth to as she was unmarried. Bernarda wants men to come with "olive whips and hoe handles" and kill her (Lorca 185). Martirio, one of the five sisters, agrees with the mob that is inciting the murder of the girl. This is a scene where the disparity between Adela and Bernarda comes to the surface as Adela begs not to kill the girl and Bernarda screams "Kill her! Kill her!" (186). Additionally, at the beginning of the third act, Bernarda tells Prudencia that "a daughter who is disobedient stops being a daughter and becomes an enemy" (187). These lines propel forward the argument that Bernarda has assumed the position of a token torturer who ensures that women do not escape their assigned roles whether they are related to her or not. She is a prison guard who functions for the outsiders as much as she controls the lives of her five daughters. When Romano's picture is stolen from Angustias' room, Bernarda expresses her frustration and asserts her dominance by confessing that the ruckus comes "of not tying you up with longer leashes" (179). She warns the daughters that she has "five chains for you" (181). Bernarda's behavior as a prison guard combined with token torturer is quite egregious. Furthermore, any time that she refers to her gender, it is only to reiterate her beliefs about the limiting roles that women are offered within society. After she misses the shot that would kill Romano, she declares that "women can't aim" (200).

The play finishes with the galvanizing suicide of Adela who kills herself after hearing the false alarm that Romano has been shot. And even as she passes away, her mother does not find it difficult to repress her emotions and orders for her daughter to "dress as though she were a virgin". This indicates Bernarda Alba's moral duty to cling to the symbols of honor. That being said, it is important to see whether Bernarda Alba could be merely dismissed as a tyrannical character. In

her book, *Gyn/ecology*, Mary Daly gives the example of the Chinese culture where little girls had to walk with footbinding. She cites the account of a man who watched it happen to her sister who was weeping, but "mother and auntie didn't pity her in the slightest" (Daly 137). However, the mother and the auntie claimed that "if one loved a daughter, one could not love her feet" (137). This means that the women were afraid that their daughter would not be able to resume a healthy and normal life if she did not go through that extreme strain of footbinding. Thus, a heteronormative argument that steals away the humanity of the tyrant who functions as a token torturer of patriarchy tends to gaslight and dismisses the need for a radical transformation of power structures. And even within extreme patriarchal socio-cultural norms, some women resist these practices. In fact, all women or inmates resist, whether they do it passively or actively. Bonnie Burstow argues that "resistance is rooted in woman's being for it-self" (Burstow 16). This is the same line of argument as that of Beauvoir who believes that women must become the One to resist the Otherization that happens through the standpoint of the Subject (Beauvoir 17). She contends that "some women's acts are limited, individual, and border on resignation" but even so, their resistance must be seen as "disobeying the patriarchy" (18). This degree of resistance is borne in Adela who is willing to go to all extents to be with her lover. Her resistance is limited because she never challenges her mother's rules or asks to go farther or beyond the gate that encages her in the house. Her resistance is individual because, even though each of the five sisters is suffering the same way, she is the only one who is ready to stand up to the authority of her mother. And finally, her resistance becomes resignation as she ends up killing herself after hearing that her lover has been shot. She would rather kill herself than go through a lifetime of living in a prison where she feels suffocated. This is when one may recall Poncia's words who told Bernarda that her "daughters act and are as though stuck in a cupboard" however, no one can "keep watch inside a

person's heart" (Lorca 192). Magdalena indeed dared to dream along with Adela when she tried to win the love of Romano. However, her desire did not blossom enough to bring her to action. On the contrary, Adela makes active decisions that would bring her to her goal of fleeing with Romano. She adheres to her role as an inmate while her emotions brood in silence. She continues to live in the panoptic house of Bernarda Alba to strike a bargain when she sees a possibility. And eventually, Adela becomes the one to bring an "end to the prison voices" (199).

Conclusion

Just as it has been said of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, time and again, that theirs is a story of love more than a love story, the same can be said for Adela and Romano. Their story of love takes place in rural Spain inside Bernarda's panoptic house but it takes place nonetheless. It has been theorized that Bernarda's house is a prison that has architectural determinism that may affect each daughter differently. While most of the daughters are afraid and become passive and docile under Bernarda's commands, Adela actively refuses and resists them. She refuses to live a banal life promised in the encasement of a house that limits the prospects of all the daughters. She also shows sympathy for the girl whom the mob lynched which is another act of resistance in a society that may take sentiment for betrayal.

La Casa de Bernarda Alba is almost a farcical play set in rural Spain based on a true story of a woman that Lorca encountered at a young age. It makes perfect sense that he would call it a "picture document" since it is a drive down the memory lane for him but at the same time, it concretizes the space that is to be used for the performance (Lorca 50). This description in addition to the portrayal of the house before the acts and through the words of women all enhance our

understanding of the nature of Bernarda's house. It is a place where women walk on eggshells and adhere to extreme social values. They are not allowed to speak to men and therefore, never find any potential partners for themselves either. However, when a man finally enters the life of Angustias, two of her other sisters also begin to flirt with him despite knowing the consequences. They would like to engage in a normal lifestyle instead of following the dictatorship of their mother who has become a token torturer of patriarchy. Adela struggles for carte blanche because she wants to bring an end to the prison voices that are always watching, always following, and always reporting.

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Imagined Communities: An Exegesis of National Schizophrenia in Ben Okri's *Incidents at the Shrine*

Fizza Rehman

Abstract

Ben Okri has emerged as a prominent figure in Nigerian Fiction due to his artistic preferences and creative genius. He traverses deep into his mythical world and apprehends reality in an unusual way. His thematic concerns are corruption, moral degradation, and Nigerian Nationalism. This research aims to discuss short stories in Ben Okri's *Incidents at the Shrine* (1986) in light of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* and Ernest Gellner's *Nation and Nationalism*. The argument is that the concepts of Nation and Nationality are locally, socially, and historically rooted but they are too complex to fit into a definition. The state apparatuses not only claim Nationalism and human collectivities to be fundamental and essential for social existence but also propagate the idea of a homogenous Nation-state, a linguistic entity having a separate historical past that withstands the tests of nationhood. These monotheist thoughts of the Nation-State led to regionalism and tribalism. Ben Okri realizes these definitions of Nationhood and National aspirations as false in his Nigeria. Okri argues that language and ethnicity cannot be fitted into a permanent framework because they are ambiguous and shifting. For this purpose, Okri wants his readers to perceive the actual meanings and the spiritual aspects of his symbols in the short stories.

Keywords: Nationalism, Imagined Community, Nation, Nation-State, Regionalism, Tribalism

Introduction

After World War II, major Nigerian political organizations influenced by the equality and liberty of the West demanded independence for Nigeria. Due to complicated tribalism and regionalism, Nigerian independence and decolonization were never easy. Most of the problems in Nigeria, including regionalism, stemmed from colonization that propagated the idea of regional autonomy instead of unity. However, to rid their colonies of colonial rule, the leaders who were the products of colonization introduced Nationalism. Nationalism has been described by Edward Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism* as a force that mobilizes and drives people of a common

religion, language, and history to resist "an alien and occupying empire" (223). Okri's fiction sheds light on the fact that the Nationalists developed replica structures. The erasure of colonialism was apparent but not actual, as new class-based exploitative hierarchical structures had replaced the old ones.

Nationalism as a 'state of mind' was conceived to be a deep attachment of an individual to his native soil, indigenous culture, and local traditions. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Modern sense of the term 'Nationalism' was developed that demanded a 'state' that included the entire nationality. Okri not only argues that there are diverse forms of Nationalism but also challenges the concepts of National coherence and unitary language. Nigerian State Apparatuses manipulate and modify Nationalist ideology to ingrain it as a cultural creative force and a source of economic prosperity in the psyches of the natives. His portrayal of the problems that plague the Nigerians and their country grappling with social, political, and ethnic problems is 'real'. Social chaos, economic dispossession, tribalism, and political corruption are the thematic concerns of Modern Nigerian Literature. This research reads Ben Okri's short stories from his collection *Incidents at the Shrine* in light of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Community.* Okri opines that awareness of the Nigerian past is a guide to the Nigerian present. The research questions addressed in this article are: How Okri's native Nigeria is Nationally Schizophrenic? Why has Ben Okri fused the extremities- the real and the exotic in the world of short stories? Are Nations and National aspirations mere seductive dreams that are hollow from within? How do Nationalist ideologies legalize violence, exploitation, and extortion?

Ben Okri in his short story collection, *Incidents at the Shrine* portrays a Nigeria that has not recovered from the trauma of the past. He uses symbolism and nightmarish images in the short stories that depict the bizarre political and social conditions of Nigeria and its natives. The reader

observes that Nigeria, the most populous nation-state in Africa is a chaotic, violent world of 'madness'. Okri's sense of African reality is profound. He sets his stories in dream worlds fraught with images of decay, ethnic hostility blended with Nigerian legends and mythology that make his fictional world 'disturbingly fantastical'. Okri in his loaded and layered narrative questions as to what happened to Nigeria when it was left on its own? It ended up being a ghastly and ghostly landscape of minimal survivals. He gives an insight into this stranded situation of a nation.

This research argues that Okri attempts to display the chaos of the Nigerian nation after colonization. He pricks the bubble of illusion that Nationalism collects people together. He believes that the coherence of the nation is nothing but a façade; rather this cohesion is artificial and imaginary. In her article, "Material Survival, Hierarchal Exploitation and Urban Space in Ben Okri's *Converging City"*, Sarah Abdullah states that "Nigeria was a country which consisted of a variety of ethnic groups. Geographically it was divided with Southern and Northern provinces and the Lagos colony but ethnically there were as many as two hundred and fifty groups; each with its own set of customs, beliefs, and language" (3). All of the short stories in *Incidents at the Shrine* are about marginalized individuals of underprivileged class upon whom Ideological State Apparatuses exert power using Nationalist ideology.

Literature Review

The Civil war, "fratricide" in Chinua Achebe's views, is a major tragedy in Nigerian history. In two of his short story collections *The Stars of the New Curfew* and *Incidents at the Shrine*, Okri picturizes war, tribal massacres, diseases, and decay and often depicts ethnic disparities manifested in dreams and visions, for instance, masquerades fighting each other and tearing their 'Mother' apart in an incestuous, bizarre and greedy rage. Okri's portrayal of divided Nigerian territory, says Guo Deyan in his article, "Trauma and History in Ben Okri's Fiction"

actually unleashes the corruption of political figures: "Their nation-destroying policies and their greed for power and wealth [that] fuel the hatred of people toward one another and ignite the civil war" (6). In Okri's opinion regionalism and tribalism stem from human greed for power and possession and Nationalist ideologies of homogeneity and monotheism are used by various socio-political institutions for the maintenance of hierarchical power structures to further their ends in Nigerian Social construct. As retaliation against the artificial idea of coherence of the Nation, Okri comes up with representations of nationally schizophrenic, delusional, chaotic, and violent Nigerian landscapes.

In Ben Okri's writings, Magical Realism has received much attention from various critics. Okri's blending of 'supernatural' with the 'real' has been widely discussed in research works that consider it an attempt to unearth Nigerian problems. K. Saranya in her article, "Mysticism and Magical Realism as Aesthetics of Necessity in Ben Okri's Writings" opines: "Hidden histories reveal themselves; disparities converge and prayers go crooked in an unkempt, deregulated world" (4). K. Saranya's article further sheds light on the fact that Ben Okri's writing that 'writes back' to the colonizer is not an ideal but a truthful depiction of Nigerian traumatic history and brings about existential angst. This research deals with the concept of Nationalism and argues that even the Nationalist ideology has been co-opted from European models; the fascination still is with the abominable, and the Nigerian nation has not yet re-territorialized and decolonized its psyche and repudiated the ideology of the colonizers who have, in modern Nigeria, been replaced by political figures. The lives of Okri's mediocre characters ruptured by various ethnolinguistic, tribal, and economic issues are anguished and pessimistic. They see through the Nationalist ideological control, observe incoherence and madness but do not dare to voice them openly, as their survival is ensured by their ambivalent, non-existent positions in the social construct.

Sarah Abdullah in her article, "Material Survival, Hierarchal Exploitation and Urban Space in Ben Okri's "Converging City", while discussing Okri's short story "Converging City" from the collection *Incidents at the Shrine* opines: "The story is about a day in the life of Agodi, a shop-keeper who is trying to make ends meet against corruption and lawlessness. His goods are held by customs officials …His church is not ready to financially assist him and some unknown burglars are threatening to rob his shop" (4). Hence, Okri's protagonists are seen struggling in a competitive and exploitative urban setting and they succumb to this legalized system of exploitation formed by socio-political hierarchical structures that leave no chance for the individual to escape. Sarah Abdullah's article brings to light various Nation-State institutions and apparatuses that repress their individuals and desensitize them to others' suffering. This strengthens the argument of this research that the concepts of a Moralistic society and homogenous nation are nothing but false myths. This artificially or imaginary nation tied together has been quite realistically portrayed by Ben Okri in his short stories as 'unreal'.

Before analyzing Nigerian Nationalism let us first discuss the term Nationalism itself. Hobsbawm defines Nationalism as follows: "I use the term 'Nationalism' in the sense defined by Gellner, namely to mean 'primarily' a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent" (16). These thinkers envisage Nationalism as a political conceptualization and democratic states in modern times have developed an idea of a Nation-state, for the Nation to have a sense of loyalty and cohesion towards the citizens and the state. Nationalism, during the 19th century, achieved actualization in the more industrialized parts of the Western European nations and then was modified for political identification.

J.F. Ade Ajayi in his article, "Nineteenth Century Origins of Nigerian Nationalism" distinguishes traditional nationalism from the Modern states:

> Traditional nationalism includes movements of resistance to the initial British penetration and occupation, early revolts provoked by the imposition or operation of alien political or economic coercions. Modern nationalism includes sentiments, activities and organizational developments aimed explicitly at the self-government and independence of Nigeria as a nation-state on a basis of equality in an international state system. (196)

This research argues that the modern sense of the word 'Nationalism' and Nationalist ideology has only been used by Nigerian State Apparatuses to exert control and exploit the masses through violence and extortion that has been legitimized in Benedict Anderson's views. Even when there exists no exact definition of Nation, nationalism, and nationality, this phenomenon continues to exist. Hence, the coherence is imagined, Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* reflects on this aspect of community formation. He says, "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). This research foregrounds Ben Okri's representation of the Nigerian community in terms of their actual oppression, violence, and social chaos. Contemporary Literature of Nigeria, including that of Okri, pinpoints Nigerian problems mainly economic instability, corruption of the political figures (mimic men of the colonizer), insecurity, and insanity that has taken over entire Nigeria. African Messiahs, those who fought for spiritual ascendance and political liberation, Okri observes, have plunged the Natives into "a new cycle of pathos".

Research Methodology

The paper draws upon *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson and *Nations and Nationalism* by Ernest Gellner and employs qualitative methodology to analyze four short stories in Ben Okri's *Incidents at the Shrine* titled, "Laughter beneath the Bridge", "Disparities",

"Converging City" and "Incidents at the Shrine" in light of Benedict Anderson's concept of Nation as an Imagined Community. This research argues that the very idea of a coherent nation is a myth and the reasons for social chaos and political upheavals in Modern Nigeria are due to Nigerian State Apparatuses that tend to erase and approbate Nigerian natives according to their monolithic belief systems. Okri argues that the unity of such a nation is hard to achieve.

Discussion and Analysis

Postcolonial theorists have argued that the West and its Literature invaded the sensibility of the African people during their colonial rule in such a way that they found their propositions utterly convincing. This attempted invasion of the colonizer then met resistance and Ben Okri emerged as a writer in Contemporary Nigerian Literature who not only resisted these invasions but addressed the problems of Africa as the new center. He observed that this new spatial configuration was formed in Post- Independence Nigeria after the colonizers left. A hierarchical structure was established that placed the political elite minority at the center, and the common underprivileged Nigerian man at the periphery.

Okri questions as to what ruptured the unity of these men trying to rid their territories of colonization. Perhaps it was the fascination and influence of the colonizers on the psyches of national leaders who were products of Colonialism in the region. Why did this Nation divide into haves and have nots? Why did they opt for a colonialist method of discrimination, domination, and oppression? This research concerning Ben Okri's short story collection *Incidents at the Shrine* deconstructs the term Nationalism and argues that national solidarity, loyalty, and cohesion are nothing but false beliefs. There exists a communication barrier between the underprivileged strata and the elite minority in Modern Nigeria. Okri's characters have no access to meaningfulness and rootedness for personal and social stability; they are wandering, uprooted populations. The

inhospitable world they have been thrown into does not require their participation in shaping their social spheres. Before his characters could recover from Post-colonial trauma, high bourgeoisie and political leaders have led them to a state of 'National Schizophrenia' that this research aims to focus on.

A reading of Ben Okri's short-story collection *Incidents at the Shrine* through the lens of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* reveals that Nation-State with its Political Nationalist ideology acts as a form of protection that offers security and socio-political stability to Nigerian individuals but repeats historical injustices, exploitation, and extortion in Post- Colonial Nigeria. Several critics agree that the modern sense of the term 'Nation' itself denotes citizen rights and rule of law but these are political ideals that not only grip the imagination of Nigerian underprivileged stratum but haunt them up to an extent that they become aggressive, violent people overtaken by insanity.

Benedict Anderson states: "The nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (7). Okri envisages Modern Nigerian society as an industrial, materialistic society. A faithful servant of the church, Agodi, the protagonist of the short story "Converging City" is ideologically, physically, and psychologically subdued by hierarchical structures of Nigerian State institutions and organizations, including institutionalized religion that he relies on the most. He is also exploited by customs officials and threatened by burglars. Okri depicts how the Nation-state organizations distance and detach themselves from the individuals who sacrifice their lives for the sake of its maintenance. This so-called comradeship is not horizontal; it follows Marx's vertical pattern of super-structure and base hierarchy.

Okri's characters either succumb to exploitation like Agodi or out of despair migrate and distance themselves, like the Taxi Driver in Okri's "Disparities", who after realizing Nation and National aspirations as false myths states: "Civilizations are based on an uneasy yoking of lies: and that is precisely when the sight of flowers and pubs and massive white houses and people depress me most" (Okri 37). Okri argues that the economically dispossessed, when left all alone and excluded by the ones who had seduced them, suffer loneliness and experience feelings of frustration and disgust.

Konstantin Sietzy in his article, "A critique of Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities" states that "In conflicted nations, open nationalism is an important tool of promoting social cohesion for elites" (3). Okri's fiction highlights that it is difficult for the individual to understand Nation as an idea constructed to serve elite minority. Okri in his first short story collection, "Laughter beneath the Bridge" writes "We all hoped someone would turn up to collect us" (1). Using powerful imagery of vultures and the depiction of the scattered city with its maniacs, Okri represents Nigeria in agonizing pain. He opines that the Nigerian territory is being plundered and looted by the ones who had to ameliorate and alleviate these pains. Likewise, in his short story titled "Incident at the Shrine", Okri writes of quack Nigerian chemists bandaging the Native's wound. The scars and wounds left by colonization have been bandaged by the Nationalists with an ideology that recognizes mutual rights and duties of the members of the imagined community towards each other.

The ten-year-old, child narrator, in "Laughter beneath the Bridge", influenced by the soldiers breaking orders, has learned that the only way to survive is to steal, break in, and raid the nation that has been stranded by its so-called Messiahs. Individuals that inhabit his world at times appear immune and desensitized to the insanity and social chaos going on in Nigeria, and at other

times shaken by the stranded situation of the nation, they suffer emotional outbursts. Okri writes of horrendous situations: “women weeping, children bawling, soldiers everywhere in battle dress and camouflage helmets, their guns stiff and strange” (4). The characters in this short story set during the Civil War, are estranged not only from the belligerent soldiers but from their selves as well. Ernest Gellner states, “The state exists where specialized order-enforcing agencies, such as police forces and courts, have separated from the rest of social life. They are the state” (4). The fear instilled in the psyches of the natives by the soldiers makes them stiff. Okri represents the Native Nigerians’ fascination with dancing masquerades and the soldier’s obsession with fighter planes to show that the psychological worlds that the soldiers and the common citizens inhabit stand in stark contrast to each other.

Ernest Gellner in the chapter “State and Nation” opines that Max Weber's definition of the state is that of an “agency within society which possesses the monopoly of legitimate violence. Violence may be applied only by the central political authority, and those to whom it delegates this right” (3). Custom officials and institutions in Okri’s “Converging City” are no less than burglars who live on the money of men like Agodi suffering from economic trauma: “we are coming to rub you tonight. If you like call the police. Anytime is good for us” (Okri 29). Furthermore, Okri critiques the agents of the Nation-state apparatuses, policemen, and, the soldiers for whom violence has been legalized to exert control over the masses “the soldiers and mobile policemen thrashed out in every direction. They kicked the metalwork of cars, pounced on lorry drivers, and beat up people who seemed to be obstructing the traffic in any visible or invisible way” (Okri 30).

Both Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson consider Nationalism and its ideology to be a product of the Industrial and Post-Agrarian age. Gellner contends that “there is, once again, no

option; but now the presence, not the absence of the state is inescapable" (5). On one hand, the very idea of individuals without a nation strains modern imagination and on the other nation-state and nationalism have failed to ameliorate the socio-economic situations. Okri's protagonists in four of his short stories exist as Frantz Fanon's "Wretched of the Earth" in Modern Nigeria that appears to be entangled or tied together artificially. "Disparities" points towards the fact that natives cradled by the elite minority have a righteous image of Oppressors in their minds.

It cannot be overlooked that the gaze and the queer ways of the colonizers have been opted by mimic men. Instead of liberating the individual, they have enslaved him. Okri writes of "those who had joined the army and promised good things and turned in the heat of battle and fired at their own men" (10). Hence, the coherence and homogeneity of a nation is a façade. The truth is that tribalism, regionalism, and various ethnolinguistic differences have resulted in the Civil war during which the saviors have become exploiters. Okri suggests that after a long history of Colonialism and Slavery, Nigerian territory that had to decolonize its psyche still grapples with various problems created by the political agencies of regionalism and tribalism. Okri deduces that these cities never 'converge'; they curse the traffic jam that brings them together. Describing the politician's frustration of being surrounded by men of the lower strata, Okri says: "When he stared at the congestion all around him, he experienced a sudden panic" (31.) This makes clear that inequality and stratification exist in a world where everything has turned into an industry.

Ernest Gellner argues that the Nationalist ideology of the ruling class becomes the ideology of the masses. Their ideology is: "Nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities" (Gellner 7). Quite similar to this ideology, "Nations maketh man", an inscription on the wall in the short story "Laughter beneath the Bridge" that reads "Young shall grow", propagates hope in Okri's world filled with anguish, destitution, filth, and

despair of the people of Nigeria. Okri's short story points towards the fact that this dream to evolve and to grow is hollow from within. The ideological Nigerian state apparatuses aim to cripple and enslave the young of the so-called nation, physically as well as psychologically. The young shall not grow until or unless this forest "riotous with insects" is cleared up (Okri 5). Likewise, in "Converging City", Okri represents the political leader as 'National Parasitic' who after enticing the people and plundering their resources abandons the country and the nationalist discourse. Here Okri's reader observes the myth of nationalism collapsing: "He had to think of his own embezzlements as well as the entangled safety of his embezzlements" (Okri 31).

Another problem is that "nationalism imposes homogeneity; it is rather that a homogeneity imposed by objective, inescapable imperative eventually appears on the surface in the form of nationalism" (39). Nations are represented as natural political destinies that had long been delayed whereas they reject polytheistic thoughts and obliterate cultures and traditions. Benedict Anderson is of the view that Agrarian society accepted polytheism and the modern "homogenous industrial community" of today has deprived Nigerian people of their language, culture, and humanity too. Nationalist leaders exposed to the industrial community and education of the West have ended up being treacherous and corrupt. They replicated the colonial structures of exploitation, leaving the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic people of Nigeria unemployed, starved, and alienated as portrayed by Ben Okri in his short stories. Okri's alienated characters are least tempted by these political ideals of solidarity and coherence.

This section discusses Okri's portrayal of National Schizophrenic masses who are driven mad by the socio-political conditions. In the short story "Laughter beneath the Bridge", Okri writes, "Hysteria blew along the streets, breathed over the buildings and huts" (10). The inhuman noises of people being murdered brutally and women raped violently, wailing not heard by the

Nationalist Messiahs drives Okri's characters mad. Nigerian land is fraught with dead bodies and the reasons for their brutal murders are unknown. Furthermore, Agodi's economic trauma is seen as a form of National Schizophrenia in the "Converging City". The protagonist of *Incidents at the Shrine* suffers from an identity crisis and is haunted by the alien influence insinuated in his body. Nationalist dreams haunt the migrant Taxi Driver of "Disparities" who is abandoned and left in despair. He says, "Hungry, wet, haunted by the faces of the anguished Nigerian, I shouted: 'There is a quarter of a million pounds floating in the river'. ... The Thames soon swarmed with a quarter of a million pirates, rogues, and hassled people who had long since had enough" (Okri 50).

Okri strips off the mask and unleashes the 'unreal' imagined nation: "The stream was full of corpses that had swollen, huge massive bodies with enormous eyes and bloated cheeks" (18). The gas masks worn by the respectable stand in stark contrast to the grotesque masks worn by the Egungun. Okri envisages the modern decolonized Nigerian nation and its natives clashing, whipping, toppling, cursing each other, and talking incoherently. The staggering, starving man of the city that never 'converges' needs to be dumped on a street as he exists as scum of the earth.

Interestingly, the characters in these four short stories realize the 'truth' at the end of their stories. Agodi's blindness is his actualization of reality. At the end of the story, he says: "God and Money were inseparable" (36). Likewise, The Taxi Driver in Okri's "Disparities" realizes, "I was entertained with the shapes of dogshit" (40). Okri's characters realize that fairy tales were bludgeoned into them. These fairy tales are the ideologies that the Nation-state ingrains in them, the dreams of equality and homogeneity, of creating a state where all Nigerian natives are to be given equal opportunities to grow individually and collectively as a Nation. Ernest Gellner argues that this is how Nationalism and its Nationalist ideology works: "upending of myths and the tremendous reversals and creating of new myths to enable people to become complacent again"

(42). Okri argues that the need of the hour is to reject the ideologies of the monoliths, the political hierarchy, and exploitative authorities and to show resilience against these products of Colonialism.

In the short story titled, "Incidents at the Shrine" Okri takes his reader into a magically real world that offers psychological and spiritual recovery. Every Archetypal experience takes Anderson, torn apart in multiple selves such as "Jeremiah, nutcracker, Ofuegbu, and Azzi", and suffering from existential angst and identity crisis, into inner recesses of the self. Okri proposes the idea that the land itself will provide him with answers. In other words, a return to the origins is the solution to the problems of the native Nigerians who have worshipped sophisticated and elegant monoliths. Okri's saying that "The world is the shrine and the shrine is the world", comforts not only Anderson who retrieves his lost consciousness but provides solace to the migrant Taxi driver as well. A metaphoric rubbing of herbal juices in the body of the natives is what Okri suggests as a remedy for Paranoia, trauma, and Schizophrenia. Okri shuns the social, political, and religious institutions that propagate and inculcate National and religious ideologies in the psyches and generate conflict between different ethnic groups that destabilize the country. Okri says: "At night we listen to all languages and philosophies, of the world. You must come home now and again. This is where you derive power you understand?" (64).

Conclusion

Without taking into consideration cultural differences, the British merged multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Nigeria. The men with different voices but similar ancestry were further exploited by the mimic men who followed their covelonial masters. Benedict Anderson talks of the 'unselfconscious coherence' of the Imagined Communities and Ernest Gellner says that the ideal situation would be that the "social conditions make for standardized, homogeneous, centrally

sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities" (56). Nigerian Nationalism and nationalist ideology that had earlier been used to resist the administrative actions and hierarchical structures of the British colonization in modern Nigeria have been modified by the elite minority, who entice and allure the economic dispossessed and the underprivileged stratum, to further their ends.

Community development and communal cooperation are not prioritized in this artificially tied community. The nationalists, so-called Messiahs have their personal political and economic interests whereas the disillusioned and embittered natives strive to make both ends meet. Okri is one of those writers who consider art to be a means of social reform. He argues that to transcend the trauma it has to be re-lived. A close inspection of Okri's *Incidents at the Shrine* reveals that through art, a Nigerian artist becomes a psychotherapist for his Nigerian Natives and makes them come to terms with the harsh realities of their existence.

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Exploring Objectification and Self-objectification of Women in Rizwan Akhtar's *Lahore, I Am Coming*

Sufia Humayun

Abstract

Rizwan Akhtar's poetry has extensive scope, but there is a subtle and succinct feminine presence in his poetry. The general themes of his poetry encompass indigenous traditions and the cultural and social setup of post-colonial Lahore in particular. This paper attempts to present a different angle of his poetry, that of gender, as it highlights traces of objectification and the self-objectification of women in the selected poems from his recent book, *Lahore, I am Coming*. The selected poems reflect different patterns of objectification and self-objectification of women and their effects on the female psyche. The paper attempts to expose these major issues of contemporary women. It highlights, how women despite objectification, outgrow the tyranny of male dominance and attempt to show traces of resistance, psychological depth, and individuality.

Keywords: Rizwan Akhtar, objectification, self-objectification

Introduction

Pakistani theoretical and philosophical stance on gender discrimination is almost non-existent. The regional feminists like Ania Loomba, Gargi Bhattacharyya, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak represent the regional and cultural perspective of feminism making it clear that the western feminist discourse cannot speak for Asian women. But these theorists represent the Asian region and do not take into view the religious feminist approach of Pakistani women. However, Rafia Zakaria a Pakistani-born American writer does talk about the feminist perspective from a Pakistani angle in her book *Veil.* In this book, Zakaria talks about different interpretations of as simple a garment as a veil. For the western women before 9/11, the veil represented the oppression of Muslim women, but after 9/11 particularly after the 2008 incident of Lal Masjid and Hafiza Jamia madrassa, the same veil meant militancy and terrorism. In contrast to which, Zakaria points out multifarious uses of the veil for Pakistani Muslim women, ranging from anonymity in public

spaces (especially in acts of transgression or during trials), protection for a jewelry laden bride, to the confident gaze of veil clad women in public space of 'a hospital lobby', to name a few. She also points out that despite the veil, these women navigate their ways out of the veil for acts of transgressions and liberation. Hence, Pakistani women demand a different version of feminism and liberation which is more in coherence with their socio-religious and cultural patterns and the demands of the society. Likewise, the feminist movement in Pakistan oscillates between Religious Feminism- rooted in Islamic discourse, attempting to empower women within Islam, and the Secular feminist movement. However, the secular version of feminism is mostly rendered irrelevant and aggressive by the counterpart version. Many of the everyday issues experienced by women such as forced and early marriages, lack of educational opportunities, lack of safe access to public spaces, domestic violence, right of choice, over-powering their sexual freedom, sexual violence, and sexual harassment at workplaces remain unaddressed in today's world. However, the young women of Pakistan have gained unusual access and freedom on social networking channels. Updating statuses and uploading videos and selfies on social media channels, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pose a question mark on the version of feminism and emancipation that the young women of Pakistan relate and subscribe to in the contemporary world. This contemporary narcissism ignites the theory of self-objectification of women. They challenge male dominance of power, spaces, and resources at one level but get entangled in self-objectification thereby confusing emancipation with self-objectification. Indigenous poets have protested against the objectification of women. The voice of Kishwar Naheed can be heard clearly in her poem "I Am not That Woman", in which she protests that society and patriarchy cannot confine women within metaphoric walls of social norms and customs, nor can her role be limited to selling socks on billboards. Likewise, Dr. Rizwan Akhtar in his poetry explores the persona of

indigenous women who exhibit individuality, who are more than mere appearances, and who reveal resistance to their treatment as an object for society or themselves.

Objectification

Objectification of women is perceived as one of the most relevant notions discussed by feminists. It generally means treating a woman as an object. According to Andrea Dworkin, "It is true, and very much to the point, that women are objects, commodities, some deemed more expensive than others but it is only by asserting one's humanness every time, in all situations, that one becomes someone as opposed to something. That, after all, is the core of our struggle" (qtd. in Nussbaum 213). Martha Nussbaum is of the view that seven notions are involved in the objectification of women: instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity (Nussbaum 218). Objectification of women is a theme subtly manifested in the poetry of Akhtar. In his poem, "The Dancing Courtesans of Old Lahore", Akhtar writes, "There are noises in dark rooms/ Who can build house without din/ Wooden stairs without creaking" (lines 1-3).

He starts the poem by questioning society and fate. A woman born among prostitutes, has almost no choice to erase her identity or change her inherited choice of profession. He discusses how a woman is objectified with gazes appreciating the prostitutes' outer beauty. She is treated as an object who entertains the senses of the viewers, ". . . those who lack skills are desires/ Growing on audience' (15-16). But he doesn't conclude here. As the poem progresses, he pinpoints the difference between a dancer who, unlike Anarkali, lacks skill and falls into the pit of objectification. In contrast, Anarkali lives in history for her honed skills for singing. To date, she is remembered and cherished for her art of singing. She is also remembered and glorified for resisting the patriarchal grip of ownership by King Babur. She chose to be enclosed in walls, where

she eventually died, rather than complying like an object. For Immanuel Kant, prostitution is the worst kind of objectification of women, but he forgets to pinpoint that all prostitutes cannot be put in the same category. Some are acknowledged for their art, music, and skills, and some accept death but don't surrender to the patriarchal ownership that comes with the objectification of women. In an environment as suppressed as prostitution, the choices might be limited but women outgrow objectification through their psychological development and will-power.

Rae Langton further argues that the meaning of objectification of women also includes the idea of her reduction to body and appearance and silencing her by denying her voice. She claims, "The silencing claim is also linked with a claim about objectification: 'Pornography makes women into objects', says MacKinnon. 'Objects do not speak'" (Langton 10). In another poem, "The Maids of the City of Dust", the poet explores how maids are reduced to objects. They are used as instruments or objects that complete assigned tasks. For example, the task of moping and cleaning the dirt. The poem has underlying references to her loneliness. He draws paradox of her situation, where on one side, her stomach has been constantly used to bear "lousy children", so much so that, "…her umbilical cord is now cemented after years/ Of clipping and cleaving" (14-15). Her voice is suppressed and is "tired from herding wages" as if this is the only kind of conversation she can have. As Kant writes in the *Lectures on Ethics* that "In loving from sexual inclination, they make the person into an object of their appetite. As soon as the person is possessed, and the appetite sated, they are thrown away, as one throws away a lemon after sucking the juice from it" (156). He goes on to say that after their appetite has been satiated, "all motives of moral relationship cease to function" (157). The expression "lousy children" and "years of clipping and cleaving" in the poem refers to indifference to her capacity to bear children. He critiques a culture where the primary task of a woman's body is to reproduce without regard for health and living conditions.

He goes on: “A woman simmers for absence, / …and there is no hand/ to go through smutty hairs” (18-19).

These expressions refer to her dehumanization and loneliness. Despite giving birth to “lousy children” one after the other, she is alone. Even though she is not confined to the four walls of the house and has ‘so-called’ liberty to roam around, she is alone and bereft. Unlike the woman that Kishwar Naheed writes about, “I am the one you hid /In your walls of stone, while you roamed /Free as the breeze,” (3-5), the “woman of dust” does roam from street to street, home to home, sweeping dirt and litter, and yet she “simmers for absence”, the absence of regard for her feelings, inner beauty and desire for assimilation. At the end of the day, “shreds of bricks and mortar" dwell in her stomach, and in the words of the poet, “The city comes alive in her gaze moping/ Whatever comes her way, layers and layers of litter” (12-22).

According to Nussbaum, the confinement of women to ‘fungibility’ and ‘inertness’ and “the portrayal of women “dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities” [. . .] is very common in ordinary social discussions of people and events” (213). The word fungibility refers to the notion of being interchangeable, an object which can be changed and replaced. Whereas, inertness refers to her lack of activity and subjectivity. The notions are well expressed in his two poems, “Chappatti” and “Bride from Lahore”. As the poet writes in “Chappatti”:

The podgy ball toddled

In coquettish flourish

Blanching thinning

Out goes your life

On soot friendly *tava* (5-9)

Here the expression "out goes your life" emphasizes the 'inertness' prevalent in the lives of common Pakistani women. The life of a common woman revolves around making perfect round chapattis and feeding her family. The expression also highlights the relegation of women to mere object that only knows to comply and denies autonomy as is expected from them by society in general. The poet goes on to question the objectification of women. He emphasizes the pejorative treatment of women as an object. He questions the very tradition of marrying women based on their skill for making round chappattis. He says, "Wheat-scrubbed rural queen/ Offered with English butter/ In the open market" (15-17). The underlying meaning of the expression, "open market" leaves room for interpretation of selling a woman, instead of marrying a woman, as an offer with the bonus of silence, obedience, round chapattis, and "scrubbed" beauty.

Meanwhile, in the "Bride from Lahore", he vents out the aura associated with a bride from Lahore. The bride remains the central figure of the marriage. His urban bride differs vastly from the rural bride of "Wedding in the Flood" by Taufiq Rafat. The 'bride from Lahore' is not particularly 'coy', 'cold and scared' and estranged as the rural bride of Rafat, as she intently observes and wonders, "Not a familiar face around me/ as I peep through the curtains. I'm cold and scared (4-5) as "the coy bride is truly wedded at last" (17).

The last line is an expression of objectification. Throughout the poem, the bride is treated and criticized like an object. The bridegroom and his father exhibit different concerns about the deal that they have struck. At certain points, it looks like haggling and bargaining over the price

of the bride. No matter how disorganized and destitute are the bridegroom and his father, they keep wondering if they struck a better deal out of this wedding. The bridegroom says:

> If only her face matches her hands,
>
> And she gives me no mother-in-law problems,
>
> I'll forgive her the cot and the trunk
>
> And looking glass. (4-7)

His prime concern is her body and he expects the bride to be pretty and slim like her hands which he can see from the veil. His second concern is compliance, silence, and obedience. These two qualifications alone can compensate for a few items in her dowry. Later in the fourth stanza, grumbles his father under breath, "They might have given a bullock at least, / Grumbles the bridegroom's father; a couple of oxen/ Would have come in handy at the next ploughing" (1-3).

The grumblings of the bridegroom and his father sound like a consumer who is purchasing something he is not satisfied with and keeps evaluating the cost before committing to it. The irony of the situation is that the deal remains open to discussion and annulment until, "palankeen" leaves the bride's village and enters the river passage, as is reflected in the last line. Then "the coy bride is truly wedded at last (17).

Akhtar deals with almost the same situation as a bride in the most contemporary and urban way. His bride from Lahore is "wobbling on pointed heels", "blinks to flashes", "swallows the greetings" and is "face-lowered". Meanwhile, the guests busy themselves with nibbling on dinner items. The poet reproaches the treatment of the bride as an object, and says, "ears and nose reined-

in by golden trinkets". The expression "reined-in" reminds one of "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" by Adrienne Rich, in which the 'massive weight' of 'wedding band' reflects that the marriage is a binding force full of 'ordeals'. It entraps a woman, just as 'unafraid' tigers are entrapped into the rug. Likewise, the bride in Akhtar's poem is reined in by phony traditions of the society which confines women to appearance and compliance alone. There are references to the bride being a showpiece for the audience. This notion of her being an object put on display solidifies when the poet adds the phrase, "with market logic" and "the photographers land on her with cameras". However, she is decorated to perfection, "buffed with filigree", "lips slicked with lipstick", and "eyes clogged with mascara", face-lowered she goes on waiting. This indicates her inertness and subjection to mere physical self.

Sandra Bartky relates Karl Marx's theory of alienation to the practice of objectification as a consequence of women's preoccupation with their appearance. She makes use of Marx's concept of 'alienation' whereby a laborer is detached from the final product of his labor. Bartky stresses that in consequence of continuous objectification, women also experience fragmentation. "If women are alienated from the body in these ways, we suffer a different form of estrangement by being too closely identified with it in others. Sexual objectification occurs when a woman's sexual parts or sexual functions are separated from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her" (Bartky 35). On one level, the bride seems to reflect dehumanization of herself as expressed by Bartky but on the deeper level, the end of the poem reflects her inner strength. She does not reconcile absolutely, or 'wedded at last' but she 'goes on waiting'. This gives a benefit of the doubt that she can also be the one to call off the wedding. She might appear to one as being in a receptive mood, "post-box mouth", swallowing

greetings. But the expression, "goes on waiting", gives the poem an open ending, as if anything might happen. Unlike Taufiq Rafat's bride who is wedded, at last, this bride waits.

Self-objectification

Self-objectification is when women as a result of being continuously objectified, internalize the idea and consequently start treating themselves as objects. The cultural and social setting of objectification functions to socialize girls and women to treat themselves as objects. It happens when women start internalizing observers' perspectives on themselves. It coaxes them to view themselves as mere objects to be looked at and appreciated- detached from their inner qualities of strength, intelligence, and potential. The self-objectification concept is based on Charles Horton Cooley's theory of the "looking-glass self" (184). He proposes that for the building of the self, a person shapes his identity on the perception of opinion and the perspective of others about him. The theory is based on three constituents. First, we keep in mind how we should appear to others; we accept the judgment of our appearance and we develop ourselves by the perception of the judgment of others on our appearance. According to Bartky: "in the regime of institutionalized heterosexuality….. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other" (38). Simone de Beauvoir also refers to this internalization of objectified self by the individual as the doubled self whereby "instead of coinciding exactly with herself, [. . .] she is existing *outside* of herself" (437). Akhtar deals with the perspective of self-objectification in some of his poems. His poems, "The Dancing Courtesans of Old Lahore", "Bride from Lahore", "Chappatti" show traces of self-objectification of women but, as the poems develop, women show psychological development. Reference to Anarkali is one example. The reader cannot help sympathizing with 'the woman of dust' who is human and sensitive enough to take note of 'the absence' in her life. However, in the poem, "The Poet Meets an Adulteress". He highlights the

double standards of the social norms. After an act of adultery, the woman treads, "a cargo of shame", whereas, "a blindfolded ghost /of lust snores under her cot". The theme of the reduction of woman to the body is translated in the voice of an adulteress. She does not speak and yet readers feel sympathy for her, "Where a blindfolded ghost/Of lust snores under her cot/ Creaking insinuations . . . " (3-5). Inbuilt moral codes make her feel guilty whereas, her counterpart sleeps in ignorance. As Michel Foucault says, 'bio-power' merges into two poles: one pole takes care of the management of life processes like birth, health, sexual relations, sickness, and disease, and the other one is labelled as 'disciplinary power'(*History of Sexuality* 149). The latter pole targets the human as an object to be manipulated. Constant surveillance enables ubiquitous control over the body to encourage its usefulness. In the words of Foucault, "Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies" (*Discipline and Punish* 138-9). He goes on to stress that social control is exercised using the policy of normalization, as a consequence self-regulating individuals (women in this context are produced). It is the same self-regulatory power that makes the women in the poem feel ashamed and guilty after the act of adultery while the man sleeps carelessly.

In contrast to this view, the woman in "Divorce" disregards views of her elders associated with the integrity of marriage, " . . . but vows and faith recycled her anger / On pillows when elders suggested/ Silence and talisman". She "takes seat in the rear /just for a better view after a long time" (Stanza 3). This suggests her satisfaction with the decision. Instead of clinging to a struggling relationship, she seeks liberation in divorce. Likewise, in "The Only Woman", a woman, who speaks in 'linear stammering', shops, drives, and leads a love life.

Conclusion

Hence, Rizwan Akhtar as a contemporary Anglophone poet depicts objectification, and the self-objectification of women by the Pakistani society under the garb of customs, traditions, and social stigmas. The women in his selected poetry are victims of objectification, yet they reflect inner strength, willpower, and vigour to break the shackles of superficiality prevalent in society.

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Short Story

Escape

Sufia Humayun

Rahema kept walking briskly, along came her daughter huffing; after an hour's blind walk they finally reached the main road. Her daughter squeaked amidst honking horns, whirring engines, and a blazing sun.

"Mother! Mother! I am tired. Stop please!"

Her first thought was to lift her in arms and keep walking but the moment she stopped to look at her, everything went hazy, she could hear her heart thudding. Helplessly she looked around to spot a footpath to rest under shrubs. The sun blinded her and traffic was deafening at midday, she was dry as an autumn leaf, parched and stiff.

"Mother! Where are we going? Are you still mad at *mai* (grandma)" Aneeqa pulled at her mother's dupatta?

"No! I am not mad", she retorted. The red mark under her eye looked brownish-red and had started mixing up with the complexion already.

Aneeqa knew she had crossed her limit and changing the subject said," I am hungry, I did not take breakfast, did you?"

Before she could answer the question, a gang of awaiting crows and a couple of eagles plummeted towards a young lad, who was standing next to them, as soon as he opened the lid of a tin box and grabbed a handful from inside and flung the meat towards the birds. A cyclist with his family kept waiting while the birds munched and plucked on the meat. Upon seeing the birds fly back, he

handed him a fifty rupees note and left. She held Aneeqa closer to her bosom as the birds flapped and fluttered around.

It was a second escape, no! The third if you also count the escape to her aunt's house living at a nearby village. She has been fleeing not her lousy good-for-nothing husband or her stepmother or even her biological mother's beatings but her fate, which kept trying her mettle no matter where she went and how fast she ran. She shrank further with each episode of escape; it had been many days since she had eaten to her fill.

……..

Dark clouds were rushing, and the wind started getting coarser. Relieved she looked up at the sky, which broke the spell of scalding heat and decided to shed rain.

"Are you done with the count of the day?" yelled a voice from behind her.

Rahema shuddered and replied in a rasping voice, "not yet, would need another hour or so"

"You are the only one left in the whole batch, look at the sky, it's going to explode with raining." Hadn't his father requested, how could I afford such a… the sky thundered to disrupt his trail of thoughts. She knew what could he be thinking and felt a little guilty about it. Bent over the handloom, her hardened fingers kept weaving the thread. The room darkened as the clouds thundered and showered, a dim lantern flickered with each breath that came from the small door on one corner of the room. Her eyes were fixed on the thread and ears upon the screams and shouts

emanating from the street. Girls of her age, on their way back home, were playing in rain, sliding on the muddy path.

“Late again, what makes you so late” resonated a familiar voice in her ears while she made her way through the dark muddy alley towards her home. The door was open ajar when she reached home and found her grandmother again in a heated debate with her father.

“Marry, but why? Do you even realize that he does nothing for a living?” said her grandmother vehemently.

“He is not going to remain jobless for the whole life, besides a wife brings her *Rizk* (fortune) with herself at the time of marriage.” Her father insisted.

“Just like her mother brought it when you got married fifteen years ago?” she mumbled. She did not wait for the answer and continued, “You are going to make her repeat what her mother did.”

“She would not have left me but for that bastard”, said he half trusting his own words.

It was a truth that Rahema’s mother left her father for another man but she did not stay with her second husband either. It is also true that she loved her second husband, but love also has its limits. Love can make one leave children and a lazy husband behind to marry the man of her own choice, but it cannot bear the constant beatings and insults. One day when police came to arrest him on murder charges, she took it as an opportunity and left with her children for Lahore as a hideout.

Rahema had listened to this conversation over and over again until it stopped disturbing her. As a matter of fact, it had become a routine to end the day with this topic. She did not stop to say anything and went straight towards the corner of the courtyard which served as a washroom, picked up a piece of brick, and started rubbing it against hardened and darkened fingers of her hands. She

rubbed till shouting became whispers and finally died away. She touched her numb hands and felt nothing.

“Aren’t you going to eat anything?” addressed her grandmother.

“I ate boiled rice and milk at (aunt) *maasi’s* place,” she said dragging her weary limbs towards her and sprawled over her cot close to her grandmother. Her grandmother clutched her hand and started stroking her. “When I was young, I also worked at the *Khaddi* (handloom), weaving soft and lush carpets till my hands became hard like rocks. “I don’t mind working at the handloom, as long as the room has windows, and timings could be shorter.” Rahema sighed.

All of a sudden there was a sound from the neighboring house. It was again Shakeel shouting at his mother for not cooking anything for the night. His mother not knowing the answer remained silent. While he was screaming and throwing utensils all around. Rahema sprung up and asked with eyes wide.

“Why doesn’t Salma work at the handloom? She goes to boys’ school instead?”

Grandma hesitated and said, “Because Salma wanted to study and she made her mother convince her father.” She could see the mist in Rahema’s eyes. Wondering at the silliness of her own question, she knew no matter how much her grandmother loved her, she could never make decisions and make her grandmother do things for her as she could with her mother.

“But you know your *Appa* also does not have to work at handloom”.

“But why?” her eyes fluttered.

“Because she is married. Married women are not supposed to work at *Khaddi”*

"If they too go outside to work, who will take care of the household, and their children? Children would be loitering around and mothers bent on working for a few rupees." grandmother minced the words.

Her misty eyes shone brightly, wide open as if weighing her options. Her grandmother could see a desire in those eyes, but she shut her eyes instead of mumbling prayers under her breath. She knew those were meant for her. Ever since her mother left her and her brother, it was her grandmother who had raised her and prayed for her. Rahema again spread over her cot and kept staring back at the starry sky till the neem tree leaves rustled and the dampness of monsoon air lulled her to sleep.

Sitting on the bank I watched my father and mother grow rice seedlings. A gush of wind struck against my back. A horse cart hovered on my head till I entered it, its unknown rider looked sweet with dusty clothes. He flew the cart like a rollercoaster high in the sky, I swung with each twist and turn without realizing the rider dropped me. I fell like a feather amid bare branches intertwined like a cave. Perhaps I was too tired from the ride, I kept sleeping in the cave. Alone.

……..

Women around the village gathered at her place, singing, and dancing, more laughing than dancing in circles. They teased her and cracked dirty jokes. Sometimes she blushed and sometimes she hurled similar jokes on them. Now that her marriage date was fixed, she had stopped going to *khaddi*. The girls laughed and it made her feel embarrassed. Her cheeks blushed, eyes gleamed and she felt butterflies tickling her stomach. She also joined them in S*ammi* for a while and then

went back to sit with her grandmother. It felt like a dream. She had not known such goodness and happiness showered upon her ever before. Amid laughs and songs, she was brought into the room, her room. Immersed in the fragrance of henna, she flickered like a red flame in her red shalwar kameez, and golden dupatta wrapped around her to cover her face. She waited and kept sitting alone in her bed strewn with rose petals. The strings of fake flowers made criss-cross patterns over her head. The band of girls gathering around her started to leave one by one as the darkness of the night approached. Her anxious mind drifted from happiness to apprehensions. As the dawn approached, her back ached from sitting straight. The closed door of the room opened once or twice, some guest peeped in and left immediately disconcerting her. Each step approaching made her heart beat faster until she dropped off to sleep. Sounds from local singers outside in *mardana mehfil* kept drumming her ears. Some local singers sang Attah Ullah Essa Khelvi's hit song, "Sab Maya Hai", a third time.

……

"It is the women, who keep man bound in the house." Cried her mother-in-law scratching the black pot.

Earlier Rahema had also always blamed herself for his escapes but with time she discovered that he was the same distant and cold self with his daughter too. What kind of a father remains indifferent to the presence of a daughter; the only name that popped up in her mind would be "his". She had been married for five whole years. She was no longer alone, and her daughter was about four years old. This was not the life she had imagined. It had been three days that she did not even know where her husband had been. More so, he did not even know that his mother created havoc over his absence whenever he choose to disappear for innumerable days. His parents had gotten

him married to make him responsible. But except for the first few months of marriage, he had always remained negligent. He would not come home fearing arguments over his unemployment.

“But how could I forget where you belonged. What else could be expected from the daughter of a woman, who takes no time in deciding the next husband?” she murmured under her breath.

“My mother did the right thing, and one day I will do the same”. She cried out, holding Aneeqa in her arms and left banging the door.

Tears rolled down her cheeks not knowing where to go. Her grandmother died right after her marriage. Going to her stepmother was the same as listening to her mother-in-law. Meanwhile, as she was jostling with her thoughts, she heard a distant voice.

“Rahema, Rahema”.

It was her brother who was calling her “Come inside, where are you going in this heat?” He led her to his home sensing some tension. He made her sit under the shade of the peepul tree, and her sister-in-law came with a glass of sweetened *lassi (buttermilk).* Aneeqa gulped half of the glass and returned the glass to Rahema. Wiping her mouth with the back of her hand she ran towards the little goat tied in the corner of her courtyard.

“What is it now, Rahema?” his face grew grim and he curled his lips as he inquired.

“I don’t want to live there anymore. Farid has disappeared again and *khala* (aunt) keeps blaming me all the time. You have known him, when was he serious with his life?” she continued firmly. “You asked me to give him chances, I have been giving him chances after chances. I did not get married to lead such a life.”

Muddasser heaved a deep sigh and after a pause said, “But where would you go?” The leaves rustled with the wind, a brief break from the otherwise hot sun that loomed over the heads in the middle of March. “Not that you cannot live with me. But how would things improve by living in my house after getting the tag of separation and….” he added. Her sister-in-law stroked her shoulders in affirmation.

“No! I don’t want to live here either.” She snapped back. “Why cannot I go to Lahore, to *mai*?”

This rendered Muddasser speechless. He was not prepared for this. He felt like leaving home immediately and not talking to Rahema ever again. It was like digging the pinching past. It was like experiencing again all those sleepless nights he had when his mother left them for good. It was like knocking on the door that had been closed on them both years before. His eyes grew red and a tear lingered but this did not move Rahema. Where she had given plenty of chances to her ghost husband, she was ready to give one chance to her mother too. An eerie silence loomed and their eyes rested on Aneeqa who was feeding the goat with the leaves now. Her tiny fingers caressed the earlobes of the goat as she munched on the leaves.

Rahema knew that she did not have any other choice, besides Lahore always fascinated her. One of her aunts lived in Lahore, and she always sang praises of city life. She knew that if she had to give a different sort of life to Aneeqa she will have to move to the city. She had led a motherless child’s life, she didn’t want Aneeqa to experience the same single-parent child’s life. What options did she have? Even if she gets divorced and keeps living in Village, Aneeqa just like her would go to handloom and then get married at an early age. This looked like a vicious circle.

The ice was broken by the opening of the door. It was his father, who had grown older and leaner. He said aloud approaching them,

"I heard you plan to go to Lahore."

Rahema nodded her bent head. She could not dare to make eye contact with her father on this. Her heart melted to see her father and brother; there was a strange sadness and angriness in their eyes but they had chosen to remain silent. Shade had started stretching from the walls to the other side of the courtyard, and there was a coolness in the wind. Aneeqa pulled her goat to shift her to the other side of the courtyard, under the shade. Meanwhile, the goat droppings had dried up. Aneeqa not knowing what else to do started counting the droppings. It was an unusually quiet evening except for her stepmother, who constantly kept murmuring resentful remarks while cooking the supper and the utensils clanked more than usual. Rahema stood to help her mother, but her father signaled her to keep sitting. He did not want any fuss. As Mudassar rose to leave, his father said, "Tomorrow morning you are to take your sister to Lahore."

Muddassar gazed at Rahema in case she had changed her mind. Her lowered eyes confirmed to him that she was never going to change her mind. He finally uttered decisively, "fine, as you say. But do you understand, once she leaves, there is no coming back and then…."

"Her father is still alive to decide her fate, don't bother yourself with extra thinking." His father cut him short.

"*Bhaiya* is right, there is no coming back. I would not have left if I had to come back. I have had enough of this place." There was a certainty in her voice that made Muddassar feel even more scared. He had always known her as a headstrong, obstinate younger sibling, but going alone to a strange and big city was a risky venture.

"Alright!" He stood up straightened his shirt and left.

Her father palmed his hand on her head, she cringed at her own words under her shawl. All of a sudden she could envision herself all alone. The idea which had always fascinated her. Now the time was near to fulfill it, she shuddered. It was the longest night, she ever witnessed. Longer than the night her mother left them. She kept staring at the sky, while Aneeqa slept beside her. Mixed thoughts of accomplishment and apprehensions lodged in her mind all night until she fell asleep.

The next morning, she got up as if she had not slept at all. She had nothing to pack, but a couple of dresses for herself and Aneeqa. They left while it was still dark. Only a couple of people could be seen working in the fields. Mudaasar walked ahead as she wrapped in her shawl, dragged herself and half-asleep Aneeqa behind him on the lonely street. A dog kept sleeping as they crossed it. They found the bus at the station, but they learned that it would not leave until it was filled with passengers. On enquiring, they learned that usually, it took an hour or so. The darkness slowly started receding, making room for piercing streaks of sun. The hustle and bustle of human activity muffled the distant chirping of birds. The vendor of steamed corn uncovered his stall, while the fruit seller was wiping the guavas and apples to arrange them into pyramids for display. Rahema thanked God for Aneeqa was sleeping on her side. Oblivious of the passenger filling the seats, the bus driver started the bus and "Paar Channa de" sang Noori in his husky voice. Half comprehending the lyrics she looked outside blankly,

Kachi meri mitti kacha mera naam ni

Mein nakaam

Kachiyan da honda kacha anjaam ni

Eh gal aam ni

Kachiyaan te rakkhiye na umeed paar di

Ariye arye haan ni ariye

Raat hneri nadi thathaan maardi

The bus swayed on empty roads, crossing fields, bazaars, and cemeteries. She noticed cemeteries always came after every residential area right after the fields. The bus stopped to drop and lift passengers mid-way. Waiting local vendors entered the bus selling peeled, sliced, and soaked coconuts, cucumbers, and spiced steamed corns. The driver started the bus again, spitting out *paan* outside the window. She felt really sad to see the conductor shooing the blind man selling kohl to strengthen the eyesight in the middle of his well-prepared speech on how the kohl works to strengthen the eyesight.

After more of an hour's drive, Muddassar shook her from her sleep. The passengers were leaving the bus. She ogled around chasing him towards the footpath across the crowd. The whiff of sweat, smoke, and heat struck against her nostrils. It was noon and the sun high over her head, she squinted to gauge her surroundings, while Mudassar explained to her the address written on a piece of paper. She looked blankly at the piece of paper holding it tight.

"*Bhaiyya* what do I do with this?" she inquired in disbelief.

"Now that you have decided to live here forever, you will have to find your ways on your own." The words stung her but she was prepared. She was prepared for everything since the decision was of her own. But on second thought she realized she had owned the decisions made for her by others, she not only owned them but lived through them. She looked around at the clouds of smoke and deafening traffic.

"You know, I cannot face her", his eyes grew fierce as he spoke and looked away avoiding eye contact. "But don't worry, Abba told me she lives somewhere near this place".

Rahema held the paper, tried to decipher the codes, and started walking in one direction. Aneeqa clung to her back, chewing on the edge of her shawl. For the first 10 minutes, all she did was to keep walking blankly till the structures like buildings and houses came into her view. Her sixth sense told her to start walking towards the houses. To her disappointment, these were the only houses built in rows without any distinction and bigger than her imagination too. She halted to look around for the clues. It was 2 p.m. and the temperature was already 43 degrees Celsius with no human form around except a vendor selling vegetables on the corner of the street under the shade. She reluctantly approached the vendor and forwarded the chit with an address written on it; her hands were shaking. He did not take it saying he could not read it but guided her to keep walking in the same direction and then take a left to the street. There she would come across a guard who would guide her better.

Following the instructions, after asking a couple of strangers on the way, she reached the place which was neither a house nor a flat but a wall with a small gate which was already open. As she peeped she could view the gate opening into a small room, and even a smaller room wherefrom she could hear someone shouting. At first, she thought she had come to the wrong place, as the shouting was accompanied by hurling screams followed by the throwing of objects. Had not the stranger ensured her that it was the house of Haleema Bibi, she would have left the house in disbelief. She went further inside, knowing not what to do, to see what was happening, when a girl aged 15 years came out running outside the gate followed by the woman with disheveled hair, hurling a steel glass in the air. Since the girl had darted outside brushing Rahema aside, the glass fell right under her eye, tearing her skin, oozing a stream of blood. Haleema stood stupefied, not knowing who these two strangers were. But before she could stop them, Rahema immediately left,

shaking inside, holding the wound tightly in with her dupatta. She ran madly until she reached the main road.

“Mother, Mother! Stop, Please!” cried Aneeqa.

Finding a shaded spot on the footpath, she sat. Her heart beating louder than the traffic horns. A green board behind her back flashed SOS Children's Villages Pakistan.

Poem

Ode to College

Ali Inan

1

O Thoth[1]! The moon deity, Egyptian god.
O The protector of learning and art,
Standing alone in this temple quite odd
Hear these numbers burst forth out of my heart,
Wrung by endeared memories of a college
Of a wisdom house a place of knowledge
Where I wandered in spring and in summer,
In the rustling autumn and in winter.
Where like a priest at an oracle learnt I
And then revealed it all; even my
Dreams gilded when I sat in ‘ts velvet lawn.

2

The years ’ve passed but the memories are fresh
Every moment, every incident lives,
As if it once had a body and flesh.
But now an abstract thought, a dream it is.

[1] Thoth is an ancient Egyptian deity whose temple was in the city of Hermopolis, Thoth was originally a moon god, a deity of reckoning, learning, and writing.

Some faded pictures on the bank of Lethe,
Of juvenile time when youth did breathe
A vigour and joy in passionate heart;
Imagination and thought for the art
With which I was blessed within sacred walls
Of a college. And as the curtain falls
All hide behind th' noble gown of knowledge.

3

That building tall, that solemn hall, golden
Days of remarkable vision, and a speech
Of enchanting words heard as noble sermon
Among the groups of learned as to preach
To young, the message and essence of knowledge.
'Twas about education at college.
Days of discovering the truth of beauty!
Pondering on Hamlet's mysterious duty.
Indeed, then the expectations were great,
Thoughts imprint on areopagitic[2] slate.
Lo! Such were the glorious days in college.

4

My lanky friend who shared secrets with me,

[2] areopagitic is a reference to Milton's *Areopagitica*, referring to ideas rooted in freedom of expression and a desire to have the liberty to know and express.

And I shared with him mine. That bearded nice,
Graceful fellow who has regard for me,
And I have regard for that friend so nice.
And that smiling face, those bright and gentle eyes
Looking ‘t me and I in those genial eyes.
All memories fresh, each image alive.
Time can’t come back, but the memories thrive.
They live in mind as blood and soul of life,
A source of solace in this worldly strife.
All set aside, College itself stands alight.

5

O the mysterious god, the days are gone!
With books, I carry memories along.
Pedagogical voices that adorn
My wit: I hear them like a divine song.
O Thoth! Did you hear of such a college?
A place of learning, fountain of knowledge.
One day I had to leave that sacred place,
And move to take part in the worldly race.
I stood looking, as you stand here alone,
In my temple like a god overthrown.
And I left the place saying farewell words.

6

Adieu! I leave your happy world behind.
Adieu! I move out to a world malign.

Adieu! With all the memories in mind.

Adieu! O holy place, the knowledge shrine.

Adieu! O college, as here I sit forlorn.

Adieu! With a hope that of an immortal tone.

Adieu! But let me not sink in the depth of Lethe.

Adieu! The velvet lawn now I walk on heath.

Adieu! For the bank of memories is full.

Adieu! For the sack of glean is full.

Adieu! O college, time to say goodbye!

Book Reviews

Exit West by Mohsin Hamid

Abeeha Altaf

"We are all migrants through time", writes Mohsin Hamid in his latest novel *Exit West*. Establishing migration as an inherent human trait, Mohsin Hamid tries to eradicate the division of humanity into migrants and natives by challenging the conventional human wisdom and our mindless acceptance of walls and borders and opening up imaginative possibilities of co-existence in the novel. *Exit West* is the fourth novel by this Pakistani diasporic writer of renown. It was published in 2017, during a time of much controversy and heated debate over refugees and migration crises across the globe. Travel bans and sanctions over displaced people escaping from war-torn nations like Syria, Iraq, and Palestine and the resulting refugee crisis, racial intolerance, and nativist paranoia in the West, formed the political context of *Exit West* which has been tackled uniquely and compellingly in the novel. The story is narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator, who offers a peek into various doors and lives scattered over real and metaphysical geographies. Gritty realism and fiction are forged together as the story traverses magical portals to very realistic, technologically advanced, yet calamity-ridden settings all over the world.

The novel begins in an unnamed war-torn city filled with refugees, who are continuously drifting across the geographical and spatial setting, in a perpetual search for comfort and peace. The protagonists of the novel, Saeed and Nadia, escape an unnamed city on the brink of war between extremist militant groups and the government, through magical doors that teleport people through space and time to different places all over the world. This deceptively simple means of

escape is not free of perils as the refugees often end up in more hostile and life-threatening circumstances than the ones they leave behind. It also comes with a fear of the disintegration of a known socio-political order and the established hierarchies of existence that perpetuate division and differences, which eventually lead the wealthy countries to heavily guard these magical doors to prevent the influx of refugees.

The novel also raises questions about the limits and how far one can imaginatively transgress boundaries and borders. As millions of people pour into London through these doors the relationship between natives, refugees and the authorities is strained as the latter feel their sovereignty and national identity threatened by the presence of these foreigners. Some of the natives are sympathetic to the already frightened and vulnerable refugees, who have escaped their homes for the sake of survival, while others are quite hostile towards them. Saeed, Nadia, and countless others are left to fend for themselves under extremely impoverished circumstances until the government finally relents and plans to build a halo city on the outskirts of London for these asylum seekers. Always on the move for survival, Saeed and Nadia like millions of others find themselves longing for home, and seeking a sense of belonging, yet simultaneously challenging this need to acquire a homeland identity and the recognition of nativity.

Exit West portrays a technologically advanced future where our sensory perception of the world is enhanced by digital devices. Technology is at once a mode of self-defense and connectivity in the form of phones and portals and a weapon against refugees in the form of heavy artillery, surveillance, and drones meant to guard cities against an influx of refugees who perhaps are the ones most in need of being guarded. This stark contradiction between the digital life, the freedom of web portals and the barbed wires, the tough terrains, and the hostile camps they face in the geographically demarcated and bordered physical world is relentlessly evoked throughout

the text. However, despite its grim documentation of life in war zones, a sense of hope and survival beyond ideological and territorial differences prevails in *Exit West*. In episodes from parallel but alternate realities, two men profess their love for one another despite being unable to speak each other's language; on another occasion, a man on the verge of suicide decides to live.

Exit West challenges its readers to imagine possibilities of survival beyond walls, barriers, arbitrary divisions, and surveillance and instead embraces inclusivity, as well as the inevitability of the temporal and spatial migration of the human race. It consequently imparts universality to human suffering, pain, and loss which makes it possible to not only identify with one another but be more compassionate to others too, thereby establishing that coexistence is possibly the only way out of this looming dystopia.

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