This is a curious time we are living in. When in the last decades of the 20th century the world witnessed a spectacle of a Wall being hammered down, the second decade of the 21st is in trepidation of another one being built. If the globalised world, had brought with it a promise of fluid borders and notions of belonging, along with new theories and terms like 'transnation' and 'postglobal', the last few years have somehow curbed our enthusiasm and brought back ghosts of the past. Rolling back the years, when one bet their dimes in essentialist ideas of race, ethnicity and nationalism, world politics has seen the emergence of neo-nationalists and fascist groups fighting to prove the superiority of their Gods, countries and races. In the process, there has been a constant threat to minority communities, with refugee crisis swelling and constant conflicts have lead to a systematic ethnic cleansing, in Africa, the Middle East and allegedly even in Burma. Such acts of ethnic cleansing, lead to an erasure of history and culture, creating a void in societal and political time, only to be replaced by the more acceptable and official versions of history and events. And under the dominant glare of meta-narratives, little, seldom reported and constantly under threat "stories" live, grapple and fight nervously for auditors. One might argue, that in today's world, where most of our lives are lived and recorded on social media, be it Facebook, Instagram or B(V)logs, nothing is lost, nothing is beyond recovery or unarchiveable. Yet reading and dealing with such issues, one cannot help but be bitten with pessimism and fear. Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Lowland*, talks about the Naxal movement and remarks that when the female protagonist, tries to 'google' out reports of the so
many 'disappearances' at the hands of the State Police, she draws a complete blank. It is then that we realise that in the war between private and personal narratives, between the local and the official, some stories remain unrecorded, untranslatable and even worse, untraceable.

In the current issue of Postcolonial Interventions, we try to look into these issues and more. We have Esra Santesso talking about the difficulties of fitting in and belonging as a Turkish in European soil (more specifically German, for she has Fatih Akin's film *Head On* as her case study) and the perceptive and incisive analysis uncovers certain pointers which generally get lost in the conflict of belonging for the migrant worker or refugee. On one hand, we have the memories of a long lost home and a desire to preserve one's memory of it and their native culture, and on the other, the possibility of belonging and self-fashioning in the more liberal West. The refugee/migrant labourer is constantly shuttling between these two islands, never fully accepted in either without a sense of guilt or shame.

Stories need to be told, re-told and circulated, lest we forget. And as Milan Kundera had remarked so many years ago, that the most crucial and poignant struggle is between power and memory. Ayesha Begum talks of the plight of the people of Palestine in her paper, something that has been in the news in recent times, troubling us with the reported atrocities and images of helpless civilians fleeing and cowering in ravaged buildings. A similar issue is dealt with by Claire Gallien in her in-depth analysis of Larissa Sansour’s and Wael Shawky’s Artwork. Gallien's sharp insights open up new avenues of thought, stimulating us, and making us question certain taken for granted ideas and assumptions.

Natasa Thoudam in her article looks at issues closer to home. For years, the North East of India has complained of a step-
fatherly treatment from the Indian Government, leading to a clamour for self-determination and the imposition of the draconian AFPSA, which gives the Indian Army almost carte blanche to search, interrogate, arrest and torture without a warrant. As a predictable outcome, reports have surfaced of human rights abuse, reports that have been hushed up and dismissed by the Central Government. Thoudam’s analysis brings under the scanner the assault, alleged rape and death of a Manipuri civilian at the hands of the Indian Army on the pretext (?) of her being a terrorist and part of an insurgency group. The struggle is not only between two political factions as it were, it is between memories, lived and imposed.

The threat to minorities is not merely based on the twin axis of race and ethnicities but as Kapil Sharma shows in his analysis of the plight of the queer community in India, it is also an entwined with gender and sexuality. The LGBTQ community and a significant portion of the civil urban society have been voicing their support for the withdrawal of the Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalises homosexuality. As the article tries to highlight, the assumption that homosexuality is a Western import is a hollow one, which tries to erase a long standing and often pictorial documentation of the presence and practice of same-sex love. What this does, is to replace the multicultural past and history of a land, by a more essentialist, totalising and homogenised version of it, for the benefits of a neo-liberal, fascist and hegemonic regime.

In fact, this is just one instance of how our present remains fissured by our problematic engagement with the past and as a result some of the ghosts we thought we had buried return to haunt our cherished gardens. This is evident from the paper by Allie Faden who looks at the uncanny resemblance between Daniel
Defoe’s rhetoric in *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* and the 21st century rhetoric of Evangelical Republican office holders in the U.S.A. such critique is particularly significant in the context of global flows of people and the xenophobic and fundamentalist spectres such movements often confront. Chinoko Ngulube explores these issues as well by looking at migrant voices, their repression and representation in Abdourahman A. Waberi’s *Transit*, positing the novel in the larger context of a locus of multicultural tolerance and freedom.

This particular issue looks at such diverse areas, interrogating official discourses and reports, trying to give voice to the ones that have been muffled, so that private memories, lived experiences and personal narratives, do not descend into what Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* called the craters of silence, hatched by the striated structures of Nation. And even as more and more voices scream, “What ish your nation?” the quest for a space beyond otherising binaries in the future, through an examination of past and present, continues unabated. Read on...

P.S. A special note of thanks to Barnamala, Sagnik and Semanti for the wonderful last-minute assistance you provided. We are delighted to call you one of us.
Claire Gallien:

Trouble in the Archive: Of Counter-Memories, Breakable Memories and Other Proleptic Moves Into the Past in Larissa Sansour’s and Wael Shawky’s Arts.
Abstract

This article focuses on the solo exhibitions of Larissa Sansour entitled “In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain” and “Archeology: In Abstentia” (2016), along with Wael Shawky’s “Cabaret Crusades” trilogy (2010-2014). Their exhibitions offer fascinating reflections on the archive as construction and on the articulation of memory in traumatic contexts, whether these are the Nakba and the on-going colonisation of Palestine by Israel or the Christian Crusades to regain Jerusalem.

In their films and their creations of breakable objects, such as the porcelain plate and the glass puppet, they open up new possibilities to think and write about the past in modes that take ambivalence and subjectivity at face value. Furthermore, by articulating chronotopes that are fundamentally disjunctive, not only do the artists suggest alternative and counter-modes of remembering the past, they also draw our attention on the act of narrating the past as political process. Thus, not only do they create alternative narratives drawn from other perspectives – here the Arab one –, but they also debunk the myth of the archive as a factual and objective piece of literature and foreground perspectivism and precariousness instead.

In other words, Sansour and Shawky’s artistic projects do not just aim at developing an Eastern historiography of traumatic times only, and certainly do not participate in a simplistic clash of civilisations narrative. Their works are eminently contextualised, but they also resonate well beyond the Middle-East and show what art can do with/to the archives, escaping adversarial narratives and using them to create dissonance, critical distance, personal and social transformations.

Keywords: Utopia/Dystopia, Civilizational/National Mythology, Archive, Dissonance, Precariousness.
“The question of the archive is not a question of the past. It is not the question of a concept dealing with the past that might already be at our disposal and not at our disposal, an archivable concept of the archive. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow”

(Derrida 36).

“Who controls the past controls the future... Who controls the present controls the past”

(Orwell Part I, chap. 3, 88).

Larissa Sansour and Wael Shawky are two contemporary artists from the Middle East – Shawky is from Alexandria in Egypt and lives mostly there; Sansour was born in East Jerusalem and lives in London. Both have strong artistic connections with Europe,¹ their arts are exhibited internationally, and they work with a variety of media, including drawing, sculpture, photography, and film making. Both artists are fascinating to study comparatively not only because their trajectories are quite similar, both being connected with the Middle East and the West, but also, more importantly, because both engage with similar topics. Indeed, they interrogate human relations to memory, and in particular the past shared between Western Europe and the Middle East, and how it resonates in the present. They outline the politicisation of the archive and of archaeology, the role played by fiction and myth in history making, the elaboration of exclusionary national imaginaries. Sansour described the central theme of her work as exploring “the tug and pull of fiction and reality in a Middle-Eastern
context,” (Gabsi 117) and I would argue that this is equally relevant of Shawky’s work.

This article focuses on the latest solo exhibitions of both artists – Sansour’s *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain* and *Archaeology: In Absentia* (2015) and Shawky’s *Cabaret Crusades* trilogy (2010-2014). *In the Future*, exhibited at the Mosaic Rooms in London in 2016, functions as a triptych with one room dedicated to the screening of the sci-fi video essay, combining live motion and Computer-Generated Imagery, one room for the exhibition of photo-montages taken from the film, and one room where the space is shared between the installation of the porcelain plates on a production belt and *Archaeology: In Absentia*, described on the project website as “a sculptural installation of ten 20cm bronze munition replicas modelled on a small Cold War Russian nuclear bomb”. Each capsule is engraved with the coordinates of the location where the porcelain plates, hand-painted with *keffityeh* pattern, are to be buried. These bombshells represent *in absentia* archaeological findings to be excavated in Palestine.

Shawky’s *Cabaret Crusades* is a trilogy that mixes marionette drama, stage designs, and filming. It recounts the history of the Crusades from an Arab perspective. The three films chart the various European campaigns in chronological order, starting with the first four years of the First Crusade, from 1096–1099, in “*Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show Files*” (2010). The second film “*Cabaret Crusades: The Path to Cairo*” (2012) covers a period of about fifty years, picking up exactly where Part I ended, in 1099, and moving through to 1146. In the third film, entitled “*Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbala*” (2014), Shawky remaps episodes of the Second (1145-49), Third (1189-92), and Fourth Crusades.
Whether in the case of Israel/Palestine, or in the case of the Crusades, both artists engage with the confrontation of perspectives between Western and Eastern historiographies and recognize how each historiographical tradition reinvests the same space and compete for “sites of memory”. However, they do not use this confrontation to rehash a clash of civilisation argument. Sansour’s and Shawky’s art go beyond an investigation of the oppositional historiographical and geographical imaginary of West vs. East or past vs. present vs. future. Rather, their investment in utopian forms of art is what allows them to complicate narratives – the notions of competitive memories and national boundaries lose cogency and are replaced by what Michael Rothberg called “multidirectional memory” and what I would conceptualize as entangled space, which is different from shared space, where the self and the other may coexist without interacting with each other. Conversely, entangled space is constituted by and through the interactions, peaceful and violent, smooth and confrontational, between the self and the other, and it belongs to neither the one nor the other.

Utopian art is what allows them to mess with chronology and disrupt linear and teleological understanding of time, used in the past and in the present to justify colonialism. As the title of Sansour’s film suggests, future and past are fused – in the future they ate from porcelain plates. Her artistic intervention takes place in the present to create the past (the archives, the porcelain plates) in the future, when future generations excavate the remains of the broken plates. Shawky’s trilogy does respect chronology and indications of time and place are captioned with each new scene in the films. Yet, his art is not only a critical reflection of how we sample, conceptualise and authorize the past, it also intervenes in the present to suggest future alternative modes of narrating and reading the past – modes that would be demystified and
integrated, narratives that would be aware of their own limited perspectives and that would be read along other archives told from other points of view. In this configuration, it becomes harder and even impossible to claim domination of the past, since the majority voice cannot be interpreted without being read alongside what it considers to be the other minor voices.

It is crucial to note that their artistic interventions are woven on two main theoretical strands, one referring to Subaltern and Postcolonial studies and the other to what has been termed the “linguistic turn” in social sciences. To the Subaltern and Postcolonial studies they owe a new emphasis placed on the silenced voice and the obliterated presence of the colonised, and her/his decolonial resurrection. As Edouard Glissant wrote in *Carribean Discourse*: “For those whose history has been reduced to darkness and despair, the recovery of the near or distant past is imperative. To renew acquaintance with one’s history, obscured or obliterated by others, is to relish fully the present” (15-16). To the “hollow delights” of a past stripped of its roots in time, Glissant opposes the “prophetic vision of the past” as emerging from deep history. Sansour and Shawky offer alternative constructions of the future based on an understanding of the deep history of the other.

Additionally, the linguistic turn supported by some historians, sociologists, and philosophers of the 1970s and 1980s led to a profound revision of the distinction between history and fiction, which undermined the “factual” pretensions of the archive in creating national memory. History was presented as a mode of narrating and interpreting the past, as a regime of truth, amongst others, and not as the embodiment of truth. In 1971, Paul Veyne wrote in *Comment on écrit l’histoire*: “Les faits n’existent que dans et par les intrigues” (51) [“Facts only exist in and through plots” (my translation)]. In 1983, Paul Ricoeur was reflecting on the same issue but
from a philosophical perspective, and argued that history and fiction operate on the same level of configuration. Sociologist of visual culture, Marie-José Mondzain encapsulated this new configuration in a concise statement: “La vérité est image, mais il n’y a pas d’image de la vérité” (266) [“Truth is image but there is no image of truth” (my translation)]. In English, Hayden White’s analysis of rhetorical tropes in historical discourse and his considerations on history as “literary artefact” in *Metahistory* and in *The Content of the Form* proved both seminal and controversial. The same type of reflection pervaded the work of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*.

In the following pages, I suggest that Sansour and Shawky’s productions of archival knowledge through art offer a reflection on the institutional archive as a form of power that operates through occlusion and repression. They also ruminate on disruptive modes of remembering that debunk the myth of the factual archive, prevent both dominant and subaltern fetishization of the past, and open up new possibilities for an ethical and politically engaged relation to it. In this respect, both of them are part of larger movement of contemporary Middle Eastern artists who “retrieve, explore, and critique orders of archival knowledge” and by doing so “underscore an inherent dissonance within the archive” (Downey 13, 16). I further contend that their use of breakable objects, such as porcelain plates or glass puppets, is innovative in that it unlocks new potentials to think and write about the past that take contingency, ambivalence, and subjectivity at face value. Instead of presenting monolinguism and cohesiveness as the ultimate horizon of expectation, their arts gesture towards a decolonial archive of the future based on precariousness and a “multi-versal” (Grosfoguel) understanding of the world.
1. Trouble in the Archive: Disrupting the Dominant Modes of Writing the Past

As presented in the art gallery Mosaic Rooms in London, Sansour’s work *In the Future* is a triptych with photo-montage, sci-fi video essay, porcelain plates and bomb replicas. Each replica contains an engraved disk with coordinates, which correspond to specific locations in Palestine where the plates are to be buried and excavated by future generations. By creating archives and by choosing their locations to be in Palestine, Sansour intervenes into the course of history and directs future narratives of the past. As the film unfolds, the viewers are made to understand that Palestinians have been uprooted and their civilisation erased. The plate function as metonymy – they are made of porcelain, which is presented as a Palestinian craft, and are hand-painted with the *keffiyeh* design, which has become the trademark of Palestinian resistance since the first Arab revolt of 1936 against British domination.

The storyline of *In the Future*, co-written with Søren Lind, is constructed around an alternation between a black background and what looks like a lunar landscape. Objects (such as a miniature ice shield or a white table hanging in mid-air) and characters appear and fade out from the black backdrop. The deserted landscape is made of sand, earth, and pebbles. The sky is either dark and gloomy or intensely illuminated, as if burning. The whole setting offers the vision of a post-apocalyptic world, the aftermath of the “biblical plague” mentioned in the screenplay.

There are only two disembodied female voices in the film and they respond to one another in the form of a dialogue. One is the voice of a psychoanalyst (Voice 2) – or so she seems to be given the nature of her questions – and the other is the voice of the resistance leader (Voice 1). As acknowledged in the credits, the role of the resistance leader is played by Poojeh Haji Mohammadi but the voice is Sansour’s. This split between voice and body creates indeterminacy in the identification process,
which is crucial to the artistic project in terms of opening, rather than foreclosing, interpretations. There is also a high level of probability that the little girls featured in the film represent Sansour at a younger age accompanied by her little sister. But the narrative, contrary to clear-cut ideologies, never provides definitive answers.

This unresolved hesitation complicates the reading-as-decoding process and is constitutive of a camouflage strategy on the part of the “narrative terrorist,” as Voice 1 calls herself. She endorses the figure of the terrorist but in displaced ironical manner. As Edward Said convincingly argued in The Question of Palestine, Palestinian resistance has been constantly described as a terrorism by the US and Israeli mass media so as to undermine the legitimacy of the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle. Thus, Voice 1/Sansour ironically reappropriates a name that was supposed to undermine the legitimacy of her resistance and turns it into a statement of regained agency. As “narrative terrorist,” she indicates that first her actions are violent and that her violence is not one backed by the state or by those in power, and second that her terrorism is discursive but cannot be reduced to an “academic exercise.”

As the film unfolds the viewer understands the nature of her intervention. Voice 1/Sansour explains: “We are depositing artefacts for future archaeologists to excavate... These facts will confirm the existence of this people we are positing. Creating facts in the ground,” to which Voice 2/psychologist replies: “And in turn support any descendants’ claims to the land, de facto creating a nation”. This scene and the following, where Voice 1 adds: “Our actions are historical interventions. I’m trespassing in the catacombs of the past, tagging each wall on my way,” are a comment on mythologizing tendency in Zionist historiography, on its tampering with archives, and concurrent erasure of Palestinian presence from off the ground: “Ever since I can remember, it was a time of disappearance. The bereavement, both material
and aesthetic. Smells, sounds, views, the very sense of motion. All gone.” This line echoes comments by Israeli revisionist historians on the ethnic cleansing of Palestine (Pappe).

Seen from the Palestinian perspective, Voice 1/Sansour’s act of narrative terrorism is in fact a form of restoration. It is intended to disrupt the Zionist narrative and is presented as an artificial intervention only to restore some level of historical truth to the experience of Palestinians and their relations to the land. Confronting what Leopold Lambert calls “Bulldozer’s politics,” that is Israel’s organised creation of the Palestinian ruin since 1948, Sansour is replanting archaeological artefacts, “adding new numbers, messing with their maths,” and thus profoundly troubling the archive.

The same move is perceptible in Shawky’s *Cabaret Crusades*, inspired by Amin Maalouf’s *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*. The trilogy translates Shawky’s artistic response to the violence not only of the episodes recounted in the archives but also to the violence which is constitutive of the act of archiving itself. Revisiting the Crusades through Arab eyes and doing so in the West is an act of subversion both on the part of Maalouf the novelist and Shawky the artist. However, beyond the construction of a counter-narrative, Shawky’s art does draw the attention of the viewer on the fictive nature of all archiving attempts.

Indeed, the scene in Maalouf which fascinated Shawky is the Council of Clermont, where Pope Urban II addressed a congregation of 300 French clerics and laymen and which is said to have triggered the first Crusade, because there is not just one version of the scene but at least five extant (Hirsch, interview with Shawky). More than any clear statement of the Pope, these archives, written sometimes ten years after the event, reveal the chroniclers’ views regarding the role of the papacy.
and Islam more than anything else. As Georg Strack argued, amongst the five main sources, only three emanate from chroniclers who attended the event (Fulcher of Chartres, Robert the Monk, and Baldric, archbishop of Dol), and even these do not entirely dovetail. His conclusions are that Robert the Monk and Baudri narrated the events more than ten years after the synod of Clermont in order to support a new campaign backed up by the French court to the Holy Land and “in order to provide other writers and preachers with a wide range of rhetorical devices and arguments” (Strack 44-45). On the other hand, Fulcher’s eyewitness account, written five years after Clermont, uses the simplicity of style of papal oratory and is not part of a propagandist effort.

What emerges from this episode and from Shawky’s screenplay is the notion that archive means reconstruction and it requires strategy. Shawky places the archive on the same level as other types of narration but recognizes the aura of truth bestowed on it. Shawky’s art unveils the mechanics and politics of the archive; it emphasizes the need to recognize that historical narratives can only be political reconstructions of the past, for better and for worse, and that as such they can only purvey partial versions. Shawky’s call is not to dismiss the archive but to dispel belief in the archive, in its purity, in its solidity, in its uniformity. This point is crucial to understand in what ways Shawky’s art differs from projects, such as that of Maalouf. Shawky brings trouble in the Western archive of the Crusades not simply by shifting perspectives but by showcasing perspectivism itself.

The trilogy complicates a strictly adversarial use of the archives and highlights both the secular motivations of the European Crusaders and the competition and violence among Arab leaders, who plot against each other and use assassination to get rid of factional enemies. Furthermore, marionettes play more than one role and shift
between the Arab and the European sides, indicating a shared history of violence. Finally, it is crucial to underline that Shawky rewrites the history of these violent encounters not from outside Europe but that trouble occurs from inside. Part I corresponds to the period when Shawky was an artist in residence at the Fondazione Pistoletto in Biella, Italy, and the marionettes he used for “The Horror Show File” belong to the Lupi Collection in Turin. Part II was produced in Aubagne, France, where Shawky had santon figurine designers produce the marionettes for the film-performance (Sapiega 17). Finally, “The Secrets of Karbala” was created in Murano (Venice), where the glass figurines were created, and Düsseldorf, in Germany. Part III constitutes a further turn of the screw, with a renewed emphasis on the breakability of narratives, from wood, to clay, and then transparent glass. Shawky’s films bring together local craft with Eastern cartography and retell the story of the Crusades not from a strictly Eastern perspective but, to borrow the concept from Mary Louise Pratt, from an unstable “contact zone” or, in Homi Bhabha’s terms, an “in-between” space, where East and West intersect and cross-feed.

Creating trouble in the archive means explaining how the archive is not a fact picked up from the ground but an institutionalised object at best constructed by the state and by the historian and at worst instrumentalised by them. Shawky’s trilogy is organised in a series of tableaux thus highlighting the fact that the history of the Crusade is always the result of a selection. Each tableau is interrupted by a black screen, the purpose of which is not only, as has been argued, to let visitors come in and out of the room easily, but also to underscore the cuts and mark them in black, as in official documents which are redacted to obliterate the names of people. Furthermore, elements of theatricality are emphasised by showing the strings attached
to the marionettes, and by alternating chorus with recitatives, which creates an intertextual reference to ancient Greek tragedy.

Thus, Sansour and Shawky’s works are not just about turning the tables and creating oppositional narratives to the dominant archive. The risk with contra-discourses, as exemplified with Maalouf, is to reproduce the very Manichean vision of the world one was trying to initially escape from. Rather, Sansour and Shawky are preoccupied with the idea of control and manipulation of the past and construction of archives as regimes of truth. To them, cohesiveness and homogeneity are suspicious, and interpreted not as a given but as the result of an authoritative gesture powerful enough to silence other disjunctive memorial forms and contents. Their artistic works question “the laws of what can be said” (Foucault 129) and how it is said or, to paraphrase Foucault again, the discursive modes of the laws’ enunciability (129). By doing so, they establish ontology and hermeneutic of the archive based on precariousness, and foreground that which pertains to its contingent nature and the selective memory it establishes.

2. Precariousness in the Archive and Consequences for Present and Future Generations

Refusing simplistic representations and Manichean readings of the past and present, both Sansour and Shawky bring to the fore elements of hybridity, permutation and ambivalence. Their artistic projects define new modes of interaction with history and with identity that are based not on deprivation but on precariousness, with the acute notion of the fragility, instability, and plurality that constitutes identities, both at individual and national levels. Precariousness has the word “care” as its root. Realising that identities are precarious, and if maintained then precariously so, means
that there is no such thing as a given identity, that constructing one’s identity requires tending, nurturing, care, and presupposes a relinquishing of any sense of entitlement.

To puppeteers and historians of art, there is a symbolic reading of the marionette that has to do with ambivalence, hybridity, and permutation. Jacques Sapiega commented on this aspect when he wrote: “La marionette hante la frontière entre la vie et la mort. Son formage à partir de l’argile ne fait qu’ajouter à cette dimension :il accentue la rêverie et le trouble qui s’y rattachent” (41) [“The marionette is a haunting presence at the frontier between life and death. The fact that it is shaped out of clay only adds to this dimension: it accentuates dreaming and the uncanny aspect related to it” (my translation)]. The marionettes created for the trilogy partake of a “hauntology” (Derrida 4, 7, 99-101) and occupy a space between the world of animate and inanimate beings, between animal and human life. They are made of earth and air and defy the force of gravity: “Like elves, the puppets need only to touch upon the ground, and the soaring of their limbs is newly animated through this momentary hesitation; we dancers need the ground to rest upon and recover from the exertion of the dance” (von Kleist 24).

The marionette lends itself to a fascinating reflection not only on the question of control and the mechanics of historiography, with the hidden presence of the puppeteer handling the control bars from behind and the visibility of the strings attached to the puppets, but also on the question of gravity, balance, and grace. Indeed, the marionette is controlled by the puppeteer but that control requires precision and acute concentration. As Irène Lentini comments, the puppeteer, who cannot see the feet of the marionette touching the ground from the platform on which s/he is perched, has to work “à la sensation” (“by feel”; Sapiega 47).
The presence of the strings reveals not only a form of control but also entails an awareness on the part of the one who handles the bars and pulls the strings of the very precariousness of that control. In other words, the puppeteer operates but is also up to a certain extent operated by the marionette, which acts as an extension of his/her body. The line that the puppets follows is equated by von Kleist to “the path to the soul of the dancer,” and this cannot be found unless “the puppeteer placed himself in the centre of gravity of the marionette; that is to say, in other words, that the puppeteer danced” (23). These permutations destabilise the ontology of being based on a clear distinction between self and other, man and nature, the animate and the inanimate worlds.

Similarly, the length of strings and the hooks placed on the marionettes are chosen with precision because any mistakes at this stage have consequences for the ways in which the marionette will be able to move. The business of attaching the strings and adjusting their length, tension, and control bars is called in French “ensecrètement,” from the word “secret,” because traditionally the puppet makers had to swear not to reveal the secrets of his/her calculations (Encyclopédie mondiale des arts de la marionnette238, 273, 184). In this configuration, knowledge is understood as rare and contingent, not accessible to everyone and from everywhere, also not everlasting.

Precariousness also affects the frontier between history and fiction. Shawky emphasises this point when he accounts for the title of Cabaret Crusades:“Le cabaret, c’est la scène du spectacle de l’Histoire. L’ambiguïté dans tout cela c’est qu’il y a une part de réalité et une part de spectacle. Mais pour moi qui ne peut croire à une seule version de l’Histoire, c’est fondamental d’être dans cette incertitude” (Sapiega 34) [“The cabaret is the stage on which History takes place. The ambiguity in all this is
that it is part reality and part spectacle. But for me who cannot believe in only one version of history, it is crucial to remain in that state of indeterminacy” (my translation).

Shawky’s point is to assert that history is not all fiction and fiction not all history but to accept to live in and with ambiguities and uncertainties about the versions of the past we use and the interpretation of the present or prospect for the future we provide, and about the capacity of these modes to translate elsewhere. In Shawky’s films, there is no attempt to maintain an illusion of reality. In that sense, his performances borrow from Brechtian theatre, which conceives of drama as the deployment of alienation effects. For instance, the systematic use of Arabic for both Arabs and Crusaders, including Pope Urban II, creates Entfremdung with regard to narration and defamiliarise the relation of the viewer to language itself.

Similarly, the de-naturalisation of setting and the systematic use of two-dimensional backgrounds further undermine the effet de réel otherwise used in historiography. The setting for Part II is modelled on the Turkish miniatures found in Matrakçı Nasuh’s Beyan-i Menazil, which do not comply with the one-point perspective but with the global perspective, offering views of buildings from a multiplicity of angles. This type of perspective is also called simultaneous as it allows the viewer to see the unseen parts of buildings too. As Philippe Comar reminds us in La perspective en jeu: “Choisir une perspective suppose une veritable philosophie de l’espace. Une image ne représente pas seulement le monde, elle dévoile la conception qu’on en a” (83) [“Choosing a perspective presupposes a genuine philosophy of space. An image does not simply represent the world. It unveils the conception that we have of it” (my translation)]. In Part III of Cabaret Crusades, the stage has changed to revolving platforms, thus linking up the movements of history with the
movements of the planets. It invites viewers to take a step back and replace this historical episode of the Crusades in a much wider frame. It also sets history in motion and implies a refusal of fixed interpretations and one-sided visions.

Creating her new art installation and film around broken pieces of porcelain plates, Sansour reveals the same acute sense of the fragmentary and fragile nature of our relationships with time and space. In the Future precariously hinges on a series of disjunctions, for instance between diegesis and setting, when voice continue uninterrupted while settings abruptly change from black background to post-apocalyptic landscape and vice versa. The film constantly shifts ground, from personal to historical narrative, from localized to utopian spaces, and the images mix time periods. Indeed, it is both and at the same the voice of a woman trying to come to terms with the death of a sister and the story of a country dispossessed and bereaved. The personal dream morphs into civilizational allegory with mythological and Biblical undertones when Voice 1/Sansour avers: “I often picture myself draped in cloth on my deathbed… feverish and sweating, my body making imprints in the fabric… becoming my own civilisation’s Shroud of Turin”. The shrouded body of the female resistance leader performs as the allegory of the Arab civilisation, and of the Palestinian nation, planting archives in its name.

The line between identifiable and unidentifiable locations is also porous. The hills and the desert, the motif of the keffiyeh, the dresses women wear on the photographs, the constant reference to Jesus of Nazareth and early Christianity, are clues that all converge on Palestine. And identifying the location is politically crucial, given the destruction of Palestinian villages during the Nakba\(^8\) and the on-going erasure of Palestine until this day, eaten away by Israeli settlements. Yet this heightened sense of location is at the same time a u-topia, a no-place zone. When
Voice 1 says: “It gets dark early out here in the desert. There’s no artificial lighting for miles,” Voice 2 immediately rejoins: “But you are no longer in the desert, remember?”

The film mixes the personal and the historical levels, *topos* and *u-topos*, but also time periods. It is both the utopian project of an intervention into the future and a traumatic return into the past. The closing words of the film repeat the first ones in a loop and do not bring outcomes and clear-cut solutions to the situation: “Sometimes I dream of porcelain falling from the sky, like ceramic rain. At first it’s only a few pieces, falling slowly like autumn leaves. I’m in it, silently enjoying it. But then the volume increases, and soon it’s a porcelain monsoon, like a biblical plague.”

Furthermore, the line separating states of being is often crossed. The elements belonging to the setting are a strange mix of animate bodies that stand, walk, and breathe and inanimate pictures from the Ottoman period, the Second World War, and of old bearded men resembling Biblical patriarchs. In the film, the hooded woman is often represented walking among these pictures. Conversely, Sansour uses CGI to animate the photographs, like the sepia picture of a Palestinian woman in traditional dress holding the tube of a long pipe from which loops of smoke emanate. The picture contains both kinesis and stasis – from something absolutely inert, life and movement appear, just as living bodies are often pictured in static postures with eyes closed or wide open, talking but with their lips not moving.

Finally, interpretation is destabilized by the insertion of irony. The option put forward by the Palestinian resistance leader of creating archives and scattering them on a massive scale is both a denunciation of Zionist historiography but also a reproduction of its *modus operandi*. Similarly, Sansour undermines their reliability by comparing the plates to other holy objects, such the Shroud of Turin, which was
proved by three radiocarbon dating tests to date back to the Middle Ages and not from the time of Jesus Christ. She also articulates a critical comment on contemporary recyclings of the Palestinian struggle, reduced to the symbol of the *keffiyeh* and marketed into plates lined up on a production belt. Irony is what fundamentally destabilises discursive positions and puts narratives on the edge.

3. Art as Archive.

The potency of Sansour’s and Shawky’s artistic performances stems not only from the fact that they produce counter-discourses to dominant readings of the past. It also lies in the articulation of *other* regimes of truth and *other* archives for the future, a future where the West tells its own story also in Arabic.

Many remarks in Sansour’s film may be heard meta-reflexively. The interventions planned by Voice 1 *in* the film are what Sansour hopes to achieve *with* her film – i.e. remapping Palestinian presence in a Western collective imaginary which has been colonized by the Israeli map. When the voice of the psychoanalyst says: “Isn’t what you’re envisioning just a polemic utopia?” Voice 1 answers: “This isn’t just an academic exercise. I’m not defending a thesis here”, implying that her intervention is not just idealistic but one with immediate practical consequences.

Indeed, in the presentation of her project *Archeology in Absentia*, Sansour explains: “The coordinates of each porcelain deposit are established during a real-life entombment performance taking place in Palestine. Ten deposits will be buried strategically across Palestine/Israel, in collaboration with local art institutions.” In other words, Sansour, through the figure of the resistance leader, is preparing archaeological ammunitions for others to complete her Palestinian mission:

Voice 2: Why did you decide to make archaeology your battleground?
Voice 1: It was already a frontline. Our rulers built a nation on archaeology. It’s no longer about history. It’s an epistemology, a tool for shaping minds, aiming to produce a cohesive national imagination. Projecting a state into the past supports the idea of historical entitlement. It’s really clever.

Voice 2: But scientifically unsound.

Voice 1: Scientific rigor is irrelevant.

Voice 2: I’m just trying to understand.

Voice 1: In its most perverted form, archaeology galvanises public sentiment, confirms myths of the past and defends them against scrutiny. Now we are part of that game, too.

Voice 2: Why porcelain?

Voice 1: Crockery resonates with our idea of the past. Every civilisation has crockery. Porcelain happens to be the trademark of this people. Every civilisation also has skeletons, but so far we haven’t buried any people.…

Voice 2: How did you manipulate the age of the porcelain?

Voice 1: It’s not exactly child’s play, but it’s not alchemy either. A buried ceramic object absorbs water and radiation at a steady rate. Ceramic dating simply measures the amounts. By saturating our porcelain with high doses of both, we add hundreds of years to its age.

Voice 2: And the carbon dating?

Voice 1: Our method is not yet reliable, but we will do further tests as corpses become available, and eventually scatter them across the ages.

Voice 2: You might have a hard time finding volunteers for that.

Voice 1: Feel free to sign up.
Part of this conversation could actually be read as an interview with the artist. However, the moment when a political interpretation is reached, the voice of Sansour as resistance leader closes the debate: “Have we had this conversation before?” By blocking off further discussion, Sansour underlines that art speaks for itself. In a context where Arab writers and artists are constantly asked to comment on Middle-Eastern politics, racism, and Islamophobia, her boycott is crucial. It represents a refusal to be tagged, marketed and recycled as forensic evidence in a political game.

Similarly, Shawky acknowledges: “I can’t imagine myself detached from society, neither as an individual, nor as an artist preoccupied with ongoing social change. I am very much part of all that” (Krystof 29). But he also clearly stated that his art resists readings that are primarily and directly political: “it was not meant to be a translation of what was happening now. It just became clear that things in Cabaret Crusades remind you a lot of what is happening today. I did not mean to do it this way at all. I try not to do this – even now. But you cannot escape the reality that are things in history that are repeating” (Krystof 147). Of course, Shawky is well aware of the resonances of the medieval Crusades today and of history repeating itself, after 9/11 and the revival of the crusading spirit under Bush’s administration. However, he also believes that his contribution as a committed artist lies elsewhere, not in mirroring dichotomies but in transcending them. Even if his art resonates with what has occupied the news since 9/11, his intervention is much more general: “I am fascinated by the text as a human creation. For it is a form of human creation. This is what I am really trying to do. Partly I can see that what I am trying to do is criticism, but it is also criticism of the way we believe in history – in written history” (Krystof 147).
Sansour also escapes straightforward recuperation of her work. Indeed, she plants archives not for the present but for the future. When Voice 2 guesses that “only in the future will people learn that this civilisation ate from the finest porcelain,” her voice confirms: “Yes, only then. Very few raptures are instantaneous.” This very strong statement comes at the end of the film and it shows that her art is not about producing immediate reactions to urgent situations but about directing postponed responses. By doing so, art does think in advance of politics, it can intercept the logic of power, and revert it.

A conclusion is perhaps not the most appropriate place to open up a full discussion on utopias and utopianism. Yet, I contend that the concept, as elaborated by Ernst Bloch, Louis Marin, and later reworked by Fredric Jameson, help us understand a key dimension of Sansour’s and Shawky’s projects. It is true that Sansour’s film belongs to the genre of science-fiction and represents a utopia, or rather dystopia, in the sense of an alternative, in the distant future, to the world as we know it. Shawky does not really imagine brave new worlds but rather revisits the past from a different perspective. However, if we understand utopianism not as a mode of representation but as an “impulse” (Bloch) and a “praxis” (Jameson), we reach a most stimulating interpretation of Sansour’s and Shawky’s interventions. Their artistic projects are driven by a utopian impulse that dislodges dominant ideology, reveals perspectives buried and repressed, and “neutralizes” (Jameson, “Of Islands and Trenches” 10) reality in order to critique, rearrange, and hopefully fix it. Sansour and Shawky certainly do not represent utopian (in the sense of better) societies, they do not engage in social dreaming, and do not presuppose that the alternative offered by the other is necessarily a better and less violent one. Yet, by unpacking the mechanics
and politics of the archive, they do give their audiences the tools necessary to rethink notions of belonging and entitlement, to decentre perspectives, and to experiment with social transformation.
Fig. 1. Larissa Sansour, *Archaeology in Absentia*, 20cm bronze sculpture, 2015. 20 Dec. 2016
http://www.larissasansour.com/Archaeology.html
Fig. 2. Larissa Sansour, *Revisionist Production Line*, porcelain plates and installation, 2015. 20 Dec. 2016
http://www.lawrieshabibi.com/exhibitions/45/works/image719/slide/

Fig. 3. Larissa Sansour, *In the Future, They Ate From the Finest Porcelain*, photomontage, 2015.
http://www.lawrieshabibi.com/exhibitions/45/works/artworks2134/slide/
Fig. 4. Larissa Sansour, *In the Future, They Ate From the Finest Porcelain*, photomontage, 2015. 20 Dec. 2016
http://www.lawrieshabibi.com/exhibitions/45/works/artworks2133/slide/

Fig. 5. Wael Shawky, still from *Cabaret Crusades II: The Path to Cairo*, HD film, 2012. 20 Dec. 2016
http://www.lissongallery.com/artists/wael-shawky/gallery/7496


Recommended video clips/trailers:

Larissa Sansour
https://vimeo.com/148158228
https://www.ibraaz.org/channel/157

Wael Shawky
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7U-pqjdHIY
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Lf5WaeW0Ow
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VORQ60cw5NQ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnUHkmfNxEg

Works Cited


*Cabaret Crusades: The Path to Cairo*. Dir. Wael Shawky. Marseille Provence 2013 – Capitale Européenne de la Culture et al., 2012, 58 min.


In the Future They Ate From the Finest Porcelain. Written by Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind. Spike Film and Video and Film London Artists’ Moving Image Network, 2015, 29 min.


2 “un lieu de mémoire dans tous les sens du mot va de l’objet le plus matériel et concret, éventuellement géographiquement situé, à l’objet le plus abstrait et intellectuellement construit. Il peut donc ‘air d’un monument, d’un personage important, d’un musée, des archives, tout autant que d’un symbole, d’une devise, d’une événement ou d’une institution” (Nora 1: xvii).

3 “Against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory – a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources – I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to on-going negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing, as productive and not privative” (Rothberg 3).
4 I am quoting here from the beginning of the movie when Voice 2 (psychoanalyst) asks Voice 1 (Sansour): “You call yourself a narrative terrorist. Aren’t you asking for trouble?” to which Sansour replies: “Of course.”

5 See Gelber, Likhovski, Morris, Ram, Sand, Shapira and Penslar for insightful analyses of this tendency.

6 Introducing the exhibition Cabaret Crusades at MoMA PS1, Shawky made his intent clear: “The puppets’ strings clearly refer to the idea of control. The work also implies a criticism of the way history has been written and manipulated” (Wael Shawky).


8 The Nakba, meaning catastrophe in Arabic, refers to the displacement of an approximated 700,000 Palestinians in the period that preceded and followed the Israeli Declaration of Independence in 1948. See Kalidi (1992) and Morris (2003) for further information on the exodus.
NATASA THOUDAM:

‘Collective Memory’ as an Alternative to Dominant (HI)stories In Narratives by Women from and In Manipur
Abstract

Theorizing in the context of France, Pierre Nora laments the erosion of ‘national memory’ or what he calls “milieux de memoire” and the emergence of what have remained of such an erosion as ‘sites of memory’ or “lieux de memoire” (7–24). Further he contends that all historic sites or “lieux d’histoire” (19) such as “museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders” (10) and even the “historian” can become lieux de memoire provided that in their invocation there is a will to remember (19). In contrast to Nora’s lamentation, in the particular context of Manipur, a state in Northeast part of India, there is a reversal. It is these very ‘sites of memory’ that bring to life the ‘collective memory’ of Manipur, which is often national, against the homogenizing tendencies of the histories of conflicting nationalisms in Manipur, including those of the Indian nation-state. This paper shows how photographs of Manorama Thangjam’s ‘raped’ body, the suicide note of the ‘raped’ Miss Rose, Mary Kom’s autobiography, and ‘Rani’ Gайдinlui’s struggle become sites for ‘collective’ memory that emerge as an alternative to history in Manipur.

Keywords: Manipuri Women Writers, Pierre Nora, Conflict of Nationalisms, Collective Memory, Sites of Memory
Theorizing in the context of France, Pierre Nora laments the erosion of ‘national memory’ or what he calls “milieux de memoire” and the emergence of what have remained of such an erosion as ‘sites of memory’ or “lieux de memoire” (7–24). He attributes this erosion of national past to “industrial growth” and “democratization and mass culture on a global scale” (7). Thus, for Nora, “the most fundamental purpose of the lieu de memoire is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, [and] to materialize the immaterial ... —all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs” (19).

Further, he contends that all historic sites or “lieuxd’histoire” (19) such as “museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders” (10) and even the “historian” can become lieu de memoire provided that in their invocation there is a will to remember (19). Nora also states that “[w]ithout the intention to remember, lieu de memoire would be indistinguishable from lieuxd’histoire” (19). In contrast to Nora’s lamentation, in the particular context of Manipur—a state in the Northeast of India—there seems to be a reversal. It is these very ‘sites of memory’ that bring to life the ‘collective memories’ of different communities in Manipur that aspire to have a nation of their own. These ‘collective memories’ are thus often characterized as ‘nationalistic’ but are against the homogenizing tendencies of the histories of conflicting nationalisms in Manipur, including those of the Indian nation-state.

I have invoked the rhetoric of nationalism here in spite of the danger it entails, considering the complex relation that Manipur shares with the Indian nation-state (which is often seen as ‘colonial’ by the revolutionary/nationalist leaders) and the nationalist aspirations of these leaders who saw Manipur as a ‘nation’ in the making. Please note that the term ‘national memories’ of communities in Manipur is itself a
problematic category. It is different from the nationalist histories of different communities in Manipur, which are not only gendered but turning more ethnic being synonymous with the totalizing Meitei nationalist history. In contrast, ‘national memory’ is a more inclusive term, a heterogeneous, fluidic, and ‘conflicting’ category that looks at Manipur as a geographical category rather than a linguistic or a religious/ethnic one. There is no attempt to homogenize this category either, which is itself a site of conflict. In addition, the term ‘nation(alism)’ is a contested term here. What was nationalism for different communities of Manipur was seen as terrorism and insurgency in the eyes of the Indian State and by the ‘others’ of each of these communities.

During the 1970s, the “hills–valley divide” prevalent since colonial times in Manipur becomes “a site of conflict” as Manipuri nationalism turns more ethnic in character being “synonymous with Meitei nationalism and begins to conflict with Naga nationalism and Zo nationalism—the latter comprising Kuki, Chin, and Lusei groups” (Thoudam 352). Already in 1949 the freedom Manipur anticipated in 1947 was thwarted with the merger agreement (Thoudam 352). Moreover, I have also argued that “many Meitei nationalist scripts see Manipur’s merger with India as an extension of colonialism” (352). Further, Meitei nationalism became more ethnic in character as it finds itself endangered by the rising nationalisms of other ethnicities mainly Nagas and Kukis as well as by the larger Indian nationalism (352). According to H. Kham Khan Suan, in Manipur, there are 33 recognized Scheduled Tribes (STs) belonging to the ethnic Naga and Zo groups. The 2001 census had the Meiteis as “the majority group” making up 65.8% of total population and occupying 10.02% of total geographical area of the state. On the other hand, the Naga and the Zo people together occupied 89.98% of the geographical area and made up 34.2% of the total population.
The Meiteis inhabit the plain districts (Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West, and Thoubal) and were surrounded by the Naga and Zo people scattered in the five hill districts (Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong, Chandel, and Churachandpur). Suan calls it the “classic case where ethnocultural boundaries broadly coincide with territorial space” (268). Further, according to Suan, three totalizing projects by the three major ethnic groups in Manipur, namely, Meiteis, Nagas, and Zos conflict not only amongst themselves but also with the autonomy of the larger Indian state (271). The Naga’s aspirations for a ‘Greater Nagalim’ (espoused by NSCN-IM) conflict with the ‘territorial integrity’ of not only Manipur but Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Simultaneously, the hills of Manipur that are considered the Naga territories are also inhabited by the Zo people (predominantly Kuki). In addition, “the demands of the Naga and the Zo people carving out separate autonomous homelands for themselves have posited uneasy questions and challenges to the Meiteis’ totalizing project” (268). Finally, all three projects often termed by political scientists and historians as ‘nationalisms’ conflict with the autonomy of Indian state. It is in this sense that Manipur becomes the site of conflicting nationalisms.

This paper shows how photographs of Manorama Thangjam’s ‘raped’ body, the suicide note of the ‘raped’ Rose Ningshen, Mary Kom’s autobiography, and Rani Gaidinliu’s notebooks become sites for ‘collective’ memory that emerge as an alternative to dominant (hi)stories in Manipur.

I

On July 11, 2004, a team of Seventeenth Assam Rifles raided the house of late Bihari Singh Thangjam and arrested the 32-year-old Meitei woman, Manorama
Thangjam. Next day, a bullet-ridden and allegedly sexually assaulted body of Manorama was found near Ngariyan Mapan Maring village in Imphal, Manipur. This led to a widespread protest against the army violence on civilians resulting in the naked protest of the *Ima Meira Paibis*<sup>2</sup> at Kangla—the then Indian Armed Forces headquarters in Imphal, Manipur—on July 15, 2004.

Two conflicting narratives weave the controversy that surrounds the incident of July 11, 2004. One is the Indian security forces’ version, and the other is Manorama’s family’s. According to the Indian security forces, more specifically the Assam Rifles, Manorama was “a member of the banned People’s Liberation Army (PLA)” (an armed opposition group) and “an expert in improvised explosive devices (IEDs)” as well as “an informer for the PLA” (Human Rights Watch, henceforth HRW; 25). They further added that on confirmation that she was at her residence in Bamon Kampu Mayai Leikai, they raided her house, took her into custody issuing an arrest memo, and recovered “one Singapore made Kenwood Radio Set and one Chinese made fragmentation Type Hand Grenade” (HRW 26–27). The Assam Rifles men intended to hand her over to the nearest police station. However, instead they went on a wild goose chase for almost two hours to capture “one of her militant colleagues” who possessed an “AK-47 assault rifle” (HRW 27–28). It was when she tried to escape that they shot at her leading to her death (HRW 28).

The family version describes the incident otherwise. Contrary to what the Assam Rifle claimed, her family insisted that “she was a peaceful activist and not involved in any criminal activities” (HRW 25).<sup>3</sup> In their narration of the night of her arrest, they alleged that Manorama was tortured before her arrest and nothing was recovered from her at that time (HRW 26–27). Moreover, Justice D. Biswas of the
Gauhati High Court in his verdict observed many procedural lapses on part of the Assam Rifles. The raid was conducted in the absence of a female constable. Manorama was not handed over to the nearest police station; instead, she was interrogated and “moved from place to place in search of another lady cadre” (HRW 28). In addition, there was no FIR pending against her at the time of her arrest (HRW 28). Further, her family suspected foul play looking at the circumstances leading to her death. They doubted the Assam Rifles’ version of the events that led to her death. One pertinent question they raised was: how could the army make no attempt to run after her and stop her considering the fact that her hands were tied from behind and she was wearing a phanek (Meitei skirt or wrap around). Instead, the army fired at an unarmed Manorama. Also, “no empty cartridges were found in the area,” refuting the army riflemen’s claim that they first shot in the air to warn her; “no blood was found near the body despite the fact that Manorama had suffered at least six bullet wounds” (the forensic report confirms that it was eight not six); “the nature of the bullet wounds suggested that the shots were fired at close range”; and “a report from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory found semen stains on Manorama’s skirt” (HRW 29–30).

This one event brought all the suffering masses of Manipur together and provided an outlet for their pent-up anger—the masses, who either had been tortured, had suffered loss of family members, or had been humiliated at the hands of the Indian army in the name of AFSPA—thus, uplifting the incident to a historic dimension it has attained now for the people of Manipur, the Meiteis in particular, and elsewhere. Papori Bora contends that the protest, especially the one at Kangla, that followed was not only against the alleged rape of Manorama but also against the rape of a region, here in this case of Manipur. In “Between the Human, the Citizen and the
Tribal: Reading Feminist Politics in India’s Northeast,” Bora argues contextualizing the Kangla protest in the light of the civilizing mission first of the white colonial man and then of the brown postcolonial/neocolonial brown man. Bora’s argument is a critique of the State which views its people in the Northeast as “incomplete citizens.” In the Kangla protest, Bora sees “an inversion of the anti-colonial narrative of woman as nation requiring the protection of her valiant sons” when “the mothers of Manipur protect their children, both daughters and sons” (351). She provides a postcolonial alternative to the language of the law (and of the human rights) (356). While critical of the nationalist and the human rights discourse that view women as “rape-able,” “vulnerable objects that need protection,” and hence “victimized objects” with no “subject position,” she suggest a re-reading of the language of the protest (356). By reading the statement on the banner of their protest (“Indian Army Rape Us”) as “a command” and not “a descriptive statement,” she shows how the lack of subject-verb agreement in the command breaks the subject-object binary (356). Moreover, for her, the “us” stands for “not just women but also the Northeast” (356). Here, she reconfigures the sexual power relationship in the state which goes “beyond the man/woman binary and signals the power relationships of the majoritarian Indian state with its minorities” (356). By doing so, she draws our attention to even stories of the less documented male sexual abuse (356–57).

In fact, Justice C. Upendra Singh starts his judicial enquiry report with these words: “This is one of the most shocking custodial killing [sic] of a Manipuri village girl so savagely, that also after inhuman torture” (127). Her dead body is described thus in the report: “She was found lying death [sic] having multiple gun shot [sic] and other injuries on various parts on her body, including her genital organs and thigh”
(C.U.Singh 127). According to the postmortem report, her body sustained eight bullet wounds; six of them were fatal, leading to her death (C.U.Singh 179).

However, it was the appearance of her partially blurred, half naked, and bullet-ridden dead body on the front pages of major local newspapers\(^6\) that touched the nerves of the masses as a collectivity, leading them to behave in the manner they did; consequently, leaving a mark on the history of women’s struggle in Manipur. This photograph was significant as its appearance marked the beginning of a series of protests including the one at Kangla immortalizing her and the image of her dead body in the collective memory of the people both within and outside Manipur. In the meantime, her family refused to collect her dead body until they get justice for her death. As a result, the police cremated her by the order from the Government of Manipur on July 24, 2004 (HRW 29). Since then, every year, on 11 July, a memorial event is held at her residence organized by Th. Manorama Memorial Charitable Trust, Bamon Kampu Apunba Lup, Manipur. In contrast, the national media exercised caution and instead used a portion of a family photograph of hers taken in a sitting position (giving the appearance of an extreme close-up shot).\(^7\)

Later memorial functions, from 2013 onwards, used the standing version of this photograph (see Figure 1), along with a photo-montage (shown in Figure 2) comprising three photographs: One was a version of the photograph used by the national media. The other two were photographs circulated by one of the local newspapers—*Hueyen Lanpao*, providing the frontal and the rear views of her dead body as it was found by the police at the time of the incident (versions of the photograph used by local newspapers).
Figure 1: Photograph Used in the 2013 Memorial Event

Recently, bloggers (Manipur Shining, Maoist Road, Namathu, and Vinavu.com) from different parts of India began to circulate the most ‘disturbing’ yet powerful photograph of the incident. It showed a medium shot of her dead body, with her still, not-fully-closed eyes, showing her blood-stained white blouse pulled up to just cover her chest in order to reveal the fatal bullet wound on her navel. This photograph can be considered as the “decisive moment”—Henri Cartier-Bresson’s terminology that “fuses a notion of instantaneity in photography (the freezing of an instant) with an older concept from art history: story-telling with a single picture” (Bate 56)—that depicts the entire story or event within one picture or “the ‘pregnant
moment of the story, where the past, present and future of the story can be read, summed up, ‘at a glance’ (Bate 56). This photograph captured the moment of reversal, when the 12 Ima decided not to be mere spectators to the army’s disrobing of Manipuri women under the garb of AFSPA and they made visible this ‘invisible’ disrobing, bringing it out in the open with their own disrobing at Kangla.

Apart from the ‘collective’ remembering of the incident by members of her family and the people from Manipur and elsewhere, the making of this ‘collective memory’ happens at three different yet overlapping levels. They are: the local media, the ‘dominant’ national media hegemonic to the official version of the State armed forces, and the ‘unofficial’ blogs. It was the photograph used by local newspapers that was instrumental in generating such a huge public reaction. However, subsequently, later reportage used a less graphic photograph, which was also used by national media and in compliance with the official version. At the other extreme are the blogs that reproduced the most ‘disturbing’ photograph of her dead body. Different visual representations of the same event were used in order to generate differing versions of ‘collective’ memory. The dominant national media and later the local media probably wanted the public to remember the injustice of the killing of an innocent person; thus they frontalized Manorama’s ‘innocent-looking’ face through the photograph. In contrast, the blogs also reminded the public of the violence of the alleged rape, which is visible all over on her dead body in the photograph they have used. The photomontage used in the memorial events since 2013 can be looked at as a bridge between these two extreme positions. It juxtaposes the photograph of Manorama taken during happier times with two photographs of her dead body in frontal and rear views. Hence, in other words, the innocent face of Manorama is juxtaposed with the image of violence done to her body, with the aim of highlighting the injustice as well as the
brutality done on her body. It also humanizes her thereby restoring her as a person as opposed to merely a body.

However, Manorama’s body represented in these photographs like a ‘real’ *lieu de memoire*, ‘real’ in Nora’s sense, refuses to be reduced merely into these significations. As Nora asserts that “[*lieux de memoire* have no referent in reality; or rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs. … In this sense, the *lieu de memoire* is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations” (23–24). He further adds that “[*lieux de memoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications” (19). Here, Manorama’s body is its own referent. To elucidate this point, let us examine her ‘gaze’ in each of these photographs. The photograph used by almost everyone apart from the bloggers shows that her gaze is not looking back at the camera even though she may be posing for the camera shot. Her eyes are shown to be shying away from any kind of confrontation with the camera. They are looking away, slightly closed but not fully. In sharp contrast to this photograph is the other photograph used by the bloggers, showing her dead body with her still, and not-fully-closed eyes. Here too, her eyes may not be looking at the camera but they are staring in a confrontational manner at something in front of them. Just as a camera freezes time and space for a moment in a photograph, death too freezes time and space eternally for a dead body. In the case of Manorama, her dead body is now eternally frozen to the moment just before her death. It appears as if her frozen gaze is fixed upon ‘the murderer’ who is most likely at that moment missing from the frame (this is when we consider the forensic report that claims that some of the bullets were shot from a very close range as true). One can read both victimhood
and defiance in those eyes. Her stare is a remnant of a frozen past moment of victimhood—as she waits helplessly and motionlessly for the next course of action (which is death in this case). Yet, the stare, in her eyes as we see it now in the photograph, is also defiant and confrontational to the ‘murderer,’ invisible from the frame, as she stares at the face of death and her eyes do not shy away from confronting at the inevitable approaching death. This contradictory ‘look,’ according to me, memorialized in this ‘decisive moment’, has indeed become the ‘real’ site of ‘collective’ memory for the people of Manipur in its refusal to be forgotten or suppressed by the authorized version of the story imposed by the Indian nation-state as well as the hegemonic national media and later the local media. The authorized version of her story sees her as a dangerous criminal and hence her killing is deemed justifiable. It denies the allegation of rape; here the national media and now recently the local media are co-opted, visible from the kind of images that accompany their reportage. The news report does not deny the killing but the rape is an ‘allegation’ and hence the use of the term ‘alleged’ along with rape in almost all of the reportage.

Further, her contradictory ‘look’ also highlights the contradiction surrounding her links with the ‘nationalist’ struggle in Manipur: her family’s strategic denial and the Indian state’s imposition of the same. Both erase her participation from the nationalist struggle in Manipur differently for different reasons. For the Indian state, plainly she is a terrorist not a nationalist. For her family, in order to prevent branding her as a terrorist, they have to deny any links between her and the nationalist struggle in Manipur, which the state considered as militant. However, Manorama’s contradictory ‘look’ confounds both as it emerges as an alternative to both, refusing both versions of her story.
II

One of the earliest cases of rape by the Indian army was reported in 1974. In Ngaprum Khullen (Kumran) village of Ukhrul district in Manipur, a Tangkhul Naga girl, Rose Ningshen, was gang raped on March 4, 1974, by the Ninety-fifth Border Security Force (BSF) in the house of R. Khasung in front of helpless village elders who were held as witness to the event at gun point (TNT, n.pag). Two days later, she committed suicide on 6 March, leaving behind a suicide note in Tangkhul for her boyfriend, Stone, of the neighbouring village, Bungpa.

I provide here a brief introduction to Tangkhuls—the people and their language. They “are one of the 33 notified Schedule Tribes of Manipur” (Ningshen 49). The Tankhuls “belong to the Naga group of tribes” and“inhabit mainly in the Ukhrul District of Manipur” (49). They“are also found in the neighboring districts of Senapati, Thoubal, and Chandel” (49) as well as “in Nagaland and across the border in the Somra Tract of Myanmar [Burma]” (49). MaireiwonNingshen describes the district and Tangkhuls thus:

It may be noted that Ukhrul District, the place where the Tangkhuls mainly inhabit was first marked out as a Sub-Division in 1919 during the British rule. Then in November 1969, it was upgraded to a full-fledged district, bearing the name ‘Manipur East District.’ In 1983, Tengnoupal District, now called Chandel District was carved out from the Manipur East District […] After that the name of the district was also changed into Ukhrul District […] The Tangkhul is the second largest Schedule Tribe of Manipur […] They are also an educationally advanced Naga tribe. (49)
She further adds that “[t]he Nagas including the Tangkhuls belong to the Mongoloid race [….] Linguistically, they belong to the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of great Sino-Tibetan family” (55). According to Kiranbala Devi Pukhrambam:

The Tangkhul language belongs to the Naga-Kuki sub-group of the Naga group of the Tibeto-Burman family (Grierson, 2006). It is a surprise to note that every Tangkhul village has a dialect of its own. It is hard to communicate between the Tangkhuls of difference villages. Manipuri [Meitei] used to be their lingua franca. William Pettigrew, the first missionary [.,] is credited for refining the Tangkhul language with the publication of Tangkhul Grammar. He introduces the Ukhrul village dialect as a Lingua-franca among TangkhulNagas through his writings of Gospel translations, Hymns and Bibles. The Tangkhuls write following Roman script nowadays. (28)

Coming back to the suicide note, it was first translated into Manipuri and published in Bharatki Loilam Manipur by the Pan Manipur Youth League in 1993. Later on, it was translated into English by Rajkumari Smejita Hidam (www.morung.com, n.pag). The note is reproduced below:

Most beloved…

In a world seeded with envy, our love shall never bloom together like those lovely flowers in the same stalk but we will bloom radiantly in that pure everlasting place of our true love. That I am leaving this world should not bereaved you to utter melancholy. A life driven by gale of sorrow and unrequited words mortify my soul and leave me to choose only this lone way.
For the days to come, we made promises to be one and together in our lifelong journey. But oh! My love I could not make for that moment! Oh! My life none is there to receive your lot. What a pity! Oh! My vanquished soul every second bears the brunt of bereaved feelings, bringing me to the threshold of defeat. Even the tears which flow like an eternal spring now dries [sic] up. Those tears were the only image of my life. I will be remembering in those looming darkness of hell the tale of you and I. From dust to dust let this body embrace its birthplace; let the earth dissolves my remains. Oh! How enviable for that last glance, to see one last time of my image in your eyes, but alas! Fate deceives me at this last hour. I choose my own disgraceful death and lo! I will walk as an outcast forever. My love when you remembers [sic] me, turn your eyes to those darkest horizon for I reside forever in the abyss of darkness. There, you will find me treading all alone with a heavy sigh of regrets in that long darkness.

Love of my life! Feeling of sweet remembrance of those long hearty laughs and sharing each other woes fills my memory. At the dead of this night, far from here my love a deep slumber will be taking you to pleasant dreams. My last wish to see your visage shall ever remain unfulfilled as you are far from me… far across these ranges of hills.

For my lovely friends, though I am unable to write each a parting letter I plead to you to tell them my last farewell. In this early morning, I am glancing over the distance of your lovely place Bungpa. Remember, my love how I wish to shower all my feelings and love, all I have for you like a cascade flowing down in your ocean of love. Have you ever received the letter I sent to you on
6-2-73? What could have happened for not returning any reply from your side? I have waited long and I am still waiting, but at the moment life steals away stealthily. Why and how did we ever get parted will only be known after you escape from this world. Oh Hell! Oh! Abyss of Darkness! I loathe going that dark passage. No one shall ever know who betrays whom. The secret is entombed forever.

The life of a maiden dries up from blooming into a lovely flower and lays in the heathen… unadorned, unaccepted, untouched. Only regrets on my part for I am choke with words which I [am] unable to tell you everything at this moment. What remains of the sad tale I will narrate to you closely in another lifetime, in another eternity. I will end with this note my love! That the only words that erupt from the truest, innermost part of me is the saddest part of our parting, the story of our failure to be together again.

Your Rose.

(“On March 4, 1974 a Naga Girl Was Raped …” n.pag.)

This incident along with another incident of rape in Grihang involving the same 95 BSF men resulted in the constitution of East District Women Association (EDWA), also known as Manipur’s East District Women Association (EDWAM) (now Ukhrul District) on May 8, 1974, with Ms. Masophi Luithui as its first president (Ningshen 166–67). It was later renamed the Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL) in 1981 (167). Its president N. Ruivane describes her thus: “Miss Rose (nobody remembers her full name) has become a semi-canonised [sic] figure in East District. … People remember her a lot these days” (India Today, n.pag). On May 10, 1974, EDWA
submitted a memorandum to Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, part of which reads thus:

We come to you with tears demanding the immediate institution of a Parliamentary Enquiry or Judicial Enquiry into the matter for stern punishment of those BSF personnel. It is a very sad thing that the charge sheet against them has not yet been sent by the Police. Some of the high-ranking officers including Police have been heavily bribed to hush up the case. We earnestly urge your honour to take immediate action against those BSF officers who have been involved in the crime, for the restoration of human dignity and security of women.

(“Memorandum submitted to Shrimati Indira Gandhi by Miss Masophi Luithui and C. Mahala on behalf of EDWA” qtd. In Ningshen 168).

The memo had the following to say about Rose:

Miss Rose was the most beautiful girl in her village Ngaimue. … She was chosen for their [BSF’s] desire. The crimes of these officers were too much for her and she ended her life on March 6, 1974. She left letters to her dear ones before her death. But the most important letter was forcibly burnt by the BSF … . (The Sangai Express, n.pag.)

The suicide note first surfaced in the social media in Facebook on June 14, 2012, as a post by an account named, My First Love Letter. It was titled “Suicide note of Chanu Rose 1974.” Then on June 14, 2014, two websites Nagajournal and
Morung.com published the note with titles: “A Timeless Love Letter” and “On March 4, 1974 a Naga girl was raped by the Indian armies. This is the touching letter she wrote to her boyfriend before she committed suicide,” respectively. The Facebook account of Nagajournal reposted this note on March 28, 2015. On February 2, 2016, The Northeast Today also published the note with a title: “Touching letter by Naga girl to boyfriend before suicide. She was raped by Army personnel.”

Indeed, at that time, Rose had already found a place for herself in the ‘collective’ memory of the people of Manipur, specifically the Tangkhul people. Belatedly, media and social networking websites began to revive this memory of hers. Emphasizing on the fact that she was a Naga, another ‘collective’ memory was created, which was of the Naga community (of Manipur) sidelined in the ‘collective memory’ of the dominant Meitei community. This is evident in the use of the term ‘Naga’ either in the name of the website or social networking account that published the note, or in the title of the article or caption accompanying the note, with one exception in the first Facebook post of June 14, 2012—where a Meitei courtesy title ‘Chanu’ was added to Rose’s name and there was no mention of ‘Naga’ anywhere in the post. Thus, Rose’s suicide note in this sense can be looked at as a site of ‘collective’ memory for the Tangkhul Nagas in Manipur.

In the case of Rose, no memorial event is held every year nor any judiciary enquiry set up to probe into the circumstances leading to her rape. Tangkhul people remembered her nonetheless as one of the president of a Tangkhul women association remarked. Still, Rose merely remained a name in a list of rape victims put up by either a journalist in an article, an activist in a report, or a researcher in a project; until her suicide note first made a short appearance in 1993 and a longer one now since 2012. It
provided an occasion for the Tangkhul people to remember and re-member her. However, there is more to it.

First at the face value, Rose’s suicide note is a regretful complaint against her boyfriend, with whom she could no longer have a future, evident in the following lines: “… our love shall never bloom together like those lovely flowers in the same stalk” and “For the days to come, we made promises to be one and together in our lifelong journey. But oh! My love I could not made for that moment!” and in whose eyes she wanted to see her own image for one last time, as this line tells: “Oh! How enviable for that last glance, to see one last time of my image in your eyes, but alas!” It is the same boyfriend whom she could not meet during her last hours, as these lines show: “My last wish to see your visage shall ever remain unfulfilled as you are far from me … far across these ranges of hills” and who had not yet replied to her letter she had sent almost a year ago. She posits a very mundane query here: “Have you ever received the letter I sent to you on 6-2-73? What could have happened for not returning any reply from your side? I have waited long and I am still waiting … .” Next complaint is directed against the gendered violence she faced at the hands of army under AFPSA, which she describes as “a world seeded with envy” and that has driven her life into a “gale of sorrow” as “unrequited words mortify” her soul. She laments her present condition of being raped thus: “Fate deceives me at this last hour. I choose my own disgraceful death and lo! I will walk as an outcast forever.” Her despair is evident in these lines: “Oh! My life none is there to receive your lot.” Here, she is also complaining against the honour economy\textsuperscript{11} of her patriarchal community that had conditioned her and consequently forced her to take the drastic step of suicide. According to Maireiwon Ningshen, the Tangkhul society was patriarchal even before the advent of Christianity, and in the \textit{Ngalalong}, girls were taught “social
behaviour, manners, obedience, politeness, and most of all, how to behave towards the opposite sex” (72). She further adds that “according to Tangkhul culture, girls should always be modest and humble before the boy” (72). The terms “disgraceful” and “outcast” are used by Rose anticipating the ostracization she might have to face if she did not take her life then. In fact, the TNT version reports that her rape was witnessed by elders in the community. What would be called ‘her loss of honour,’ in the form of a gang rape, was turned into a ‘public’ spectacle thus.¹² Her shame was no more a personal shame but a public one—an ‘ignominy’ as Olufunke Adeboye describes while writing about the politically motivated suicides in colonial Ibadan. According to Adeboye, an honour economy was attached to such suicides that transformed ‘victims’ into ‘agents/heroes.’ Adeboye argues thus:

[T]he desire (which sometimes bordered on duty) to preserve personal and family honor [sic] in the face of impending ignominy was a major factor that moved public figures to commit suicide. The agency of these individuals in choosing death over exile is here acknowledged. Far from being ‘victims,’ they made the most of disadvantageous situations, turned them around and earned respect and esteem in death, instead of the ridicule that would have been their lot. Suicide, thus, served as [an] ‘honorable’ purpose for them.

(190)

However, along with the “idea of suicide as a means to honor [sic] (either of preserving ‘existing’ honor or earning ‘fresh’ honor),” he also acknowledged the contradictory “idea of suicide as a means of averting shame,” making him conclude that “the two ideas are, in fact, interrelated because it is in averting shame that honor is preserved” (190–1). He also accepted the fact that such an honour economy was
often imposed on the leaders of Ibadan people. Even when we are tempted to see Rose’s suicide on these lines, as a means to honour as well as a means to averting ‘further’ shame, her suicide note in its complaint form resists being reduced to merely such a reading—complaining against not only the gendered violence under AFSPA but also against the AFSPA-infested patriarchal community of hers as well as such a gendered reading of the text. Katrina Jaworski in *The Gender of Suicide: Knowledge Production, Theory and Suicidology* tries to understand “how the knowledge of suicide is constructed through gender” (4) and comes to the conclusion that “the gender of suicide is masculine and masculinist” and “the character of the gender of suicide is in fact performative” (3). According to her:

Knowing suicide is not just a matter of exposing what already exists, as if it were self-evident, transparent and obvious. To borrow from Butler, knowledge is “implicated in social processes, inscribed by cultural norms, and apprehended in their social meaning” (20). Gender is part of the parcel through which knowledge of suicide is produced. How gender ‘works’ is complicated. It occurs in multiple, heterogeneous ways. Sometimes suicide seems gender-neutral. Sometimes suicide is heavily imbued by gender. Sometimes gender assumptions are visible and invisible. The masculine and masculinist side of gender dominates. In doing so, it leads us to think that there is only a singular or homogenous way of reading suicide. (4)

Clearly, Rose’s suicide note resists an easy reading of her suicide that is in line with the masculine and masculinist gender ascribed to suicides in general and also to the reading of it in such a manner. She problematizes her suicide note, which, in spite of using the clichés of the honour economy (use of words such as “outcast” and
“disgraceful death”), complicates it with its form of a complaint. Thus, even though the suicide note is writing about an attempt (a successful one though) to erase a life from this world (erase as in killing off); yet, the note itself by writing about the erasure (death here) is in fact resisting an erasure (as in forgotten). In fact, it has become the “monolith,” representative of a now extinct Tangkhul tradition, erected “as a form of remembrance for the deceased by their family, usually built after a year the person had passed away” (46).

Hanging precariously on a suicide note, the narrative of her death resists being forgotten and waits patiently to be re-read, retold, and re-membered (as if an outcast is finally turned into a member). The invocation of her suicide note recently in the social media bears testimony to it. It is an alternative response to the atrocities committed under the draconian AFSPA. Thus, it gradually emerges as a site for ‘collective’ memory for the Tangkhul Naga women in Manipur, presenting itself as an alternative (struggle) to the existing struggles in the gendered and dominant histories of both the Pan Naga nationalist struggle13 scripted in Nagaland and the Meitei nationalist struggle,14 both of which are participants in the conflicts of nationalisms in Manipur.

III

In this section and the section that follows it, I look at two Manipuri women co-opted into the history of Pan-nationalist movement of the Indian nation-state. In this section, I specifically focus on the gendered construction of Mangte Chungneijang Mary Kom as a ‘national [female] hero’—a term used by Duncan McDuie-Ra for Mary Kom—of India as well as a ‘representative’ figure of the entire North East community. Born on November 24, 1982, in Sagang village, Churachandpur district, Manipur, Kom was the eldest daughter of Mangte Tongpa
Kom(father) and Sanakham Kom (mother). She is the “queen of [the Indian] boxing
[ring]” (Kom 73), and has won five World Championships and an Olympic medal in
2012. Married to Onler Kom, she has three children with him. Amongst the accolades
she received for her sporting feats are Padma Bhushan in 2013, Rajiv Gandhi Khel

The Kom community into which Mary Kom belongs to is also one of the 33
recognized tribes in Manipur (L.R. Singh 17). The Kom villages are scattered
between the districts of Chandel, Churachandpur, and Senapati. There is a bone of
contention on whether the Koms are a Naga tribe as Benjamin Kom initially argues or
a tribe belonging to the Old Kuki groups as observed by R. Brown, E.W. Dun,
Grierson, and J. Shakespeare (L.R. Singh 19). However, Benjamin Kom concludes
that the Kom-Rem group considered themselves separate from both the Nagas and the
Kukis (qtd. in L.R. Singh 19). The Kom-Rem group is a collaborative association the
Koms have formed with tribes such as Aimol, Chiru, Koireng, and Purum—all of
which share a similarity on language and cultural and traditional practices (L.R. Singh
19). These tribes are, however, recognized as separate units by the Indian nation-state
(19).

One can ask how does an individual’s memory come to represent collective
memory of a community, in Kom’s case, those of the Kom community of Manipur?15
In his book The Collective Memory, Maurice Halbwachs discusses the intricate
relation between individual memory and collective memory. Here, Astrid Erll
commenting on Halbwachs observes, “Halbwachs unites—albeit not explicitly—two
fundamental, and fundamentally different, concepts of collective memory” (15). One
of the concepts sees “collective memory as the organic memory of the individual,
which operates within the framework of a sociocultural environment” (Erll 15). Halbwachs’s actual words were: “remembrances are organized in two ways, either grouped about a definite individual who considers them from his own viewpoint or distributed within a group for which each is a partial image” (50). Even though Halbwachs called the former individual memory or autobiographical memory and the latter collective memory (50), for him, as Erll argues, collective memory is contained within an individual’s memory. This is also evident in the heading of one of Halbwachs sections in *The Collective Memory* which reads thus: “The Individual Remembrance [Memory] as the Intersection of Collective Influences” (44). Even when the memory invoked in Kom’s autobiography may appear as ‘individual’ memory, her life struggles are representative of the community she belongs to and in this sense collective as the collective is contained in the individual. Conversely, through Kom’s memories from her past that form her experiences in the autobiography, we get a glimpse of lives of her community. It is in this sense that Kom’s individual memories constitute the collective.

Kom’s life story detailed in her ‘mediated’ autobiography is a typical rags-into-riches tale of how a daughter of a landless farmer becomes an internationally renowned boxer. Kom had written her ‘mediated’ autobiography title *An Autobiography: Unbreakable* along with Dina Serto. I have called it mediated because of two reasons. First, it was written along with Serto. In the Acknowledgments, Kom mentions that apart from Serto, Au Dina and her editor, Ajitha, helped her in writing this book. Second, it was written in English, a language Kom is not fluent in evident from what Kom herself mentioned in the book that “the only languages” she knew were Manipuri (Meitei) and Kom and she was very “conscious” of her inability to communicate effectively in either Hindi or English (55). James W. Pipkin calls such
an autobiography as “a kind of authorized biography rather than a true autobiography” (9) even though he reasons that “while the athletes may not write their books in the sense that they often lack the skills to craft them, their autobiographies are authentic because they are their stories” (11). Pipkin was writing in the context of autobiographies of American athletes. However, Duncan McDuie-Ra is critical of how her ‘successful’ life story was co-opted within the narrative of the Indian nation-state and of how she “has come to represent a Northeast that Indians can embrace,” while “figures such as dissident Irom Sharmila represent a Northeast that Indians wish to forget” (304). While I agree with McDuie-Ra when he speaks of the construction of Kom into a figure of “a national hero,” I am however wary of the way he discusses this construction—totally ignoring the violence, often gendered, associated with such a construction. The first problem I have is with the use of the term ‘hero’—which I see as an attempt to masculinize Kom. It is true that traditionally ‘boxing’ was considered a domain for men and the entry of women such as Kom has been successful in breaking the earlier stereotype. Still, when McDuie-Ra makes a gendered invocation of the figure of “a national hero,” he is actually, ‘unconsciously’ perhaps, feeding into the same stereotype. Further, McDuie-Ra claims that his arguments are based on how this figure of “a national hero” is constructed in her autobiography, apart from the role played by the national media. What he has ignored is the contradictions within the autobiography—the silences and fissures that indicate Kom’s ‘silent’ refusal to be constructed thus.

I begin with these sentences from the Prologue of her autobiography. The narrative begins with a description of her house. Kom describes it thus: “My house, a government quarter in Langol Games Village,16 is only a couple of hours from Kangathei village”17(1). She further describes this place which houses her residence
thus: “There are policemen standing outside the campus. They have big guns. It’s a common sight everywhere in Manipur. Both the policemen and the army men” (1). It is understood that she is presently the Superintendent of Police, and in this role, she cannot speak openly about state’s forces’ violence on the civilians. However, when she says that it is “a common sight” to have policemen and the army men “everywhere in Manipur,” she is indirectly hinting at the growing militarization of Manipur. Further, if we read more between the lines, the phrase “both the policemen and the army men” points to a dangerous liaison between these two groups of men with “big guns,” who are under the common ‘protective’ umbrella of AFSPA. By the time she was born in 1982, AFSPA was already in place in the entire state of Manipur. In spite of knowing about AFSPA, there is no direct invocation of this draconian act not even once in the autobiography. In addition, since 1982 to 2013, so many incidents of violence by the state’s armed forces on the civilians have been reported along with violence perpetrated by what she calls insurgents. Still, none of them are mentioned even as a passing reference in this autobiography, except in Chapter 7 titled “The other face of Manipur,” which shows the violence of ‘insurgency’ in Manipur culminating into the violent killing of her father-in-law by “unknown insurgents” (75). It is the only chapter that speaks of the violence in Manipur. This three-page chapter further gets spliced in the middle with a 12-page gallery containing a montage of photographs depicting her journey as a sportsperson interspersed with some family moments captured on camera. Each one of these photographs is accompanied by a caption. This splicing is significant. While it is ‘insurgency’ that has interrupted her life waking her up “to the reality of the world” around her (74), it is the pictures of her life that breaks the narrative of insurgency in her autobiography. I see this intervention as important. This rupture also functions as
a narrative strategy to introduce a moment of suspense. When she says that “one incident woke me [her] up to the reality of the world around me [her],” it tries to build an anticipation in the reader about what that “one incident” would be (74). The reader has to go through 12 coloured pages before getting to this incident. Immediately, after saying these lines, she talks about Manipur as “an insurgent-torn state since 1980s.” Then, she goes on to lists the prominent “militant groups” in Manipur namely, “NSCN-IM, NSCN-K, UNLF, and KNO” (74). Interestingly, she lists at least one “militant group” from the three dominant communities in Manipur. NSCN-IM and NSCN-K are Naga groups; UNLF is a Meitei group, while KNO is a Kuki group. She is critical of the parallel governments these groups run. She clearly speaks like a policewoman when she describes these parallel governments in these lines:

People who live in remote villages with no police or army security are the most vulnerable. Chiefs of villages are given demand letters, and if they fail to fulfil the militants’ wishes, they are kidnapped, very often never to return. Sometimes the demand is for supplies, at other times that the village should arrange recruits for one or the other organization. (74)

This is followed by the incident: the news on 27 December of the kidnapping of her father-in-law and later the recovery of his dead body. Here, she gets a first-hand experience of the violence in Manipur with her father-in-law’s assassination. She calls it the waking-up moment. It appears as if she has already decided on who are her allies would be. The Annexure 4 titled “A word about my sponsors” confirms her stand as she shows the Indian army in a different light here: “The immense contribution of the Army towards my academy is praiseworthy. The Army’s encouragement of sports and their overwhelming support continue to inspire me. I
remain thankful to them” (152). In fact, the journalist Kishalay Bhattacharjee is critical of Kom’s lack of interest with Sharmila’s cause. This makes him ask this question: “What makes our sportspersons so cagey about standing up against injustice when the common person can stick their neck out” (n.pag.). In Chapter 16, Kom talks about her encounter with the world of glamour and announces that the caption “Our Kom-commitment to the Nation” is her favourite from her photo shoot (127). This choice reflects the need on part of Kom to reiterate her loyalty to the Indian nation. When the national icon is asked to prove her commitment to the nation here, she does it by choosing an advertising caption that speaks of that commitment. This burden is also visible in Chapter 9 titled “The comeback.” In spite of the fact that “the people of the Northeast are often mocked in other parts of India” on account of their oriental looks and are called Nepalis, Chinkies, and names like ching-ching chong-chong, she insists that “whether or not” she looks “Indian,” she is “Indian” and she represents India, “with pride and all my [her] heart” (91). Writing in the context of Muslim boxers in Bengal, Payoshni Mitra talks about how sportspersons from minority communities in India are time and again compelled to prove their loyalty to the nation (184–45). Agreeing with Mitra’s observation, Supriya Chaudhuri also asserts that “Mary Kom is not a political activist” (1770). Chaudhuri even justifies Kom’s “distancing” as “part of the way in which sport, like art, operates in society.” Comparing Kom to other women activists in Manipur, Chaudhuri argues that “if other women in Manipur have used their bodies to protest the actions of the body politic, Mary Kom has chosen, through sport, to achieve measure of freedom and detachment from the political turmoil surrounding her” (1770). Thus, for Chaudhuri, “the boxer in the ring, absorbed in her discipline, needs to shut out the world, and concentrate on the ends of sport” (1770).
This pressure on the minority to prove their ‘nationalism’ is an evidence of the mediated nature of Kom’s autobiography as much as the silences and fissures are an interruption to this mediation. I begin by arguing that these silences and fissures reflect the mediated nature of her authorized autobiography. It appears as if the world of sports and the world that Kom’s family inhabit both are untouched by the violence in Manipur except when her father-in-law gets assassinated. I see this absence of references to the political violence against the civilians in Manipur in the autobiography as a result of the mediatedness of the autobiography. Kom fractures the mediation through strategic invocation of violence which begins from the Prologue itself. I have already shown how the prologue indirectly points to the rising militarization of Manipur and the dangerous nexus between the army men and the policemen in Manipur. It is not clear whether Kom supported AFSPA or she was against it, but her own personal experiences made her condone “insurgency.” Hence, she has one full chapter on how “the political problems” of Manipur made her family into “victims of insurgency” (75). Her story is the less documented story of civilians suffering violence at hands of the “insurgents.” Apart from the Prologue and Chapter 7, the political situation in Manipur gets one more mention in Chapter 3 titled “Playing too was hard work” when she talks about “bandhs and blockades” as “frequent occurrences in Manipur”—Manipur, which she thinks, is “politically sensitive and disturbed” (28). She brings this subject up to discuss her journey home to bring some rice before a bandh and the financial constrains she had to face while training at Sports Authority of India (SAI) branch at Imphal.

The construction of Kom as a ‘national hero,’ McDuie-Ra observes, entails the violent suppression of dissenting narratives be it the rejection of the ‘undesirable’ protest of Sharmila Irom or the refusal to link the exodus of Northeast people from
major cities in India in 2012 with racism. Also, there is a line of men who need to be credited in the making of this ‘national hero.’ Further, media’s initial reluctance to report on her first international win points to the fact that it did not consider women boxing as a serious sport or a news worthy of reporting. In fact, the world of women boxing at least in India is still dominated and controlled by men—be it the coaches, the selection committees, the sports associations, or even the Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur (International Boxing Association) (AIBA). Moreover, Onler, her husband, whom Kom claims to be very supportive of her sporting career, also had this to tell her when she discussed her plans to participate in the Olympic in 2016: “it’s extremely hard to raise two young boys [now it is three] and manage a home without a wife, and so I [Kom] should consider hanging up my [her] gloves” (129). These attitudes of all these men trying to control a woman’s sporting career resemble the views expressed by her first coach, Oja Ibomcha, in his reply to her when she approached him for the first time: “You are a small, frail girl. With your earrings, you don’t even look like a boxer. Boxing is for young boys” (31). The irony here is that their job here is to help women with boxing, yet they feel that it is still not a sport for women. Moreover, the influential people in Kom’s life who were pivotal in ‘making’ her were predominantly men be it Onler, her father, her father-in-law, her coaches, the members of selection committees, and members of AIBA. All of them share credit in the ‘making’ of the ‘national hero’—Mary Kom. In fact, all these men are trying to make a ‘man’ out of her so that she could excel in a sport that they considered ‘masculine.’

Simultaneously, McDuie-Ra also highlights how “gender shapes the figure of Mary at the national level” (312). According to him, Kom’s success in “the ‘masculine domain’ of boxing, while at the same time being a wife and mother, has
cast her as a ‘supermum’ and an inspiration to other Indian women to succeed in male-dominated aspects of life without sacrificing their reproductive roles” (312). Even Sonia Gandhi in her letter congratulating Kom on her Olympic win emphasizes on this maternal role of Kom as Gandhi writes: “I hope you are enjoying a happy reunion with your family and your adorable twin sons” (148).

Altogether, there are four instances where the violence in Manipur gets a sporadic yet short appearance in her autobiography: the Prologue, Chapter 7, Chapter 17 titled “My vision for future” where she wished to do something about the rise of violence against women in India, and Chapter 3. As I have mentioned earlier, in the prologue, the presence of the army is a reference to the rising militarization of Manipur. It also reveals the dangerous liaison between police and army in Manipur. Chapter 7 refers to Kom’s personal encounter with the political situation in Manipur. Here, she speaks of ‘insurgency’ yet she is silent about counterinsurgency and AFSPA. Interestingly, she names this chapter as “The other face of Manipur” and yet she is silent about the other side of the AFSPA story. It is just one side of the AFSPA story, which in spite of its silences, entails within it the other side of the story. In Chapter 17, she writes:

Violent crimes against women are on the rise in India—a phenomenon that I have been observing with alarm. I have been considering adapting my training in boxing to self-defence courses. Perhaps I can provide such courses for women, and not just in Manipur, in the future.” (137)

This is paradoxical as, on the one hand, she wishes to train women to fight against violent crimes against them. On the other hand, she does not extend her solidarity openly with women, such as ManoramaThangjam, who were victims of gendered
violence in Manipur. Thus, it problematizes the politics within the autobiography. Similarly, in Chapter 3, the short interlude about the bandhs in Manipur was a deliberate insertion on her part. It speaks of a violence that is so much part of the everyday life in Manipur. When she speaks of a mundane everyday incident, she cannot help but slip into and talk about the ‘other’ everyday—the everyday which her mediated autobiography has tried so far not to speak about. However, time and again, it surfaces sporadically even if it is for a very short while creating a space for an alternative ‘collective’ memory entailed in this individual rendition of Kom that questions the dominant narrative of the ‘making’ of a ‘national icon.’

IV

This section shows how the case of ‘Rani’ Gaidinliu provides a critique of the Pan Naga nationalist movement. It particularly interrogates her erasure from the ‘collective’ memory of the movement and instead read her struggle as an alternative site for ‘collective’ memory for the Heraka followers. Simultaneously, it also looks at the violent as well as gendered co-option of her life struggle into the nationalist narrative of Indian nation-state.

Born on January 26, 1915, at Longkao, Rongmei (Kabui) Naga village of Tamenglong district, Manipur, ‘Rani’ Gaidinliu was the fifth child of Lothonang (father) and Kocotlenliu (mother). After the execution of Hapau Jadonong in 1931, she continued his fight against the British rule to establish a ‘Naga Raj.’ However, she was defeated at the Battle of Hangrum (Assam) in 1932 resulting in her arrested and life imprisonment. In 1937, Jawaharlal Nehru met her in a jail in Shillong and conferred the title ‘Rani.’ He even appealed for her release to the British. She was released in 1947. She stayed in Vimrap village, Tuenseng, Nagaland, till she moved to

She was the “more famous follower and successor” of Jadonong under whom the Zeliangrong movement “was to be a challenge not only to the colonial power but also to an independent India, and to presage the later insurgent movements of the north east [sic]” (J. Parratt 44). Still, even after her significant contribution in the Naga nationalist movement, she is merely described as a subordinate to her guru and messiah Jadonong. In fact, because of its hostility towards Christianity, the militant Heraka or Araka movement she started in 1960s was not even recognized as nationalist by the Pan Naga nationalists.

According to Amit Kumar Nag quoting Ursula Graham Bower, the new religion founded by Jadonong and Gaidinliu was “a blend of Hinduism and Christianity, grafted on to a Naga Animist stock” (6). Hence, it became easy for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) to take it under its fold in the 1970s. A similar observation is also made by the scholar Arkotong Longkumer who has written extensively on the Heraka and Rani Gaidinliu. Another factor that brought the Heraka movement close to the VHP ideology was its anti-Christian stance. Already, an article in the Hindustan Times had rightly stated that “after independence, she [Gaidinliu] became Jawaharlal Nehru’s poster girl of the northeast” (n.pag.). Now in the present time, the Bharatiya Janata Party is trying to build her as ‘a regional icon’ putting her in league with the like of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Bengal and Rana Pratap of Rajasthan (Hindustan Times, n.pag.). An Indian Express news article headlines reads thus: “PM Narendra Modi honours legendary freedom fighter Rani Gaidinliu from North-East: Modi credited her with spreading the message of
Mahatma Gandhi in the North-East, thereby connecting the thoughts of the rest of India with the North-East” (n.pag.).

In 2015, the BJP government’s intention to build a museum-cum-library in her memory in Nagaland met with opposition from the local Christian civil societies. The Nagas are divided regarding Gaidinliu. Christian Nagas and organizations such as Nagaland Tribes Council are critical of her links with VHP, while the Heraka adherents and organizations such as Zeliangrong Heraka Association (ZHA) backed by the RSS (the militant wing of VHP) support her fully, including her religious stance (*Hindustan Times*, n.pag.). In between these two extremes is the Cachar Hills Tribes Synod of Haflong that openly states that “the Zeliangrong people regard Gaidinliu as a freedom fighter, but we do have reservations about her religious affinities” (*Hindustan Times*, n.pag.). Still, there are some missionaries who try to link Heraka with Christianity. They claim that it was “the church-inspired traits that went into establishing the first Heraka temple in the Zeliangrong region … 30 years ago” (*Hindustan Times*, n.pag.). However, the president of ZHA dissociates the Heraka movement from both Christianity and Hinduism. This contradiction is even evident in Longkumer who on the one hand says that “[t]he Heraka Movement had come into conflict with Naga nationalist groups who had been demanding the creation of a separate Naga state” even when he explains that it was only during the 1960s and 1970s (“Religion” 501). Simultaneously, on the other hand, in the following sentence, he adds that “[currently], the Zeme support the demand of ‘Greater Nagalim’” (501).

The case of the Naga leader Rani Gaidinliu exemplifies the danger of the conglomeration of the many conflicts of nationalisms in Manipur. The dominant Meitei Hindu nationalists marginalize her in the name of the ‘territorial integrity’ of
Manipur. She is the ‘other’ who has no place as an actor in the making of the history of Manipur which is now synonymous with the history of the predominantly Hindu Meiteis. Simultaneously, the Christian Pan Naga nationalists refuse to even acknowledge her as a nationalist on account of her anti-Christian Heraka movement. Finally, the Indian Hindu nationalists try to co-opt her as a representative figure from the Naga community of India’s Northeast who had contributed in the nationalist struggle of India against the colonial British rule.

Both the marginalization and the co-option are gendered in Rani Gaidinliu’s case. I have already shown how Meitei nationalism is ethnic in nature. It is also gendered as it has ignored the participation of the Meitei women. On a similar note, the Pan Naga nationalism is also gendered which frontalizes Muivah and Kaplang as leaders of the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K), respectively, while looking upon women collectives such as the Naga Mother’s Association and Tangkhul Shanao Long as merely a subordinate social or civil society organization as well as ignoring the contribution of women such as Rani Gaidinliu in the history of Naga struggle. Rani Gaidinliu’s struggle against the British rule along with her opposition to Christian missionary activities brings out in open a rather ‘uneasy’ side of the Christian Pan Naga nationalist movement. Her struggle thus represents a collective memory that the history of the Pan Naga nationalist movement wishes to forget. Hence, there are attempts for a violent erasure, often gendered, of what she stood to represent.

The co-option story is also gendered as it focuses mainly on her ‘passive’ imprisonment by the British. Further, it feeds into the ‘masculine fantasy narratives’ of the ‘male’ nationalists such as Nehru who have a ‘masculine’ duty to ‘rescue or save’ her from the male colonizers. Recently, while attempting to revive her as a
regional icon representing the Naga community in the narrative of Indian nationalist struggle, what has been ignored is her repeated demand for the creation of a separate Zeliangrong administrative unit. Both in its erasure and in its co-option, the figure of Rani Gaidinliu along with her struggle thus becomes a site of collective memory for the Zeliangrong group, however divided they are, and refuses both the attempts of the three opposing gendered nationalisms.

The collective memory invoked by the followers of Heraka movement is divided even when it interrupts the linear histories of various nationalisms within and outside Manipur. In narratives of such a remembering, she is rendered agency-less even when the narratives speak up for her own struggle. In such a discourse, she is written and spoken about but never allowed to speak for herself, except when her speech is made to ventriloquize the position of the narratives within which she makes an appearance. She is reduced to a ‘subaltern’ figure whose voice is muted and rendered unheard by all the nationalist players wrestling in the arena of Manipur’s politics.

It is here that I look at Rani Gaidinliu’s notebooks which give voice to her and resist the subalternity imposed on her. J. P. Mills describe her notebooks thus:

Magic books of the sorceress Gaidiliu [sic] captured with her other property in March 1932. The writing is apparently nothing but meaningless scribbling. She is a Kabui girl of no education at all and taught herself to scribble. Her ‘literary’ power gave her immense prestige and she used to send written messages to her adherents – with verbal messages to say what they meant. (Mills qtd. in Longkumer, Reforms 99)
J.H. Hutton in his correspondence with the British philosopher Carveth Read discusses about a “curious case of the ‘child authoress’” thus:

There is a girl who produces sheets of scribblings representing the names of natural objects at the dictation of 10 familiar spirits, six male and four female. There is no doubt but this child, aged about 7, is very much in earnest. She got her mother to obtain writing materials from Kohima at the dictation of the spirits that reside in her and when they arrived fasted seven days of her own accord as a preliminary genna [no-working days—associated with taboos] before beginning to write. (Hutton qtd. in Longkumer, “Lines” 129)

Longkumer is critical of Read’s response to Hutton reproduced below:

Your letter about the inspired child who spoils so much writing paper has lain too long unanswered. … Amongst ourselves it is a common occurrence for a child to announce its intention of “writing,” and to do so upon every scrap of paper obtainable for some time. But that is plainly imitativeness, and there is no claim to inspiration. This Naga girl cannot have got the idea of writing out of her own consciousness: She must have seen it done or heard it described. She may deny this (I suppose) without intentional deceit. As to the 4 female and 6 male spirits that direct her, does the local belief in “possession” account for such a delusion? … What the local belief in possession is I don’t know. If it will explain her delusion, that is enough. That the girl should have undertaken to write without any knowledge of what it is to “write,” is impossible; and she herself, therefore, is logically non-existant [sic]. (Hutton qtd. in Longkumer, “Lines” 129)
Longkumer senses a “philosophical arrogance” with Read who “equates ‘writing’ with a particular kind of learned technique” and “anything outside this realm” is dismissed (Longkumer, “Lines” 131). Longkumer cites the example of this girl and the correspondence between Hutton and Read to show that “‘writing’ of this kind was known to exist in the region [India’s Northeast]” in order to explain the scribbling on Rani Gaidinliu’s notebooks (131). Even Longkumer in his early writing had dismissed her notebooks as “some pages had writing that resembled the Meitei (the language used in Manipur) and Bengali alphabets while other pages had seemingly random lines, circles, and drawings” (Longkumer, Reform 98 qtd. in Longkumer, “Lines” 131). This made Longkumer previously conclude that “overall, the writing was very cryptic” and “they represent a form of ‘literary power’ that was probably based on imitation influenced by the colonial state” (131). Later on, he traces the journey of her notebooks which were “confiscated in 1932 by British administrators and donated to the museum” and recent returned around 2005 by the Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford) to the Zeme Naga\textsuperscript{24} of Assam, India (“Lines” 123–24). He also argues that the textuality of the notebooks requires “one to examine the notebooks in relation to the unfolding of the kingdom (Zeme: heguangram), using notion of textuality […] grounded in dreams, prophecy, songs, and visions” (123). He also emphasizes that “to appreciate the value and purpose of the notebooks, one must pay attention to the sonority of sound that manifests the words of the notebooks in song” (123), while simultaneously describing them as “untranslatable” (124). The colonial confiscation and the postcolonial return of her notebooks entails the return of a ‘collective memory’ which the British colonizers attempted to hide. Longkumer describes the confiscation thus: “Intriguingly, it could also suggest that he [Mills] took the power of Gaidinliu and the notebooks seriously: to prevent the spread of her influence, the
action by Mills forever imprisoned the notebooks, rendering them dormant in the colonial museum” (129). This comment was made in the context of the absence of any scholarship on the notebooks by Longkumer (129). In contrast, Longkumer sees the return of the notebooks as the fulfillment of a “prophecy” that is linked with the establishment of heguangram (the kingdom of the Heraka)\(^{25}\) (126).

I now focus on one of the untranslatable Heraka songs translated by Longkumer and attributed to Rani Gaidinliu, *Cheham Rani*. According to Longkumer, this song was received by her on her first journey to Bhuban Cave\(^{26}\) (Longkumer, *Reforms* 186). The song which Longkumer observes is clearly about “resistance and victory” is reproduced below:

When will God let us be free?
Even if others trouble us
I’ll live free like a heguang
If other people dominate us
We can also dominate them
We can’t overcome them by ourselves
But by the blessing of Herawang [king of gods] from the beginning
Now you are victorious
But by the blessing of Herawang, we’ll be victors
Everybody calls on God
They call on Ram and we call on Herawang
And we can’t stop calling Herawang
To rid us of a bad god, we can’t stop praying to Herawang

(Longkumer, Reforms 186)
Longkumer aptly writes that “[t]he song also speaks of continuity, of a certain direction, as history comes through their voices and songs” (Reforms 187). For him, “[t]his history [of the Heraka] is embedded in the ‘Hangrum Parade,’ a nostalgic reminder of the time when Ranima [Rani Gaidinliu] and her soldiers hid from the British and later the Indian army and other Naga Christian nationalists, who saw her movement as conniving with the devil” (187). Longkumer further adds that “the ‘Hangrum Parade’ is also a reminder of a nascent nationalism” (187). This nascent nationalism is against all forms of totalizing nationalisms be it of the Britishers, the Indians, or the Naga Christians.

If, on the one hand, the Pan Naga nationalist movement rejects her in totality as she has no place in their ‘collective’ memory; then, on the other hand, in an attempt to posit her as a regional icon representing the Naga struggle in the narrative of Indian nationalist movement, the Indian nation-state have only accepted that part of her which makes no demand for the sovereignty of the Zeliangrong group. Her repeated demand for the creation of a separate Zeliangrong administrative unit still falls on deaf ear, even after her death. Here, attempts are made to revive another ‘collective’ memory of hers which fits into the national narrative of India. Both in its erasure and in co-option, Rani Gaidinliu’s struggle reflected in research by scholars such as Longkumer and in Rani Gaidinliu’s own songs from her notebooks thus become a site of ‘collective’ memory for the Zeliangrong group, however divided they are, and refuses both the attempts of the two opposing nationalisms.
Conclusion

Each of these women is articulating their own ideas of memories, often collective, from their own unique locations. The legal battle over Manorama’s raped body throws into relief a very pertinent question about nationalism—about who can or should define nationalism. The two opposing camps for different reasons have erased her from the very history of struggle in which she was a participant. Rose’s suicide note and its invocation provide an alternative site of struggle against the atrocities committed in the name of AFSPA. Her suicide notes lend agency to Rose, allowing her to assume a position of authority and to refute the official as well as dominant versions of her death. Along with the struggle of Rani Gaidinliu, Rose’s suicide note critiques the gendered Pan Naga nationalism in Manipur. The gaps and fissures in Kom’s ‘collaborative’ authorized autobiography in its mediatedness tells an alternative narrative, invoking a collective memory of Mary Kom which is different from the one valorised in the national media. The silences in the autobiography speak of the gendered violence that accompanied the making of a national icon called Mary Kom. It shows how Kom has turned a co-option story back to itself with a clever deployment of silences that speak and speech that points back to silences. Kom’s autobiography silently resists the gendered violence of the imposition of the tag of a ‘national hero’ on her, while Rani Gaidinliu struggles against both erasure from the Pan Naga nationalist movement and co-option into the Indian nationalist movement. All these sites of ‘collective’ memory in their own respective context reiterates Anne McClintock’s observation that: “All nationalisms are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous—dangerous … in the sense that they represent relations of political power and to the technologies of [gendered] violence” (352).
Still, these sites of memory attempt to provide an alternative to such a gendered history of gendered nationalisms in Manipur.

Works Cited


1 Also spelled as Gaidinlui. However, for consistency, I have used Gaidinliu throughout unless it is in quotation or in titles of already published works.
2 A women’s collective formed around the 1970s predominantly from Meitei community. For details, see my paper titled “Fiction or History in the Making of the Past: A Dialogue between the Public and the Private in Maharaja Kumari Binodini Devi’s *Boro Sahib Ongbi Sanatombi* (The Princess and the Political Agent).”
3 A problematic claim is made by her family by refusing any link between Manorama and the ‘nationalist’ struggle in Manipur. Here, her erasure from the movement starts from her family itself. However, it can be justified that the family has adopted this strategic denial, which would otherwise feed into the army’s case of vilifying Manorama as a criminal and hence justifying their killing of her.
4 A correction: According to the forensic report it was found in her petticoat not skirt.
5 The AFSPA gives the armed forces wide powers to shoot, to kill, arrest on flimsy pretext, conduct warrantless searches, and demolish structures in the name of ‘aiding civil power.’ Equipped with these special powers, soldiers have raped, tortured, ‘disappeared,’ and killed Indian citizens for five decades without fear of being held accountable” (Working Group on Human Rights 5).
6 Due to issue of copyright, the photograph could not be reproduced here. However, two versions of this photograph are used in the photo-montage used in her memorial event since 2013.
7 This photograph also could not be reproduced here because of copyright issue. Another version of this photograph is used in the photo-montage of 2013 onwards.
8 Because of issues of copyright and considering the graphic nature of violence depicted, this photograph is not reproduced here.
9 Another term used by the eighteenth-century German dramatist and critic, Gotthold Lessing. The term ‘pregnant moment’ (“otherwise known as *peripateia*—from the Greek, meaning ‘dramatic moment’ or sudden change of fortune”) is “the instant when the future of the story will be determined; the moment of ‘anticipation’ when the story is in the process of being decided” (Bate 56).
10 In this paper, I have used collective memory synonymously with collective remembering.
11 Symptomatic of the Christianization of the Tangkhul community of Manipur.
12 Gang rape involves a spectacle as much as her rape is a spectacle to the elders.
13 How the Naga nationalist movement is gendered is discussed in the section on Rani Gaidinliu.
I have discussed the gendered nature of the Meitei nationalist history in detail in another paper by me titled “Fiction or History in the Making of the Past: A Dialogue between the Public and the Private in Maharaja Kumari Binodini Devi’s *Boro Sahib Ongbi Sanatombi* (The Princess and the Political Agent).”

The Kom community straddles between the conflicting demands by both Naga and Zo groups to assimilate them as one of their own.

The venue of the XXX National Games held in Imphal in 1999. This complex was built to house the participants from rest of India.

A village in Moirang district where Kom grew up.

She was writing in the context of modern boxing and its modern and postmodern literary representations.

Literally, ‘sir’ or ‘madam’ (*Ojai*): a courteous address for a teacher.

A Kabui prophet who inaugurated the Jadonong movement. During the Kuki rebellion against “the raising of a labour corps for the First World War,” the worst sufferers were the Kabuis, the Tangkhuls, and the Koms (J. Parratt 42–43). J. Parratt saw the violence during the Kuki rebellion as “one of the factors which brought about the Jadonong movement” (44). Even though, this movement was an attempt to seek “a common political identity as Zeliangrong,” J. Parratt contends that the movement had “deep religious roots” (44–45).

Zeliangrong clans—comprising of the Rongmeis or Kabuis of Manipur, the Zemeis of Cachar, Assam, and Liangmeis of Nagaland.


Religion does play a role is the hill–valley divide in Manipur but it was not the only motivational force behind the conflict. The conflict was rather mainly over land and territory. The qualifiers “Hindu” and “Christian” are thus merely descriptive and definitional.

Followers of Heraka.

In Zeme, “*heguangram*” means *heguang* (a state of freedom or ‘one who is the agent of this freedom’), while ram literally refers to a village or community having territorial connotations” (Longkumer, *Reforms* 160 qtd. in Longkumer, “Line” 126).

A sacred cave of the Heraka.

“A ritual of the *heguangram*” commemorating the martyrs of Hangrum, one of the Zeme village in Assam (Longkumer, *Reforms* 167).
Esra Mirze Santesso:

Problematizing the Hyphen: Disorientation and Doubled Otherness in Fatih Akin’s *Head-On*
For some time, postcolonial and diaspora studies have expressed a deep and occasionally uncritical enthusiasm for “hybridity”, first as a form of existence that undermined imperial power and authority, and later as a new form of subjectivity—a form that can upset the various binaries surrounding “otherness.”

The idea of hybridity as a challenge to essentialist understandings of identity has become a trope in numerous films about globalization, migration, and transnationalism, though other authors and filmmakers have been more skeptical about hyphenated and hybrid identities as a way forward, particularly when the subjects in question are “doubly othered” (i.e. by race and religion, or by religion and gender). Drawing on critical notions including diaspoetics and disorientation, this essay looks at Fatih Akin’s 2004 film, Head-On, as a challenge to the notion that hybridity solves the problem of otherness, and indeed to the notion that hybridity is even possible. The film, lauded upon its release, has, I argue, gained additional significance because of the accuracy of its more pessimistic predictions about the future of pluralism and hybrid Turkish identities.

**Guest Workers and the Politics of Inclusion**

*Gastarbeiter,* the guest-worker program established by a number of European states (Germany, Belgium, Austria, the Netherlands, as well as the Scandinavian nations) to boost national economies and rebuild depleted infrastructures after World War II, has an ambivalent place in the Western imagination. Even though it is broadly understood that this arrangement provided a much-needed stimulus, some view it as the beginning of Europe’s “invasion” by foreigners. As it became apparent that the “guests” (consisting mostly of a young labor force arriving from poorer nations) would be a permanent addition to the population, the question of inclusion generated profound political rifts, reinforcing binary oppositions between “native” and “alien”, “self” and “other”, “East” and “West”, “Islam” and “Christianity”. A particularly vexed relationship existed between German nationals and Turkish immigrants, who started settling in ethnic ghettos in metropolitan centers. In no time, the Turkish laborer came to personify Europe’s larger apprehensions about foreign infiltration; in Levent Soysal’s words, “[a]s guest workers are progressively rendered into symbolic foreigners, in an inverse movement to the
normalization of their status, the foreigner has assumed the guise of the Turk” (Soysal 500). The Turk, taking on the position of the abject, symptomized an identity crisis prompted by the shifting significations of “home”: as the “host land” transformed into the “homeland”, anxieties stirred among Turkish immigrants, who feared being stuck in an interminable state of *gurbet* (exile) while some German nationals began to complain of *Überfremdung* (over-foreignization) — best exemplified in Max Frisch’s words: “We called for labor, but people came instead” (Mandel 51).

*Gastarbeiter* ended in 1973; today there are approximately 2.7 million residents of Turkish origin in Germany (King and Kilinc 126). It took another decade or two for the “Turk” to be transformed from a commoditized migrant worker to a legitimate member of society; this shift not only required re-imagining German identity (during the 1980s and 90s) in a multicultural context, but also adopting a new level of religious tolerance towards a faith group thought to be antithetical to the values of modern, progressive European society. Integration debates became even more contentious in the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7 as Islam came to be seen as a direct threat to national security. Soysal makes the following observations:

In public, popular, and scholarly discourses, Turkish migrants appear, at best, as relentless advocates of revitalized Turkishness or Islam, or, at worst, as essentially unassimilable agents of foreignness. Furthermore, this attribution of radical otherness, in cultural or ethnic variety, sets the migrants apart from public spaces in their country of residence, renders their participation invisible, and presents their situation as anomie. (493)

Many reporting agencies throughout Europe (OSCE, Runnymede Trust) spotted a rise in Islamophobia after the terrorist attacks. This marked another shift in the symbolic reception of the Turk; no longer the emblem of the abject, the Turk was now stigmatized as the active, radical Islamist, posing a real and imminent security threat. Tahir Abbas observes that in the West,
Muslim cultures are seen as monolithic; Islamic cultures are substantially different from other cultures; Islam is perceived as implacably threatening; Islam’s adherents use their faith to political or military advantage; Muslim criticism of Western cultures and societies is rejected out of hand; the fear of Islam is mixed with racist hostility to immigration; and Islamophobia is assumed to be natural and unproblematic. (12)

As Ayhan Kaya observes, German media has fueled these views: the 1997 issue of Der Spiegel characterized young Turks as “criminals” and “fundamentalists” (Kaya 230). Perhaps in an ironic way, the failure to view the Turk as a “normal” German and instead as the irreducible racial/religious other exposed the limits of liberal democracies in the West.

For the Turkish immigrant, the triangulation of Turkish, German, and Muslim identities—no matter how unstable these categories might be—necessitated a rethinking of national belonging, racial heritage, and religious membership. Some critics have pointed out that the first wave of migrants understood their position as outcasts, and were satisfied with the prospect of achieving “a degree of economic integration and becom[ing] upwardly mobile, without homogenizing culturally” (Benmayor and Skotnes 2-3). In this regard, they identified for themselves a two-fold mission: to participate in the German economy while preserving their cultural roots, and prepare for a return home by educating their (German-born) children about their heritage. By contrast, second-generation immigrants grew up to be relatively receptive to cultural exchange but they also understood that their interaction with the host nation would be regarded as a betrayal of their origins by the older generation. The role of Islam in this balancing act became increasingly important. Moving from a Muslim homeland in the 1970s and 80s (one where public expressions of religion were prohibited: the Turkish constitution guaranteed a secular public sphere) to a more lenient Western state (which legally guarantees freedom of religious expression even when remaining socially suspicious of Islamic practices) opened up fresh prospects in the process of self-fashioning.
According to Mandel (2008), the comparatively moderate implementation of secularism in Germany engendered a more stringent observation of Islam within the Turkish migrant community. In a way, Islam provided a sense of belonging to immigrants occupying a minority position within a Christian-oriented national space. Mandel furthermore states that for many Turks, reconfiguration of identity in a non-secular diasporic context “may have been partly a reaction to the fear of an unfamiliar Christian culture that might threaten their own and their children’s attachments to their homeland, culture, and religion, but also a reaction to a newly discovered freedom of religious expression offered by liberal German society.” (7). An abiding sense of nostalgia, coupled with a desire for counter-identification with the host culture, led the members of the diasporic community to perform their foreignness in an exaggerated way, and indeed to become not just Turkish nationalists but proud Islamists. For many immigrants, Turkishness and Islam became synonymous as they publicly re-affirmed their roots.

During this tumultuous process, the cultural production of the Turkish migrant community became increasingly visible, and eventually created an important niche market in the literary and cinematic fields. We can understand German-Turkish cultural work as experiencing three basic phases: the initial phase consisted of the labor story of first generation immigrants, which shed light on their severe alienation from German culture. A new type of writing emerged in the mid-1980s that advocated acceptance by focusing on “culture and identity stories,” paving the path towards a “normalization of [foreigner] status” (Soysal 497, 500). From the late 1990s, there occurred a transnational turn in immigrant writing and film, which “disrupt[ed] the hegemony of prosaic labor-culture stories” (Soysal 504). These new productions moved beyond the victimization narrative of the Turk, and looked for new forms of expression to examine the legacy as well as the challenges of what I will shortly argue is a “doubly othered” Turkish-German identity.

Fatih Akin’s Head-On
It is within this historical context that I would like to pursue a critical reading of Head-On (*Gegen die Wand*, 2004), directed by the Turkish-German filmmaker, Fatih Akin. The film participates in diaspora poetics by using specific tropes of displacement. In doing so, it presents a highly complex critique of a hyphenated subjectivity based on dual allegiance. Furthermore, the film uses the Turkish-German community to illustrate Turkey’s liminal position within Europe and reflect on the political resistance against Turkey’s membership in the European Union. (At the time, Turkey was preparing to make a bid for membership in the European Union). Born in Hamburg to Turkish immigrant parents, Akin routinely explores Turkish-German identity and addresses the quandaries of hyphenated subjectivity, as evident in films including *Short Sharp Shock* (*Kurz und Schmerzlos*, 1998), *Kebab Connection* (2004), and *Edge of Heaven* (*Auf der anderen Seite*, 2007). Nezih Erdoğan attributes Akin’s success to his “double consciousness as a diasporic Turk living and working in Germany, his transnational existence as a filmmaker and his contested national and cultural belonging” (27). In an interview, Akin acknowledges his liminality, stating “[w]e are brought up in two cultures, we are the new Germans” (qtd. in Fachinger 244). In this regard, Akin transcends his artistic purpose, and takes on the role of a “political ambassador” whose cinematic vision seeks to transform the monolithic representation of Turkish culture—both at home and abroad (Erdoğan 35).

It is no surprise, therefore, that both countries were quick to cast him as a national prodigy, whose dual vision enriched and supplanted both cinematic traditions: he was credited with the revitalization of German cinema in a transnational context: “the new German film is ‘Turkish’ and that ‘Turkish’ cultural film production has the potential of salvaging ‘German’ culture” (Fachinger 245). Likewise, he was recognized as an innovator in Turkey for re-inventing the “melodramatic modalities” of Yeşilçam (the metonym for the Turkish film industry). Many applauded him for moving away from the commercially-driven cinematic productions aimed at Turkish audiences to more sophisticated transnational trends, oriented towards global spectators. As Savas Arslan contends, “Unlike Yeşilçam, the new cinema of Turkey is no longer limited by a narrowly defined notion of ‘Turkishness.’ Instead [Akin’s films] are representative
examples of the many different strands and facets of Turkey’s new, globalized and diversified film culture” (95). It is precisely the “globalized and diversified” aspect of Akin’s films that makes them relevant to discussions of Turkey’s EU membership, thus promoting as well as critiquing the idea of a Eurasian identity as a possible amalgamation of East and West.

Head-On, the recipient of the Golden Bear at Berlinale (2004), brilliantly captures the “the changing dynamics of German-Turkish identity” (Suner 16). Indeed, the complex depiction of the immigrant experience acts as a counter-narrative to the traditional flattened experiences of the abject Turk. The film focuses on the unconventional love story between Cahit Tomruk (Birol Ünel), a middle-aged punk-rocker who makes a living by collecting empty bottles at bars, and Sibel Güner (Sibel Kekilli), the daughter of a conservative Turkish family living in Hamburg. The two protagonists exemplify the emergence of a new consciousness among young Turks in Germany, more sympathetic to the host culture, and disgruntled with the policing efforts of the minority community that impedes their desire for cultural exchange. The lovers meet at a rehabilitation center after their attempts at suicide: Cahit is admitted for driving into a wall, head on, and Sibel cuts her wrists habitually. Upon meeting Cahit, Sibel boldly proposes marriage after enquiring if she is Turkish. Although Sibel’s pushiness seems comical at first, her increasing irritation—which escalates to another episode of slashing herself after Cahit’s numerous refusals—reveals the level of her desperation. Sibel’s insistence on marrying Cahit is a symptom of her inability to remain within the patriarchal structure of her family, and more importantly, to be reduced to an emblem of the family’s good standing and reputation within the community. Cahit eventually gives in and to control his rebellious daughter, Sibel’s religious father consents to the unusual marriage; even though Cahit is not a particularly desirable bachelor (older, barely-employed, no strong family connections), the fact that he is a Turk makes him an acceptable groom.

Of course, Sibel’s subversion hides an elusive paradox, in that she is only freeing herself from the constraints of her family by giving in to their impositions. In “Putting
Obstructions in Young Turks’ Way,” the German-born Turkish essayist, Ayse makes the following point:

[These young Turkish girls] have no qualifications and no profession. Even though they don’t want to spend the rest of their lives in chastity and in prison, moving out of their parents’ home to live on their own is out of the question, even if it were financially possible. (244)

At first, Cahit and Sibel imagine their marriage as a sham, a way to escape community pressure; gradually, however, they realize that their solution holds its own complications. By entering, however superficially, into a marriage, both Cahit and Sibel symbolically conform to the rules of the community. To their own surprise, they find themselves performing the stereotypical roles prescribed by the husband-wife relationship: Sibel assumes the role of a care-taker while Cahit becomes an exasperated husband who acts as a bodyguard, rescuing her from awkward situations when she picks up strangers at bars. In time, the independence they hope to gain through their mock marriage is overshadowed by an actual intimacy that develops between the two. Yet as Cahit’s indifference turns into affection, Sibel fears that the possibility of falling in love with her legal husband will undermine her struggle to break free from her community. However, just as Sibel begins to warm up to Cahit, Cahit gets into a fight with a young German man who accuses him of being Sibel’s pimp. The provocation resonates with Cahit and in a moment of rage, he attacks and kills the man with a broken bottle, and faces twenty years in prison for manslaughter. Visiting him in his cell, Sibel vows that she will wait for his release. However, because the incident carries the stigma of a jealousy killing, she is immediately ostracized by her family and community. Her father burns all her pictures while her brother attacks her in the street for shaming their family name. Sibel’s only option is to flee her family by heading to Istanbul, to take refuge with her cousin.

I argue that this film is relevant to larger analyses of the phenomenon of what I have elsewhere called “disorientation”, a temporary disruption of identity that is caused by the confusion, alienation, and instability felt by the Muslim immigrant in the West—
regardless of one’s level of religiosity. It is much to Akin’s credit that in his dealings with
diasporic identity he moves away from the familiar narrative, based on a simple binary of
assimilation and rejection. Rather than presenting the clash of Turkish and German
cultures as the sole genesis of an identity crisis, he focuses on the pressures within the
minority community itself to represent the nuances in attitudes towards integration. In
this way, he presents a dialogic exploration of the predicaments faced by second-
generation German-born Turks who experience a marked psycho-social disorientation
because of their inability to balance the public sphere of their experience (national life),
and the private sphere (diasporic life): they are neither German enough due to their racial
difference, nor Turkish enough due to their cultural assimilation; hence they remain
outside both these seemingly irreconcilable ways of life.

Diaspoetics, Disorientation, and the Challenges of the Hyphen
Postcolonial studies has provided a critical forum to explore the upshot of crossing
borders—especially as it relates to the cosmopolitanization of the post-imperial space as a
result of mass migrations. For Sudesh Mishra, movement across borders has given rise to
a new type of study that he calls “diaspoetics”:

The genre of diaspora criticism […] sustains itself by recognising and repeating
certain methodological manoeuvres derived from contemporary theory […] by
recruiting and transforming a quasi-biblical description—diaspora—into a
modern critical practice; and by staging a series of statements about traveling
communities that, in a sly combinatory manner, surpass all the previous orders of
bearing witness to migratory events and mobile subjects. (13-4)

Mishra describes three significant “scenes of exemplification” that defines diaspoetics:
“scene of dual territoriality” (separate terrains that produces a split subject), “scene of
situational laterality” (“a double movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization”
(17), and “scene of archival specificity” (individualized histories that replace idealized
scenarios). Drawing on Mishra’s formulation of diaspoetics, I contend that these three
stages articulate a general sense of “disorientation”, a confused apathy caused by the
inability to navigate skilfully between different—often contradictory—value systems. In *Head-On*, German-born Turkish immigrants exemplify the way disorientation works as form of psychic paralysis caused by doubled otherness: second-generation immigrants, in other words, are doubly othered – by the majority culture as well as the diasporic community. Disorientation exposes a type of abeyance, a raw reaction to the double liminality experienced by the other, which induces a disruption of identity. This disruption gives way to a weakened sense of self, and an inability to act rationally or to act at all.

Both Sibel and Cahit are disoriented characters because of their inability to wrestle with the “negotiation of ethnicity and gender within the Turkish-German context” (Fachinger 254). Cahit willingly distances himself from the diasporic community as a way to cast off his Turkishness, which he finds inhibiting. His inarticulate Turkish raises concerns during his visit to Sibel’s family to ask her hand in marriage; when Sibel’s brother asks him why his Turkish is weak, Cahit simply remarks that he threw it away. Although Cahit has no specific obstacle to reconciling German values with his Turkish background, the death of his first wife haunts him in a way that destroys his *raison d'être*. His day-to-day living reflects a complete state of apathy.

By contrast, Sibel aspires to live life to the fullest even if that means going against the wishes of her parents. However, her gendered otherness creates further complications for her quest for independence; she understands that severing her ties with her father will automatically lead to her being ostracized by the Turkish community. As Nawal El Saadawi (1977) reminds us, in conservative Muslim societies, young women represent their families through their modest conduct; women’s bodies, in that sense, becomes a mechanism through which the families are surveilled and tested, and controlling their de-sexualized daughters ironically allows the family to find a marriage match. Saadawi further explains that “Ignorance about the body and its functions in girls and women is considered a sign of purity, honor and good morals and if, in contrast, a girl does know anything about sex and about her body, it is considered something undesirable and even shameful” (67). As a disoriented member of a minority group whose actions are closely
scrutinized, Sibel is unable to reconcile her cultural obligations and personal aspirations. Her efforts to gain autonomy and to escape from the confines of her secluded life are constantly sabotaged. Ayse’s insights are once again helpful here: “Everything that wasn’t Turkish was rejected as outright bad. To live like Germans was out of the question, because the German girls, in their opinion, were whores who would give themselves to anyone” (“Women are Property” 242). In this highly patriarchal, repressive community (her brother breaks her nose after she talks to a German boy), Sibel knows that her survival depends upon safeguarding her public image as an obedient, submissive woman—and that is precisely why she sees a way out with Cahit. Only when the father transfers his authority to the husband can the daughter leave the house with her honor intact; in this way, the family structure—the only defense against the corruption of the outside world—ostensibly continues to protect the traditionally-accepted gender roles and integrity of the Muslim family. Sibel is content to create the illusion of her “purity” and chastity by participating in a fake marriage.

However, in their disoriented state, both Cahit and Sibel have trouble navigating the effects of their newly-combined hyphenated identities. “A hyphen,” writes Azade Seyhan, “simultaneously separates and connects, contests and agrees” (15). As a subject position, hyphen both opens up possibilities but also limits options—since each adjustment is defined against a set of cultural positions designated by the hyphen. Therefore, the hyphen can “divide[…] and weaken […] the logic of adaptability and resourcefulness” (76). The antagonistic alignment of the sides suggests a constant competition that enhances otherness rather than eradicating it. As Akin’s characters illustrate, it becomes difficult to pursue a fully-reconciled doubleness under community pressure. This point is illustrated vividly in the film: while having an argument on a bus, Cahit and Sibel are thrown out of the vehicle by a much older bus driver (who happens to be Turkish, and who overhears their private conversation); he declares that he cannot tolerate “bastards like [them] who have no respect for their God and religion.” This public humiliation and rejection by other Turks illustrates the actual heterogeneity of a seemingly monolithic diasporic identity. Here, Cahit and Sibel appear as a minority group within a minority community. By highlighting the differences and tensions within the
diasporic community, Akin shows how failure to balance these value-systems can generate a level of paranoia, leading to self-abuse and destruction—as we see with the suicide attempts of the two protagonists. Cahit and Sibel are ultimately unrepresentable within their own communities. As a consequence, they move into a new form of disaffected subjectivity, one which is based on subversion (of race and gender) and counter-identification (with diasporic and national cultures).

Normally, the process of self-fashioning inspired by the scene of situational laterality is imagined to fuel hybridity as a form of cultural amalgamation. Defined as “the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations,” hybridity embraces in-betweenness as a positive influence in the reconstruction of the diasporic self (Bhabha 9). Homi Bhabha has been instrumental in advocating hybridity as a discursive practice that helps construct a renewed sense of self. Describing hybridity as a creative interchange between two modes of existence, Bhabha envisions it as “the sign of productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities” invested in “the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (112). Similarly, Stuart Hall elaborates on “in-betweenness” as a site of empowerment:

The diaspora experience […] is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, though transformation and difference. (qtd. in Nyman 24)

For these critics, hybridity’s challenge to purity, authenticity, and homogenisation is invaluable. Indeed, this “grafting” of identities has become a measuring tool to assess the success or failure of a postcolonial text, with its facility in promoting in-betweenness becoming the most important paradigm for self-awareness.

However, this default position has been challenged by many “insider” authors and filmmakers, who clearly view the immigrant experience in “less teleological ways”
(Santesso 17). To put it differently, to argue that hybridity and hybrid consciousness are the natural end-points of the immigrant experience, and the innate subject of immigrant narratives, is to depend upon an understanding of identity as something that can easily be blurred. In *Head-On*, Akin recognizes hyphenation as complex and potentially rewarding; however, he is not naïve about its instantaneous promise for attaining hybridity. As he demonstrates via Cahit and Sibel, the subject’s need to be appropriated “into a multidimensional set of radical discontinuous realities” creates a “fragmented and schizophrenic decentering [of the self]” that eventually results in disengagement (Jameson 413). In the film, both protagonists reveal the difficulties, and perhaps the impossibility, of maintaining a balance between—or blurring of—the two sides of the hyphen that can lead towards hybridity. The reason for this is precisely what Hall had previously discussed in terms of the sense of “a primary origin” that causes the subject to lose the flexibility of moving in between positions and he identifies the loss of that original influence as essential for the emergence of a flexible identity (Chen 394). This is the heart of the problem for the second-generation immigrant: to put an end to their marginalization, the young immigrants have to engage in a bicultural dialogue, yet the equilibrium between those two cultures is difficult to maintain when one is constantly haunted by “a primary origin”—as we see in the case of Cahit and Sibel. For them, it is impossible to think and act since their hyphenated identity rests predominantly on a mediated, rather than an experienced, sense of Turkishness that privileges the values of the diasporic community. Unable to discard this primary origin, the two of them fall victim to an ontological paradox: they need the presence of the older generation to understand their inescapable Turkishness, but they also have to break free from the constraints of their diasporic community to gain the autonomy needed for a true understanding of the self. This conceptualization of identity dramatically deviates from the hybridity model, often presented as a beneficial consequence of postcolonial border-crossing.

We see a brief sliver of hope when the sham marriage between Cahit and Sibel unexpectedly regenerates their faith in camaraderie, ultimately becoming an antidote for the depression and self-destructive tendencies that emerge out of a doubly-othered,
disoriented life. Neither of them is interested in changing the world, or even in satisfying the basic demands of their two societies. All they really want is to forget the meaninglessness of their lives, put some distance between themselves and their restricting communities, and end their disorientation by embracing their individual desires. Their fake marriage, ironically, becomes the only real thing in their artificial and closely controlled lives. However, their miscalculations about autonomy eventually cause their relationship to become more of a curse than a salvation. Their self-destructive tendencies shatter their faith in the possibility of venturing beyond the hyphen and achieving re-orientation.

**The Return Narrative**

The question of disorientation takes a new turn when it is discussed in the context of going back to the Turkish homeland: by exploring this option, Akin simultaneously calls attention to the differences between Turkish-Germans (referred to by Turkish nationals as “Alaman” or “Almancı”) and Turks living “back home.” In the vast, vibrant city of Istanbul, Sibel hopes to find salvation, yet the city’s potential for healing is called into question. It must be noted that in Akin’s films, Istanbul usually assumes a special role as a space of redemption and temptation; as he stated in an interview, “[m]y home is Hamburg but I am also the spicy voice of Istanbul. And I love spicy food. I need spice to feel I am alive” (Erdoğan 34). But there is a different logic at work in this film: Sibel’s return to Turkey is not motivated by a desire to reconnect with her roots; it is rather an “escape” from her disoriented self in Germany. Istanbul, in this case, is understood as “an escape route” for the female immigrant “reacting against patriarchy and against the traditional social mores” that are ironically more oppressive in diasporic communities than in the Turkish motherland (King & Kilinc 130). Sibel’s “home-seeking journey” masks a larger desire to shed her hyphenation by fitting in with the “normal” Turks (Erdoğan 30). Yet, as Fachinger rightly points out, the return “to the ‘homeland’ is highly ambiguous in [Akin’s] films”: while Turkey offers “a radical new beginning,” it does not come across as a “liberating space” (257). Indeed, it soon becomes apparent that German-born Turks will fail to shed their otherness in Turkey, just as in Germany, and continue to feel marginalized. Estranged from their roots, and linguistically foreign (Turkish-German
accents and slang are widely derided in Turkey), they cannot pass as Turks and continue to occupy the position of an outsider, doomed to remain as “Almanci.”

Şenocak and Tulay reflect on the consequences of a return which furthers the immigrant’s displacement rather than removing it:

A change of place without a simultaneous change of perspective, leads to emptiness. The break with the original Heimat took place long ago. But this break and all its consequences must be understood so that the resultant emptiness can be filled. […] The Turkish youth cannot cling to phantasmagoria of the lost Heimat. (259)

Just because Sibel is able to cross borders does not mean that she is mentally prepared for the challenges of re-integrating. Frustrated with her inability to adapt, she becomes increasingly self-abusive and puts herself in extremely dangerous situations. Sibel’s estrangement from what is supposed to be her “native” culture illustrates the way in which her disorientation is sustained: her initial experiences of separation, uncertainty, and confusion in Germany continue as she tries to re-assert herself in a nation that also treats her as an alien.

Cahit goes through something similar, as he makes the same journey years later. He realizes that it is not just him who has thrown away his Turkish identity years ago; Turkey, in a sense, has thrown him away as well. The couple eventually reunite, and spend two days in a hotel room; Sibel, who now lives with another man and has a daughter, knows that she is in love with Cahit but is unable to accompany him to his birthplace, Mersin, as she fears that doing so would risk bringing her own daughter into the cycle of othering in which she and Cahit have spent their lives. So the initial predicament continues to haunt them: neither Sibel nor Cahit can shed their hyphenations even when they go back to Turkey; perhaps they are no longer Turkish-Germans but now they have become German-Turks, doomed to remain at the margins of the society. Therefore, Head-On problematizes the hyphenation of identity as a standard, or even viable, solution to the marginalization of the immigrant, and rather presents it as a sort of
captivity. When Cahit, at the end of the film, boards a bus alone to head back to Mersin, it is with the knowledge that both Germanness and Turkishness now exist beyond his reach. The concluding position of the film is not an optimistic one.

Turkey and the European Union

Head-On of course, was never just a character study, or even simply a film about hybrid identity; on a deeper level the film was meant to be seen as a reflection on the nature of Turkey’s complex relationship to Europe. The Turkish migrant’s liminal position in the West, for example, intentionally echoes Turkey’s vexed association with the EU. Starting in 1987, Turkey made a series of bids to join the EU in 1987; by 1997, its membership application was officially initiated at the Helsinki Summit, which started a series of reforms and improvements to make the legal and financial systems compatible with European rules and regulations (also known as acquis communautaire). From a political perspective, Head-On expresses the various tensions long felt by Turks at home and abroad in their efforts to construct a Eurasian identity bridging the East and West. Pushing this logic further, it is possible to think about Head-On as a film that is not only about the hyphenated identity of two Turkish characters but that of Turkey itself. In another interview, Akin explains that “[i]n making the film, I was also interested in exploring the question of whether Turkey is really European enough for the European Union” (Dürr and Wellershoff). Turkey’s membership, of course, raises questions about European geography and identity:

Where does Europe end? Where is there a sense of ‘we Europeans’ as a meaningful expression of a larger sovereign people? Would Russia ever qualify extending as it does as far as Vladivostok? Does Turkey really qualify, or is it the true test of a submerged sense of Europe as a Christian world, defining itself against the otherness of the world of Islam? (Kroes 10-1)

Akin was aware of these debates, and he did not shy away from vocally supporting Turkey’s accession—at least until 2005 (he later expressed concerns about the unchecked capitalism as a result of its membership) (Erdoğan 35-6).
The entire situation, of course, has changed today, which lends *Head-On*—and in particular its pessimistic conclusion—a new and different significance. For decades, Turkey’s secular democracy has been presented as an emulative model for other Middle-Eastern states. Only a few years ago, Turkey’s prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was touring the Arab world, praising Turkey’s stable government, its economic growth, and its commitment to Western-oriented modernization, suggesting that EU membership was imminent. Today, the political reality is radically different, as Erdoğan’s Turkey has re-aligned its cultural and political axis away from Europe and towards the Islamic world. And the feeling is mutual; there is now a measure within the EU to suspend Turkey’s candidacy because of the “repressive measures” introduced after the attempted coup in July 2016, which violated the basic constitutional rights of its citizens (BBC, 24 Nov. 2016).

For many Turks, especially those who support Erdoğan, this reversal was long seen as inevitable, a result of unrealistic attempts to transform Turkish identity into something more Europe-friendly. In its initial efforts to join the EU, Turkey traditionally presented itself as a unique blending of two civilizations; the articulation of a Eurasian identity was, in a way, a serious attempt at negating the East/West binary and overturning Orientalist discourse. In doing so, however, Turkey found itself doubly othered—alienated from the East for its secular principles, and insulated from the West by its Muslim heritage. This situation created a crisis of representation, and an unavoidable fragmentation. For some, particularly in the artistic community, the synthesizing of these two irreconcilable identities can only be accomplished through narrative exercises, a unifying articulation of collective values that can provide stable ground for national unity. However, Turkey’s liminal position complicates the creation of such a reconciliatory narrative; the Turkish nation has experienced a disorienting rupture between its optimistic projection of a Eurasian identity and the rejection of this possible identity by other nation-states. Perhaps more importantly, by privileging the hyphen, Turkey’s desire for duality eliminates the possibility of a more plural identity (one built around a series of “ands”). Questions about ethnic background are no longer included in the Turkish Census, part of a strategy to present unified “Turkishness”; the more than 60
ethnic groups and minorities living in Turkey are now forced to fit into a more narrowly-defined Eurasian identity.

Today, Turkey faces a more specific threat under the current regime: the policies and the “new constitution” introduced by Erdoğan aim to reverse longstanding Kemalist principles of modernization, and foster instead a nostalgic longing for the Ottoman past and its autocratic combination of political power and religious authority. In that regard, the Turkish state is prepared to “throw away” its Europeanness altogether and embrace instead a categorically Turkish and Muslim identity. In the end, Head-On is indeed a tragic vision, not only of the doubly othered Cahit and Sibel but also, in Akin’s view, of the future of a doubly othered Turkey as well.

Works Cited:


Dürr, Anke and Marianne Wellershoff. “Turkey is Neither Eastern Nor Western: Or Is It


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1 Homi Bhabha theorizes hybridity as a collapsing of borders: Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social, develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an ‘in-between’ temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history. This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double-edge, which […] represents a hybridity; a difference ‘within’, a subject that inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality.’ (13)

2 Hybridity is generally viewed as the single most creative act for constructing a viable, “modern” diasporic identity. However, it is misleading to think that hybridity can be a clear and attainable goal for every immigrant, in all circumstances. As research shows, the diasporic subject does not become automatically hybridized due to geographical dislocation; there are instances in which radicalization, not hybridity, occurs as a response to displacement. Furthermore, those who consider hybridity as a critique of binary oppositions often “ignore the fact that hybridity itself rests on the a priori existence of an opposition; this manner of representation, in other words, ends up participating in the validation of binaries rather than circumventing the essentialist rhetoric associated with it” (Santesso 18).

3 The European Monitoring Centre on Racism concluded that “across the entire spectrum of the EU member states incidents were identified where a negative or a discriminatory act was perpetrated against Muslims or an entity that was associated with Islam” (Allen & Nielsen 34).
AYESHA BEGUM: 

The Caravan of grief: A narrative of resistance, the status of refugees and the longing for a Home

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The dystopic scenario of political conflicts highlights the exigencies of literature, often culminating in the narrative of protests and resistance. To counter the diabolical nature of the repressive state apparatus, traditionally, people have always sort the refuge of art in general and literature in particular. The site of ‘Palestine’, has become emblematic of a problematic discourse and therefore, constantly focalised as that space, that seeks to resist the claims of popular narrativization. In this paper, I seek to discuss the politics of resistance in Joe Sacco’s graphic novel, *Palestine* and Eran Riklis’s film, *Lemon Tree*. I have chosen two very different visual narratives, which are also narratives of protests, whose very different media specificities and textual productions, highlight the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

I hereby aim to showcase how both these texts situated within a very specific historio-political context, constantly resists and hence subverts the dynamics of power structure. It is also important to note that both these texts explore the different nuances of narratives of protest and resistance.

To understand the polemics of the narrative of protest used in both the texts, one must first be acquainted with the narrative that has been ubiquitously propagated, in historio-political consciousness. It is what Edward Said, in *The Question of Palestine*, would call the claims of ‘Zionism’, premised on the idea of a promised land (in the Old Testament) exclusively for the Jews, along with the negation of the presence of the native Arabs as non-existing in those lands. Thus, Zionism as an idea based itself, on “the excluded presence, that is the fictional absence of native people in Palestine; institutions were rebuild deliberately shutting out the natives, laws were drafted
when Israel came into being that made sure the natives remained in their ‘non place’, Jews in theirs and so on.”(Said 42). This intentional motive of erasure of the Palestinians, for the creation of the State of Israel, is based on the concept of an ethnic purity (the dialectics offered to counter the Holocaust turns ironical, although officially not recognised) and found itself manifested in the (in)famous Balfour Declaration of 1917. Thus, Zionism in the very conceptualization of Israel not only ignored the presence of the Arabs, but also demanded its recognition on the ‘assumed subordination of a designated inferior Other’(Said 253). To add to the immense popularity of Zionism, is the Machiavellian role of the West, with its political baggage adding fuel to fire. According to David Gardner, the role of US and Britain in backing Israel is tied to their own national interests and is premised not only on a ‘double standard’ but also a ‘wrong standard’(Gardner 143).

What one needs to recognize is the deep complexity of the ‘question of Palestine’, that has often been consciously obliterated from official history. At the same time, it is important to note, that despite the attempts to efface the Palestinians by sheer force, the Palestinians continue to exist, and it is in their daily struggles of resistance, that they counter mainstream narrative.

The term ‘resistance’(muqawamah) was first applied, in the context of Palestine, by the Palestinian writer and critic, Ghassan Kanafani in his work, *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine* in 1966. The point that Kanafani has tried to raise is the question of how a cultural form of resistance constantly disrupts the power equations, often more than armed resistance/protest itself. In the words of Kanafani as quoted by Barbara
Harlow, “If resistance springs from the barrel of a gun, the gun itself issues from the desire for liberation and that desire for liberation is nothing but the natural, logical and necessary production of resistance in its broadest sense: as refusal and as firm grasp of roots and situations.” (Harlow 11). As such Kanafani, situates the literature of resistance as a powerful counter narrative within the ‘cultural siege’ imposed by the State machinery or to subvert what Harlow calls the ‘hegemonic domination and oppression.’ (Harlow 29)

In Joe Sacco’s *Palestine*, we see a very interesting hermeneutics of resistance being fore grounded. Joe Sacco is one of the most reputed graphic novelists of our times. Of a Maltese American nationality, Sacco did his graduation in journalism at the University of Oregon, before choosing the medium of comics to highlight important socio political happenings, in different historical settings. He is also the author of other famous graphic novels, namely, *Safe Area Gorazde*(2000), *The Fixer*(2003), and *Footnotes in Gaza*(2009), along with *Palestine*. His graphic reportage has earned him worldwide acclaim and he is the recipient of the famous *American Book Award* and *Eisner Award* among many others. This graphic narrative was initially published in serial forms in nine volumes and later in 2001, assembled as a complete book, with an introduction by Edward Said. We are introduced to Sacco’s *Palestine* and the Palestinians as a discursive presence, that seeks to de establish the myth propounded by the Israeli and other Western mainstream media narrative.

*In Palestine*, we are presented graphically with the scenario of the Israeli Palestinian conflict. We as readers, much like Sacco himself, are
initially equipped with only the populist and stereotyped understanding of the Palestinians as terrorists. The story about the killing of the American Jew, Klinghoffer, by the Palestinian terrorists as well as Sacco’s racist and abusive language against the Palestinians showcase the generalisations made by Western media, as part of the ‘Orientalising’ process. It is only when Sacco traverses through the different areas of Palestine, collecting testimonies from the Palestinians themselves, that he along with the readers is implicated. The graphic narrative then becomes the meta narrative, where the reader, like Sacco, in turn become the ‘witness’. Here, an interesting facet explored by the graphic narrative, is the subject position of Sacco himself, which further complicates the narrative. Sacco becomes a chief character for the telling of this narrative of protest, with his own idiosyncrasies and biases. This is again fitting with Kanafani’s rejection of the concept of ‘academic objectivity’ and ‘scientific dispassion’, in literature of resistance (Harlow 3). According to Bhakti Shringarpure, this dismissal of objectivity is a ‘sly, intelligent trope that covers more ground in a few pages than entire political tomes.’ (Shringapure 213)

What is more important is how Sacco, in his journalistic report, presents the account of the lives of the Palestinians, giving them the space to narrate their stories, in their chequered experiences of being under Israeli occupation. In his depictions, Sacco not only presents a world, ‘trapped within an inferno of war and violence: the despair and resilience of people in an extreme crisis, of lives regulated by curfews, where torture and prisons constitute everyday realities’ (Shringapure 213), but also the stories of each individual, often taking the resort of memory, to prevent any generalizations and stereotyping. We recognise the fact that despite the scepticisms on the part
of the Palestinians before the Western media, their only viable option is to constantly narrativize their stories. According to Helen Taylor, the need for telling stories becomes almost an act of claiming self recognition. Quoting Andrews, Taylor states, “stories are not only the way, in which we come to ascribe significance to experiences we and others have had; they are one of the primary means through which we constitute our very selves”(Taylor 37).

Almost everyone that Sacco meets in his journey, has a story to narrate. Incidents of past horror leaving physical and psychological wounds, are narrated without any hesitation with precision and graphic details, by almost all the interviewees. The point I am trying to raise here, is not only the significance of the narrative self but how these narratives also become a tool of resistance. It is the Arab guide that Sacco meets at Hebron, with his faith in God, that acts as a narrative of protest with its completely different cultural logic, that undercuts the role of history and power. His recognition of the omnipotence of God, and the fragility of the discourses of State power, from the Romans to the English, might seem all too baffling and irrational to a secular audience, but also a powerful reminder of the politics of piety as deeply embedded in the Middle East crisis. “They are gone/We all go/Only God is great.”(Sacco 40). The politics of the narrative of protest is also dealt with in the issue about women and the discourse of the ‘hijab’, where we find the dialectics of resistance even further complicated and often as a counter narrative to Western Imperialism and First World Feminism. The cultural shock for Sacco speaks volumes about the general stereotyping of the West in relation to the idea of freedom of Muslim Women. “You could say the hijab was more my problem than hers.”(Sacco 137). It is in the stories of ‘Ammar’,
who has been unable to get the work permit from Israel, or the story of ‘Sameh’, who works in a Rehabilitation centre catering to the needs of handicapped children, without much help, or the story of the old woman who has lost both his sons, that we recognise the importance of these private narratives. All of these narratives, along with other testimonies, marks the point of departure, the departure being the voice of the Palestinians claiming space and history through their acts of registering their voice and often through memory. This provides an axiomatic idea of self identity to the Palestinians, giving them the power, through what Said called ‘individual acts of rhetoric.’(Said 134). These testimonies are filled with outbursts of anger, pain, hope and hopelessness and although may seem trivial, initially, as Debbie Van Kerckem notes, “these events are anything but trivial and passing for they have implications until long beyond their end”(Kerckem 38). It is also interesting to note how disparate events narrated by different individuals about their lives under Israeli occupation, somehow have an uncanny similarity. In the horrors recounted by the family members of Jibril, “We learned that nearly 20 homes were attacked last night”(Sacco 64), that of his neighbour, “The attack lasted 15 minutes and in the morning we found 60 stones”(Sacco 66) or that of the old woman who has been separated from his family, recounting the horrors of her destroyed home, “A bulldozer arrived..They told me to get into this room and lock the door, and they demolished our house”(Sacco 68), we find an undercurrent of suffering that unites these people. In the words of Helen Taylor, quoting Jackson, “In narrating one’s own story, one salvages and reaffirms, in the face of dispersal, defeat and death, the social bonds that bind one to a community”(Taylor 37). In other words the testimonies collected by
Sacco, helps him to record social histories, situating individual desire within a particular social circumstance and helps to counter the official history and narrative. As such, these narratives offer an “alternative way of conceiving human history” (Said 260), using memory and often the past to highlight, what accounts most significant to these individuals in their suffering.

In chapter four, the part entitled, ‘The Tough and the Dead’, the graphic narration about the woman interrogated by the ‘Shin Bet’, provides an interesting dimension to the narrative. Her robust attitude and defiance of the threats imposed by the Shin Bet, shows her not just as an ordinary female Activist, but one who counters the stereotypes of Arab women. Her refusal to give up showcases a complete reversal of the gaze. Similarly, in the same chapter, the part dealing with the stories of ‘Ansar iii’, showcases the different strategies deployed by the prisoners in the face of oppression. It is in their acts of organising the inmates under different political affiliations, disciplining and educating themselves, observing silence at the death of ‘Abu Jihad’, that completely unsettles and unnerves the Israelis, if only temporarily. It also showcases how the prison gets transformed into a centre to ‘counteract the policy of recruiting Israelis to be Palestinian haters’ (Sacco 92).

What is also unique about this genre dealing with the narrative of protest is how Sacco uses the realm of the comic, where the caricatured sketches have more than a few serious, in fact philosophical implications. To this is the added element of dark humour, sometimes in a stark manner and at times with subtleties. Sacco must be applauded for the extensive detailing used, where every twitch of the eyebrows, every facial expression or gesticulations,
assume the language of narrative of protest. *Palestine*, has an interesting tapestry that moves between black and white illustration and photographic representation. Moreover, “his layouts shift in style to match the material: stories told to him emerge in symmetrical panel grids, while incidents in which he is involved, or engage his emotions are rendered in a far looser style, in which images and captions slide across the page.”(Murray 1).

The next important facet that the graphic novel explores is the question and status of the refugees in Palestine. The intifada of 1948, or what came to be known as ‘Al Naqba’(the catastrophe) resulted in the displacement and forced migration of millions of Palestinians from what they had previously called their homeland. According to Gardner, “The other Arab-Israeli minefield which can still be traversed with a pragmatic compass concerns the fate of the roughly 5 million Palestinian refugees-still used by rejectionists on both sides as the reason why no reconciliation of this tragic history will ever be possible.”(Gardner 161). What becomes pertinent is how these refugees continue to exist and define their identity, despite all obstacles. With the loss of their home, they are living in a continuous siege and exile. In *Palestine*, Sacco captures brilliantly the horrors of the Israeli occupation, through his journey into what he terms as ‘Refugeeland’, covering the areas of ‘Jabalia’, ‘Nuseirat’, ‘West Bank’ and most importantly, ‘Gaza’. An almost entire two pages(146-147) is devoted in the graphic novel, to showcase pictorially, Sacco’s journey into the lives of the refugees. The extensive detailing is used to represent graphically the physical condition of the topography, with clustered buildings, swarming population, potholes, garbage and yet people continuing their daily routines.... “The camp looks like small cities, only even more
crowded and sometimes they are built next to the already existing cities, which makes the transition from city to refugee camp even more blurry”(Kerckem 36) The despicable condition of living highlight the reality of the refugees, without even the basic amenities of living and yet it is in this same locale, that the refugees are struggling for a living, trying to spread education and even formulate ways to counter the Israeli occupation. Their daily lives fetching for the most mundane things registers their identity beyond the nationalist struggle. It is intriguing to note how the reference of the refugees in their struggle is quite subtly juxtaposed with servings of tea, black coffee and tomatoes. Almost all the narrations revolve around the ritual of gatherings with the accompaniment of tea and coffee. As such, one must recognise how these objects attain meaning in the narrative beyond their materiality, as part of a tradition that “merge individual sorrow or joy with communally prescribed forms of observance.”(Taylor 144).

As a visual medium, the graphic narrative also plays with the idea of what McCloud would call ‘closure’. It is interesting to note that as a narrative of protest, Palestine does not provide any ethical closure, to the Israeli Palestinian conflict. This is most poetically rendered in the last chapter, where a Palestinian child is being interrogated by an Israeli soldier. A moment that captures the extreme tension and fragility of relationship between two individuals separated by the burden of history, politics and blood. At the same time, the graphic mode, allows for a certain closure by bringing about a wholeness, from the disparate slides of images. To quote McCloud, “Comic panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of
unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality.”(Kerckem 55).

The feeling of unease that one has to grapple with in the graphic novel is further intensiﬁed in Eran Riklis’s ﬁlm, Lemon Tree. One of the most unsettling things that one encounters, is this sense of longing and bereavement for the loss of ‘home’, in the entire Israeli Palestine conﬂict. Time and again, it is the central metaphor of the home that beguiles the tragedy of this entire discourse. The next visual narrative, that I intend to discuss in this paper is Eran Riklis’s ﬁlm, Lemon Tree. Based on an actual story, originally written as a Novel, this transmediation into cinematic representation, beautifully captures the moment of crisis between two individuals, within the larger spectrum of Israeli-Palestinian conﬂict. The ﬁlm with its own poetic rendition complicates the politics of resistance to a whole new level. We see how the land with its agricultural metaphors and imageries, becomes the umbilical cord that connects both the Israelis and the Palestinians, irrespective of the interjection of history, complicating the roles of the victim and executioner.

Eran Riklis is a name famous in World cinema today. Born of an Israeli origin, he spent some of his childhood years in New York, before returning back to Israel. Despite his Israeli afﬁliations, as a ﬁlm maker, he has always tried to capture the intricacies of human relationships that develop in politically disturbed regions, especially in the Middle East. He started his cinematic career with his political thriller, On a Clear Day You Can See Damascus and his other notable contribution to ﬁlm making has been recognised all throughout the world.
In this film, *Lemon Tree*, it is the singular spectacular image of a lemon grove, that becomes the central metaphor determining the Israeli Palestinian relationship. The film opens with the image of lemon trees growing in and around the Green Bank, showcasing how lemon trees have always been a shared symbol in the poetic consciousness of both the communities. The lemon tree becomes a pervasive image that captures the many nuances of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, as a ‘recurring flashpoint in this conflict, dire symbols of the idiocy and the waste of war.’(Kennicott 1). The movie itself opens with the song, “Lemon Tree”, that poignantly speaks of a ‘love that once existed, was untenable and is now lost’(Shutek 17), between these two communities. This once existing bond between the Jew and the Arab, in the same place where both claim to be their homeland, was also narrated in the graphic novel, when Sacco meets Ammar’s uncle. Ammar’s uncle, an old man who had witnessed the catastrophe of 1948, speaks too, about his relationship with the Jews, “Yes, I had Jewish friends...A Jew used to visit my brother...They would drink coffee together, black coffee..”(Sacco 165).

In this film, we see how the lemon trees becomes the bone of contention between the Palestinian woman, Salma Zidane(and by extension, the entire Palestinian community) to whom belongs the lemon orchard, and Israel’s Defence Minister( by that extension, the Israeli Nation). As such, the lemon trees in this film becomes “non textual elements of Nation building.”(Shutek 15). At the same time, it becomes the site, that hinges on the bleak possibility of reconciliation between Israel and Palestine.( as mediated by the relationship of Salma and Mira, the wife of Israel’s defence minister.)
As we note in the film, Salma Zidane, a middle aged widowed Palestinian woman, owns the lemon orchard, that suddenly poses a site of potential threat for terrorism, when Israel’s Defence Minister and his wife, become her neighbour. As such, Salma receives official orders that inform her about Israel’s decision to uproot her lemon trees, along with necessary ‘compensations’ for the ‘losses’ thereby incurred. The film, then revolves around this singular narrative of protest of Salma, to protect her orchard, from being uprooted and destroyed by Israeli forces.

This brings us to the question and meaning of home, in all its complexity. The idea of home in popular imagination is almost always conceptualised as situated within a particular geographical location, which in turn becomes the legitimate premise for most Nation States to draw borders, to demarcate their space. However, despite Statist narratives to fix the locale of the Nation, the subjective experience surrounding the idea of home, moves beyond borders. In other words, the attachment of an individual or a community to their conceptualization of a home, has different registers, especially that connected with belonging and emotional attachments. In the words of Nira Yuval Davis, “Belonging is where the sociology of emotions interfaces with the sociology of power, where identification and participation collude, or at least aspire to or yearn for.”(Yuval-Davis 216). As such, the construction of a house can be on a fixed geographical position, and yet its transformation into home contains a kind of fluidity, in the sense that it becomes spatial. This idea of the home as spatial, is the argument of Helen Taylor, for whom the meaning of a home is acquired over time, with personal memories, rituals, ancestral ties etc.(Taylor 12). The problem arises when
different individuals attach different meanings to a land, that often causes conflict as one witnesses it in Palestine. It thereby, complicates our epistemology of history, making a detour from our comfortable notions of ‘home’, where both the voice of the Invader/Settler and Exiled/ Settler, intersect. It is also important to note that despite the fact, that a home is not fixed in that sense, the fact of forced migration and displacement often reinforces the feeling of locating the home, within a geographical space in the refugees. At the same time, it instils in the refugee’s imagination a feeling of exile, of mourning for a homeland that once was there and is now lost forever or receded in the distance. In the words of Brah, home is often a “mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination...a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory.”(Taylor 12). In other words, the home then becomes a temporal identity, for the refugees, where through this ritual of mourning and memory, one attributes a cyclical pattern, that delineates from the linear notion of progression of time. As such, it is important to note, that for Salma, the lemon trees are not just her source of sustenance, but associated with it is the memory of her childhood, along with her father. The film cinematically captures the poignant moment when we can see the lemons falling to the ground and Salma being awakened by the rustle of the leaves and the sound of the falling lemons. This is followed by a flashback, where she recollects the time she spent with her father amidst the lemon trees as a child, her hands caressing the lemons hanging from the trees. The lemon trees then become associated with her yearning for nostalgia, as well as a token of legacy, she has inherited from her grandfather. The desire and conviction that Salma has, to protect her trees from being uprooted at any cost, emanates
from the desire to preserve her memory from being colonised. As such, here the politics of resistance is displayed by the role of Salma’s memory. At the same time, it adds a temporal dimension to her notion of home. However, what becomes the most important factor for Salma in the film, in her attempt to save her lemon trees, is the material aspect of the home. The material aspect of a home, surrounds not only the physical structure of the building, but also the land and vegetation that for the refugee has wider implications than simply its economic surplus. Another interesting argument to substantiate the idea of resistance is to understand that the lemon trees have a wider semiotics for Salma, that move beyond the question of ‘materiality of objects’. In fact, Shutek talks about how several food historians, and anthropologists have observed that ‘food is never simply food but carries multiple meanings and associations.’(Shutek 17). This obviously reminds us of the third chapter in Sacco’s *Palestine*, where the old man laments the loss of his Olive trees and associates the feeling of being forced to cut down his own trees as, filled with excruciating pain. “I was crying...I felt I was killing my son when I cut them down.”(Sacco 62). It is also akin to chapter six of the graphic novel, dealing with ‘tomatoes’, that showcase how these agricultural metaphors become an important constituent in the narratives of protest. In a similar way, in the *Lemon Tree*, Salma constantly goes through all struggle just to save her lemon orchard, instead of taking any economic compensation from Israel, for these lemon orchards are synonymous to her feeling of being at home. It also highlights what Ben-Ze’ev found in her study of Palestinian refugees, that for them, the plants acts as ‘mnemonic devices enabling a temporary (re)creation of the past. The particular taste and smell of home points to the specificity of
individual villages, each with their own significant plants.' (Taylor 17). In regards to Salma, the lemon trees acquire a symbolic value, of ‘not only reaching back in time, but recreating the features of a place to which one cannot return.’ (Taylor 18).

The film revolves around the single handed struggle of Salma to save her lemon trees. Her display of courage is directed not only against the state of Israel but also against the Patriarchal norms of her own society, as displayed by her defiance of societal honour, while engaging in an emotional affair with her lawyer, Ziad Daud. Thus, her narrative of protest is at two levels, both within and outside of Palestine. She takes her case, initially to the military tribunal and then later puts everything at stake, taking her case to Israel’s Supreme Court, after her plea is rejected. At the end, the Supreme Court allows Salma to keep her lemon trees, albeit to a certain height only, for security issues. Although, Salma considers the judgement as an ‘insult’, Ziad Daud sees it as a partial victory, a sign of hope for the larger Palestinian cause, alluding it to the story of David’s triumph over Goliath. It is interesting to see how the Old Testament allusion, so very significant for the Jewish tradition is appropriated by the Palestinians, in this film, making it a meta narrative.

What is even more interesting about this film, as far as the politics of resistance is concerned, is the relationship shown between Salma and Mira. We find both these women uncannily similar in the way, they both struggle against their respective systems. At the same time, there is an unbridgeable gap between them, owing to the ‘lemon groves between us’, that prevent them
from being like ‘normal neighbours’, as they inevitably realise that there is so much of ‘blood and politics’. Besides, there is also the barrier of language, preventing them to actually communicate, and yet Mira’s expression of solidarity for Salma, turns the relationship between the Israeli and the Palestinian to a more nuanced understanding.

As far as the use of visual tropes are concerned, its treatment is different from the graphic novel, yet similar in approach. The use of ocular observations through ‘binoculars’, ‘windows’, ‘tree branches’, ‘webcams’ etc, showcase the opacity of vision that hinders ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ about others. Similarly, all throughout the film, we hear a nonsensical gibberish used as a subtext to deflate the seriousness of the issue and render it ‘comical’. Moreover, the film itself being directed by an Israeli points to a different dimension of the politics of resistance, in which both the Israelis and Palestinians are victims of their own history.

Thus, both the texts in their own way highlight the story of Palestinian lives, of the brave resilience of Palestinians for self assertion. At the end of both the texts, one inevitably realises that the dynamics of power structure is far more convoluted and calls for self reflexivity. This is where literature with its semiotics of truth, provides only an ambivalent space, and acts as a constant deterrent to clichéd oversimplification of history and politics.
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Allie Faden:

A Rhetorical Comparison of Daniel Defoe's *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* and the Twenty-First Century War on Christianity

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Abstract

The rhetoric used by those who claim to believe the modern day War on Christianity exists is strikingly similar to that used by Daniel Defoe in *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* as an exposition of the harsh treatment Dissenters received from Tories in eighteenth-century England, and warrants further examination. The use of antirrhesis, chorographia, and parody are so similar, it begs the question as to whether reporters on the War on Christianity actually believe this is occurring or claiming this war exists to gain economic and political traction. Examining their use may shed light on economic considerations and voting tendencies of Evangelical Christians in the United States, in the same way Defoe’s use highlights the absence of threat to Anglicans by Dissenters. This essay examines myriad sources on the financial status of celebrities from popular political commentary shows, Donald Trump, and Fox News with respect to their specific targeting of Evangelical Christians, who feel disenfranchised and marginalized by the increasingly progressive sentiments in contemporary political discourse and legal statutes, just as Anglicans in Defoe’s day felt legal rights afforded to Dissenters marginalized them socially and legally. In doing so, the reader is able to observe evidence that the so-called War on Christianity, rather than seeking to bind Christians together to fight for a return to an idealized American past, as Defoe highlighted the need for Christian unity across sects, may simply have become a new form of profiteering by preying on the fears of those who feel they have lost their supremacy in the US.

**Keywords:** War on Christianity, Daniel Defoe, Donald Trump
The Toleration Act 1689 ushered in an era of increased freedom for English Dissenters. With this Act, Protestant non-Conformists were able to live their religious lives openly and without fear of governmental reprisal, including the ability to have their own churches and schools. While this Act did not negate the political restrictions created for Dissenters by the Test Act 1678, it did mitigate many of the concerns held by non-Conformists. Queen Anne, upon her succession in 1702, failed to keep her promise to maintain the Toleration Act, and almost immediately Parliament got to work on drafting bills to renew restrictions on Dissenters.

Similarly, twenty-first century American progressiveness has met with tremendous backlash from the New GOP: Evangelical Republican office holders have relentlessly attempted to pass controversial bills, such as restrictions to abortion access, revocation of the Affordable Care Act, mandatory drug testing for recipients of social safety net programs, and so called “bathroom bills,” to combat the effects of the bills passed that allow for increased freedoms to LGBTQ people, atheists, women, the poor, and other marginalized people. As part of this effort from the religious right to reclaim the America that gave them exclusive advantages, Evangelical Christian leaders have constructed and mythologized the so-called War on Christianity. Complaints about the manner in which Christians have lost their privilege include the loss of mandated prayer in schools, the ongoing existence of abortion clinics, and the Supreme Court ruling that same-sex couples may now legally marry throughout the nation.

As has happened in response to the American War on Christianity, copious quantities of satirical literature was produced in England in opposition to a bill against
occasional conformity. Through his use of parodic satire (Highet 13) and other rhetorical tropes, Daniel Defoe wrote The Shortest Way with the Dissenters (1702) as an exposition of the harsh treatment Dissenters received from Tories in eighteenth-century England. Although satirical, the rhetoric used by those who claim to believe the modern-day War on Christianity exists, is strikingly similar to that used by Defoe, and warrants further examination. The use of these tropes is so similar, it begs the question as to whether those who report on the War on Christianity actually believe this to be occurring, or are speaking and writing in the same parodic manner as Defoe in order to illustrate the ridiculousness of any possibility that such a war could exist in a nation where 70.6% of the population identifies as some form of Christian (“America's Changing Religious Landscape”). Alternatively, are those official sources that claim this war exists gaining economic traction by doing so, without believing it to be true? Or might they, as Ashley Marshall suggests Defoe was attempting, produce this vitriol “to warn like-minded readers” (Marshall 234)? The answers to these questions cannot be solved within the scope of this essay, but it is still important to examine such possibilities. This essay seeks to illustrate another mode of examining some of the relevant data with respect to these larger questions.

Daniel Defoe utilizes antirrhesis multiple times throughout The Shortest Way with the Dissenters. Some of the more interesting examples of Defoe's use of this trope indicate that Observers were “huff'd and bully'd with your Act of Toleration” (Defoe 282), demonstrating that England erroneously forced Anglicans to tolerate Dissenter's, leading to great harm to the monarchy and citizens alike. Moreover, “ ’Twas too much mercy shewn to them” (283), which “was the ruin of his posterity, and the ruins of the nation's
peace” (*ibid.*). This error in judgement, Defoe's speaker claims, led to great wickedness being committed by those for whom the Act of Toleration should have allowed to be functional members of a primarily Anglican society. Defoe's use of this trope allows the reader to believe the pamphlet both supported [un-]Christian intolerance, while potentially supporting the claim that to be tolerant toward Dissenters allowed them to take advantage of this law to the detriment of England on the whole.

Likewise, political commentator Bill O'Reilly remarks that, “some far-left people aided by a sympathetic media are now smearing Americans who oppose things like abortion and gay marriage. No question it is open season on Christians” (O'Reilly), illustrating that Christian tolerance to heretical “far-left” people and media not only opens the door to victimization for Christians, but tolerance encourages it. He quotes Newt Gingrich as saying that the leftist “lynch mob underway” normalizes abuse against Christians and forces them to acquiesce to immorality as the norm within Christian America (*ibid.*). O'Reilly claims this continues solely because of “the lack of push back by American religious leaders. It is very rare to see any high ranking Catholic cleric defending the faithful publicly. Protestants are a little bit better but organized efforts to defend the Christian faith are rare. Therefore, the anti-religion people have a free fire zone to attack at will” (*ibid.*). Tolerance to Dissenters, again, provides the framework through which the fabric of Christian American society is placed at (sometimes violent) risk. Instead, Christians should loudly and publicly renounce the wickedness of those who lack faith, as well as the actions the faithless undertake to destroy America and American values on the whole. It is simply not enough for political commentators to support American values, the American way of life, and Christian dominance in
American society. Of paramount importance is the wholesale rejection of the rhetoric and actions of Dissenters by modern religious leaders. However, the New Testament mandates the tolerance O'Reilly, and Defoe's speaker, claim is instrumental in the systematic dismantling of Christian America and Anglican England.

According to a 2012 Vanity Fair article, Bill O'Reilly earned $15 million per year hosting *The O'Reilly Factor* (Miller). His program attracts viewers in excess of 3 million people for some episodes (slightly above 300,000 is his typical nightly viewership), and earns Fox News upwards of $100 million in advertising per year from O'Reilly's show (Peters, LaFauci). An enormous amount of money each year is made by O'Reilly, Fox News, and its advertisers to continue to report in a fashion that caters to its largely white, middle-class demographic whose mean age is 72 (LaFauci). While it is likely O'Reilly does believe his own rhetoric, it also seems evident that even in the absence of true belief, he would continue to comment on America's political climate in like fashion simply to protect his own financial successes. Moreover, due to the extraordinary advertising funding he brings in, Fox News will continue to support this type of rhetoric in order to further its own corporate goals.

Chorographia makes an interesting appearance both in Defoe's essay and in commentator expositions of the War on Christianity. Within the framework of a legally Anglican nation, chorographia is sensibly used, but when applied to a nation that purportedly practices mandated separation of church and state, its use has no place outside that of utilizing pathos to seek agreement from its highly religious readership and viewership. Daniel Defoe's speaker reminds us that England has a “Church establish'd by law” (Defoe 282, emphasis in original), thereby describing his nation as being Christian,
and specifically Anglican, by definition. The speaker reminds us that this is an
irrevocable facet of England's law and culture, tied directly to the monarchical system,
when he states, “Had King James sent all the Puritans in England away... we had been a
national unmix'd church; the Church of England had been kept undivided and entire”
(283).

The Church of England is the official religion of England, and its citizens' religious practices are herein defined exclusively. Tolerance violates this definitional stance on the importance of the Anglican Church by allowing choice in belief structure. Tolerance, according to Defoe, results in “a civil war” (ibid.) and a loss of civility amongst the English people. It is essential “the Government will find effectual methods for the rooting the contagion from the face of this land” (286) in order to maintain the Anglican state of the nation. Moreover, to allow diversity in religious belief and tolerance of such, “our Government shall be devolv'd upon foreigners, and our monarchy dwindled into a republic” (289). Defoe is clear here that the supremacy of the Church of England is a defining characteristic of the nation, and to remove its supremacy implies a change of the very governmental structure, rather than a colloquial change in culture with its governmental structure maintained.

The United States of America, in contrast, in theory, is the very type of democratic republic against which Defoe satirically cautions. Situated within its founding documents is the admonishment that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (US Const. amend. I). Yet, for there to be a War on Christianity in the manner of which conservative media describe, the very precepts of the nation's founding must first have been violated in order
to grant legal supremacy to Christians, and later to strip Christians of the same. Whether or not this is the case is debatable and the subject of some scholarly scrutiny, as evidenced by the Princeton study that concludes the United States now functions as an oligarchy rather than as a representative democracy. The authors of the study state the “average citizens’ influence on policy making... is near zero” (Gilens and Page 576). Rather, we see the majority of policy making occurring within the framework of that advocated by the “economically elite” and “business interest groups” (575).

Within the context of the War on Christianity, who are these interest groups? Primarily, Fox News serves as the largest profiteer from the War on Christianity. In 2014, Fox News “attracted $2 billion in advertising and license fees from cable operators last year... [and] earned $1.2 billion” of profit in contrast to CNN and MSNBC's combined earnings of $533 million (“Has Prime Time Faded for Cable TV News?”). These profits, fueled by perceived persecution, are predicated on the belief that the United States is defined as a Christian nation, and moreover, one that is under attack by non-Christians. According to the FBI's 2013 Hate Crime Statistics, however, hate crimes committed against Christians comprised 9.9% of the 16.9% of hate crimes based on religion (“Hate Crime Report, 2013”). This culminates, for Protestants, in a total hate crime victim rate of .0051% (“War On Christianity? FBI Hate Crime Statistics Utterly Destroy Fox News Lies”). Beyond Fox News' own profits, conservative radio political commentators Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Glenn Beck earned, in 2014, $79 million, $29 million, and $90 million, respectively (“World's Highest Paid Celebrities,” “Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity Hit Forbes ‘most Powerful’ List”). In examining even these few profiteers, it is clear that the War on Christianity is big business and is likely to remain
such, so long as “Christian” remains a central point of the description of the type of nation America is.

Parody is a notable feature both of Defoe's essay and of leading Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump. Trump's bombastic speech patterns and attachment to the most ridiculous facets of GOP narratives function as a mode of illustrating what would be, if it were not actually believed by many, a highly comical presentation of the effects on the War on Christianity amongst conservative Americans. Likewise, Defoe brilliantly used parody to replicate the modes of thought held by Observers. According to Maximillian Novak, “Obviously many were fooled, and surely part of Defoe's intention was precisely that” (Novak 403). Defoe's exceptional ability to use parody to expose the Observers for their hypocrisy when faced with options to be either merciful, in Christ-like fashion, or to be punitive, in monarchical fashion, still resonates with readers today, and is still both shocking and impressive in its exceptional command of both rhetoric and understanding of one's audience.

Defoe writes, “...the time of mercy is past, your day of grace is over; you should have practised peace, and moderation, and charity, if you expected any your selves” (Defoe 282, emphasis in original). In this statement, Defoe effectively informs, parodically to the Dissenters that the time for tolerance toward them has passed, as this tolerance has encroached too far into the supremacy of the Anglicans. He continues to write in the fashion of Charles Leslie and Henry Sacheverell, except as a “literal plan for the extermination of the Dissenters, and he did it in such a way that a large part of his audience believed the speaker was serious” (Novak 404). Similarly, Donald Trump speaks so virulently, and so in like fashion to those Evangelical Christians, that it appears
he is serious rather than creating a parody of his potential constituency. Perhaps Trump is serious. Perhaps Art Buchwald was correct that “You can't make up anything anymore. The world itself is a satire. All [we're] doing is recording it” (Buchwald, qtd. in Meyer 308).

Donald Trump’s rhetoric leaves the reader or viewer with great confusion as to whether he is performing some of the most impressive parody since Defoe’s writing, or whether he intends to be taken seriously. Recently, Trump has proposed a national registry for Muslims, in the same fashion seen in Nazi Germany, as well as many other Eastern bloc nations, prior to the onset of the Holocaust (“Donald Trump’s Call for Muslim Registry Denounced by Democrats”), and has advocated for the construction of larger walls to protect Americans from the steady stream of undocumented Mexican immigrants who are “doing the raping” of Mexican and American women (“Trump Asks ‘Who Is Doing The Raping?’”). Surprisingly, however, he went on record as saying, regarding the Supreme Court ruling on marriage equality, “Some people have hopes of passing amendments, but it’s not going to happen. Congress can’t pass simple things, let alone that. So anybody that’s making that an issue is doing it for political reasons. The Supreme Court ruled on it,” despite clear and long-standing opposition to marriage equality (“What Donald Trump Just Announced About Gay Marriage Will Create SERIOUS Buzz”). He has, in effect, played into the biases held by a seemingly large percentage of the voters he hopes to reach. For his efforts, he has earned, as of 16 October 2015, nearly $6 million in campaign contributions in the four months between official declaration of candidacy and the date of this report (“Donald Trump (R)”). Although his rhetoric is extreme, it clearly appeals to some portion of GOP voters.
Almost assuredly, some portion of this funding has been donated in response to Trump's statement that “The media wants to make this issue about Obama. The bigger issue is that Obama is waging a war against Christians in this country. They need support and their religious liberty is at stake” (“Trump Doesn’t Correct Rally Attendee Who Says Obama Is Muslim and ‘not Even an American’”).

In 1998, during an interview with Larry King, Donald Trump said, "I'm a registered Republican. I'm a pretty conservative guy. I'm somewhat liberal on social issues, especially health care, et cetera…. The Democrats are too far left. The Republicans are too far right. And I don't think anybody's hitting the chord, not the chord that I want to hear, and not the chord that other people want to hear, and I've seen it" (“Transcript: Donald Trump Announces Plans to Form Presidential Exploratory Committee.”).

In 1999, Trump affirms, in an NBC interview with Stone Phillips, that he is pro-choice and a proponent of universal health care (“The Voter’s Self-Defense System”). While it is impossible to know at this time if Trump is profiting through the parody of right-wing conservatives or has become genuine in his current sentiments, it is clear that he understands these statements are funneling money into his campaign, as evidenced by his demand to be paid $5 million to participate in the next Republican debate (“Donald Trump Demands $5 Million from CNN to Participate in next Republican Debate”). What we do know, however, is that Trump reported $1.75 million in earnings received from speaking engagements and has a net worth of approximately $4.5 billion (“Donald Trump’s Income and Wealth Are Shown in Filing but Are Hard to Pinpoint,”“#72 Donald Trump”).

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In Defoe's time, “The nineties were a period of toleration” (Novak 405), much like that of the late 2000s and early 2010s in modern-day America. Inevitably, tolerance and a cultural proclivity toward inclusivity and increased equality results in a tremendous backlash from those who feel equality has marginalized them that “can never be call'd persecution, but justice. But justice is always violence to the party offending, for every man is innocent in his own eyes” (Defoe 283). Dissenters in Defoe's era enjoyed relatively high levels of tolerance and equality until the onset of the reign of Queen Anne. “In 1702, the first year of Queen Anne's reign, occasional conformity became the focus of widespread political debate when newly confident High Church Tories sponsored the Bill for Preventing Occasional Conformity” (DeLuna 320). This expected pendulum swing against equality for Dissenters resulted in Defoe's decision to write *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* as an ironic parody of the rhetoric of those who had reclaimed political supremacy under the new monarch.

Correspondingly, the past few years have shown overwhelming victories in America’s legislative, executive, and judicial equality-based policy making, despite the few set-backs, such as the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision, that have interspersed these victories. Homosexuals now enjoy the same right to marry that heterosexuals previously claimed as an exclusive privilege. States increasingly vote to decriminalize marijuana use, either medicinally or in sum. Non-discrimination employment acts have been passed in a number of states, and a federal version comes up for vote annually. The Affordable Care Act was passed, and despite over sixty attempts to repeal it, still serves to provide less affluent citizens the opportunity to purchase health care insurance. Immigration reform is a highly sought-after solution for reconciling America's
tremendous number of undocumented immigrants with the nation's need for their labor. Laws have been passed to restrict the government's ability to grant bailout funds; refinancing opportunities for homeowners became available to correct predatory lending practices. Ohio has prohibited employers from asking applicants if they have been convicted of a felony. And most importantly, the 2013-2016 tax seasons see a 4.6% hike in marginal tax rates for the upper echelon of American taxpayers (“Federal Tax Brackets”). Interestingly, the population that self-identifies as Christian has declined 8% in the last seven years (“America’s Changing Religious Landscape”).

According to Richard Rorty, “when history is in upheaval and traditional institutions and patterns of behavior are collapsing, we want something which stands beyond history and institutions” (Rorty 189). This is seen in Defoe's time with the rejection of tolerance and its resultant rejection of Dissenters. Interestingly, “Defoe's enemies complained that the ‘rabble’ protected him, drank to his health, and even threw flowers and garlands rather than the usual stones and rotten fruit. He left the pillory a hero” (Backscheider 274) in the same rousing manner as Kim Davis' infamous stage-performance release from jail after being incarcerated for refusing to issue marriage licenses to homosexual couples (“How a community rallied around Kim Davis and religious freedom”). The same criticism applied to Defoe, and more, was applied to Davis and her supporters. As part of the effort to discredit Davis, background checks revealed four marriages and a case of adultery(Schneider). The release of Davis' matrimonial background did not result in her condemnation by conservatives, but rather appeared to showcase her personal and ongoing development as a Christian woman.
Kim Davis’ actions, however, did not net her any increased wealth. Although a crowd funding campaign was started on her behalf, GoFundMe, the website this campaign was hosted through, refused to allow the campaign to continue on grounds that it was based in bigotry (“No GoFundMe for Kim Davis: Crowdfunding Puts the Brakes on the Disturbing Bigots-get-rich-quick Trend”). If the War on Christianity is a parody of real life Christian beliefs, the lower- and middle-class hero-victims like Kim Davis are the “proof” that support its continuation and lend it credence. Historically, profit based on belief systems has been a prominent feature of global religious politics, and certainly is one that will continue. It is definitely possible that high-level conservatives who are profiting off this War on Christianity are true believers as well, although based on the above evidence this seems unlikely. If, in fact, this purported war is parody, it is parody that has earned just the five people and one entity upwards of $2.5 billion in the last year. And that, like Defoe’s *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, would be irony at its finest.
Works Cited


Kapil Sharma:

Destabilizing Section 377: An Indological Approach to Gender and Sexuality

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Abstract

The modalities of gender and sexuality are not divorced from the over-arching ubiquity of the idea of nation. The politics of gender and sexuality, queer issues, religion, nationalism and nationhood are all inextricably inter-connected and continuously enter into negotiation, intersection, coalition and opposition. Nation is always defined on gendered terms. This has been especially evident during the British colonization of India and other colonies. Imperialist Britain, as a Western nation and as the aggressor in colonial intrigue, forged a masculine identity in its literary and political discourse while India portrayed its post-colonial nationalism using feminine symbolism in order to create an identity which mobilised Indians to resist imperialist and colonising forces. The Hindu nationalists co-opting the polarity of the gender binary to represent the opposing forces in the process of colonization and coining the symbol of ‘Bharat Mata’, a mother in distress who supplicates her sons to safeguard her honour during colonization, firmly popularized India's position as the victim of a violent and 'impure' attack. Modern, Gandhian India is comprised of various remnants of the colonial hetero-normativity imposed on Indian culture and nation during the reign of the British. One such example of these remnants, which can be directly and historically traced back to British rule is the continuing presence on Indian statutes of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which affirms the colonial 'hangover' with which the Indian nation continues to grapple. The issue has demonstrated irony of post-colonial India, where, proponents of the law show a tendency to argue that the law protects Indian culture despite its clear link to colonialism. The paper will engage with the grotesque paradoxes and incongruities pertaining to the notions of gender, sexuality and queerness in contemporary politics of religion in India. It will also examine their dubiousness in the face of misinterpretations and the appropriation of Hinduism into a hetero-normative framework, hetero-normativity itself being a western import. It also problematizes the disjunction between the contemporary right wing Hindu radicalization and the ancient myths, legends and sects of the Indian subcontinent that had polymorphosity and queerness of gender and sexuality as its inherent constituents. The contemporary stalwarts of right wing Hindu nationalism, the spiritual leaders - Baba Ramdev being the most controversial figure - contribute to the naturalization of right wing ideologies under the guise of conclusively representing Indian culture. Ramdev, through his representation of Indian Hindu morality, otherizes and alienates alternate sexualities
and sexual practices as anomalies to the 'natural order' and a Western 'disease'. The entire array of political ideologies that coalesce with this hetero-normative manipulation and misrepresentation of Hindu spirituality are all juxtaposed with and subverted by a recuperation and re-analysis of the pre-colonial history of the Indian subcontinent. The fluidity of sexuality and gender during this period, in addition to the recognition and celebration of sexualities and sexual practices external to the hetero-normative gender binary in the absence of consolidated, unified and Eurocentric ideas of nationalism and of the 'nation', stands in stark contrast with modern nationalist Hindu ideologies. By delving into the time prior to the consolidation of South Asian sects, beliefs and myths into a homogenized category now referred to as Hinduism, the paper will pose an antithetical and subversive interpretation of gender and sexuality against the contemporary criminalization and alienation of the queer community. This indological analysis and queering of pre-colonial history and mythology will be a strong derision of contemporary, right wing, and anti-queer Hindu ideologies.

**Key words:** queer, nationalism, post-colonial, hetero-normativity, indological.
Gender and sexuality are intertwined with the idea and material reality of nation, nationalism and nationhood. H.J. Kim Puri, Jyoti Puri and Hyun Sook Kim, in their article “Conceptualizing Gender-Sexuality-State-Nation: An Introduction”, posit:

The flawed promises of nationalism as an all-inclusive, horizontal community are especially visible from the positions of women and marginalized groups. This special issue argues that understanding the changing cultural and political terrain of states and nations is relevant and crucial to analyses of sexuality and gender. This issue grows out of the recent work of a number of feminist scholars who have recognized that states, nationalisms, and nations are profoundly gendered. They have attended to the gendered, class and race-based idioms that shape the contours of nationalism, its boundaries, and its key symbols and meanings. (Puri et al. 137)

The “flawed promises” that the article mentions is relevant in contextualizing gender and sexuality in modern Indian nationalist context which is framed by a patriarchal and heteronormative hegemony that marginalizes and criminalizes deviations from the monolithic regime. The entire construction of the figure of Bharat Mata is not only Hindu centric in its imagination of Indian nationhood and blasphemous to the monotheistic Muslim beliefs, but also a distortion of the Hindu mythology and the image of femininity that it draws upon. The post-colonial image of Bharat Mata which draws upon Ma Durga degrades the powers and potentials of the goddess who in traditional mythological beliefs is a self-sufficient protector and warrior and does not require any masculine intrusion or aid. The discourse of a Bharat Mata supplicating her sons to free her from the imperial powers is derogatory to the traditional mythology which eulogizes the goddess as Adi Shakti (absolute power). This anti-colonial, Hindu nationalist discourse turns the otherwise invincible mythological femininity into an infirm woman, supplicating the masculine power for her release. This installs the patriarchal hegemony and the heteronormative gender roles that configure Indian Hindutva Nationalism. The article also emphasizes on “denaturalizing” geo-political boundaries to analyze the mutual constitution of gender, sexuality, state and nation. It is through naturalization, sublimation and deification of the contours that a nationalistic emotion is generated. A deconstruction and historicization of these contours lay bare the constitutive process in the formation of the nation. The retention of section 377 of IPC is one of these processes that form a nationalist emotion along repressive, patriarchal and heteronormative lines that appropriate and control sexuality to meet the hegemonic image of a homogenized, uniform and absolutist nation state. The article states:

States and nations reimage and reconfigure their power and extend their reach, albeit in varying cultural contexts. While we do not suggest that all state practices of exclusion, discrimination, and violence are similar across cultural and historical contexts, it is instructive to highlight the patterns of how states and nations regulate sexual, gender, racial, and cultural borders. It is equally important to note the struggles around citizenship, such as the demands for full inclusion in the citizenry and nation. These
demands are constrained by the liberal politics of inclusion and belonging. Social class, race, gender, and sexuality are central nodes for challenging cultural and political exclusions but also are sites where inequalities are created anew within the framework of national states. (Puri et al.139)

The otherization of LGBTQ communities by the supporters of section 377 by deploying nationalist sentiments, deeming deviant sexualities as western imports and overshadowing the gender and sexual fluidity, diversity and multiplicity inherent in the indigenous cultures and mythologies are paradigms of the schemes that the states and nations co-opt to impose homogeneity and uniformity for an easy exercise of power.

The re-criminalization of homosexual relationships with the retention of section 377 of Indian penal code led to many debates and dissent. The debate “Is homosexuality conflicting with Cultural Values in India” on Prime Time, NDTV, hosted by Raveesh Kumar, offers an insight into the constitutional as well as cultural incongruities and paradoxes that Section 377 and its petitioners reflect, in their beliefs, values and understanding of what constitutes ‘Indianness.’ The prime panelists were Supreme Court advocate Ejaz Maqbool from All India Muslim Personal Law, women’s rights’ activist Vrinda Marwah and historicist Saleem Kidwai. (NDTV 2013). Ejaz Maqbool -an advocate for the retention of section 377, on being interrogated by Raveesh about the Supreme Court's regressive decision, emphatically upholds multiple times, “Don’t ape the west.” This renders Ejaz vulnerable to a vast historical criticism that exposes the incredulity of his understanding of the history of India itself. Ironically, the very existence of section 377 in the Indian statutes, post Independence, is an imitation of a law that has its roots in western, Judeo-Christian morality. On another debate on NDTV called “The Homosexuality Debate”, Anand Grover, senior advocate, representing Naz Foundation, which had petitioned against section 377, historicizes section 377 and the status of sexuality in Indian history. He lays bare the fact that section 377 of Indian penal code was imposed on India from the colonial British constitution in 1860 to “demean” our sexualities. He talks about the glorious status of the transgenders in Indian history where the chief executive of last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar was Mehboob Ali, a hijra. The origins of this section go back to 1290, the times when the church and religion were hegemonic forces, influencing every sphere of life in Europe. The law emanates from Judeo-Christian vigilantism that deemed any non-procreative sexual act as ‘unnatural’ and a sin. Kamal Farooqi, another member of All India Muslim Personal Law, in the same debate, argues for criminalization of gay sex by saying, “Anything that comes in the way of human purpose, assigned to us by the creator, and our advancement, should be eliminated.” What strikes here, is the grotesque irony of his outdated and religious idea of advancement which predicates upon the multiplication of human species, for a country whose gravest issue is soaring fertility rates. The religious fundamentalists’ understanding of natural and unnatural is quite dubious, as what is unnatural and artificial is the human interference with the natural course of sexuality, which is that of fluidity and multiplicity. The channeling and correcting through ‘order’ is unnatural. If penile-vaginal sex is the only natural sex then it would happen on its own
uniformly across all human species, without any religious, psychological or legal indoctrination or correction. It is the instrument of ‘naturalization’ of penile-vaginal sex that the structures of power deploy to sustain the hetero-normative and patriarchal hegemony. Kamal Farooqi and Ejaz Maqbool, in their advocacy for section 377, heavily resort to religion, which renders their arguments redundant for a country whose constitution has secularism as its foundation, and not religious absolutism. The presence of this section in Indian constitution defies the values of secularism, as its origins are purely religious. The quotation from the Indian constitution is as follows:

377. Unnatural offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offense described in this section. (Lawyers Collective 01)

The law clearly penalizes any form of sexual activity except penile-vaginal sex. The criminalization of sodomy dates back to Dark ages, when it was enforced in Britain, where the church fabricated binaries of natural/unnatural or pure/evil, stemming from the biblical idea that God created man to multiply, which is only possible through heterosexual penile-vaginal intercourse. The law demonizes deviations from procreative sexual acts, and calls them "carnal acts against the order of nature". It is a sheer western, colonial import and a misfit for independent, cosmopolitan and secular India. The deployment of the term ‘carnal’ explains the essentially didactic and biblical/evangelical overtones that the law carries demonizing not procreative sex, but sensual, fleshy, corporeal pleasures defined by ‘lust’ which is one of the seven deadly sins of Christianity. The outdated law still rests upon gender binary, recognizing only men and women and does not address the communities outside this binary which form a large part of Indian population. Even the proponents of the law- the British, scraped the law and de-criminalized homosexuality in 1967, but India, the victim of a colonial imposition, continues to grapple with it despite independence.

The Naz Foundation had filed a petition in 2009 arguing that section 377 is totally discordant with the other sections of the constitution that protect our fundamental rights as the citizens of India—fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India. The presence of section 377 denies the queer communities the right of equality before law, right against discrimination on the basis of sex, and most importantly the most nuanced article 21, which reads as: “Protection of life and personal liberty: No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty, except according to the procedure prescribed by the law” (Naz Foundation Judgement 2009). The article went into revisions in the recent years with expansions and more explanations like:
It imposed a limitation upon a procedure which prescribed for depriving a person of life and personal liberty by saying that the procedure which prescribed for depriving a person of life and personal liberty, must be reasonable, fair and such law should not be arbitrary, whimsical and fanciful. The interpretation which has been given to the words life and personal liberty in various decisions of the Apex Court, it can be said that the protection of life and personal liberty has got multi dimensional meaning and any arbitrary, whimsical and fanciful act of the State which deprived the life or personal liberty of a person would be against the provision of Article 21 of the Constitution. (legalserviceindia.com 01)

However, the arguments of Naz Foundations were rendered baseless and invalid by The Supreme Court of India in 2013, upholding the constitutionality of section 377. (CIVIL APPEAL NO.10972 OF 2013 (Arising out of SLP (C) No.15436 of 2009). The very idea of premising law on religious ethics, in a secular nation, and arbitrarily constructing natural/unnatural binary are clearly whimsical and fanciful acts of the state. Within the constitution itself is found the incredulity and illegitimacy of section 377. As Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a transgender rights activist and a transgender herself, emphatically proclaims in “Gay Sex debate” hosted by Arnab Goswami, that this section denies queers the right to live with dignity and they feel ashamed of themselves(The Newshour Debate 2013). She quotes quranic verses where transgenders are recognized and also upholds that Indian ancient history is that of free sexuality as opposed to modern colonial/draconian laws maneuvering it into hetero-normativity, which punctures the religious fundamentalist arguments of Kamal Farooqi. The petitioners for the retention of section 377 also argue that the law does not criminalize the concept of homosexuality and homosexuals per say, but as Kamal Farooqi says, it criminalizes “the sex” between two consenting homosexuals. This ludicrous argument incites a lot of dissenters who attack the diplomatic tokenism of feigning acceptance, while denying the basic fundamental right of privacy to two or more consenting adults in private. Filmmaker Sridhar, whose film on queer issues, The Pink Mirror was banned by Indian censor board for the explicit display of sexuality, dissents by upholding, “Why would I even be a homosexual if I do not have sex. It is my basic fundamental right being a human. This law denies me my humanity.” (NDTV 2013). NDTV, in the beginning of the debate, shows a small clip where, on being questioned upon the retention of section 377 by NDTV journalists, the Indian politicians respond with refusals to talk about the issue and the exclamations like “Shiv Shiv!” which denotes a corrective response to purify an impurity or a sin, which doesn’t have to be uttered in public. The trivial incident exhibits the contemporary reality of India which is analogous to the western 19th century Victorian social reality, as Michel Foucault delineates in his seminal work, The History of Sexuality:

On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom. The rest had only
to remain vague; proper demeanor avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one's speech. And sterile behavior carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty. (Foucault 03)

‘Silence’ played an important role in controlling and regulating sexuality in 19th century Europe, which is now hegemonizing the Indian societies. Stigmatizing sexuality to the extent that talking about it too instigates cringe and disgust is one of the most effective ways to manacle it. On legal and political forefronts, the silence transforms into homophobic and corrective discourses. Advocate Ejaz Maqbool calls the retention of section 377 a “corrective surgery” co-opted by Supreme Court to redeem the decriminalization that the high court had previously undertaken (NDTV 2013). The term renders Raveesh shocked which he expresses by repeating the term in an interrogative tone. It is a stark sign of regression that Indian legal framework is dwindling into, following the measures that the West deployed in archaic times, when homosexuality was deemed as a sin/flaw/disorder capable of correction.

The shocking replies of the Ministry of Home Affairs to the Naz Foundation’s petition expose the misconstrued knowledge about Indian history and society that dominates the mainstream values and belief system and forms the normativity of repression. Ministry of Home Affairs writes:

Indian society by and large disapproved of homosexuality, which disapproval was strong enough to justify it being treated as a criminal offence even where the adults indulge in it in private. Union of India submits that law cannot run separately from the society since it only reflects the perception of the society. It claims that at the time of initial enactment, Section 377 IPC was responding to the values and morals of the time in the Indian society. It has been submitted that in fact in any parliamentary secular democracy, the legal conception of crime depends upon political as well as moral considerations notwithstanding considerable overlap existing between legal and safety conception of crime i.e. moral factors. (Naz Foundation Judgement 2009)

It cannot be ignored that contemporary ideas of nationhood and nationalism are influenced by colonial standards. The values and morality of contemporary Indian consciousness are shaped by western, colonial morality of hetero-normative standards which are erroneously ascribed to bhartiya sanskriti (Indian values), as a consequence of a colonial hangover, wiping off the memory and the knowledge of ancient sects, scriptures and cultures of Indian sub-continent that reflected a free-play of gender and sexuality. The history of containment of this queerness of Indian civilization by the west has to be traced along the lines of law that criminalizes homosexuality. The morals and values of the society are not autonomously formed. The political leaders in power who are predicating their arguments on the values and morality of
the Indian society must know that these very values and moralities are fabricated and indoctrinated by the dominant normative, the power holders and the law. It is the state that deploys its ideological apparatuses (ISA) i.e. various instruments perpetuating the dominant ideologies—religion, culture, pedagogy, mass media etc. that form the consciousness of the individuals (Althusser 33). It is through these instruments that the ideology formulated by the state, in Marxist theorist Louis Althusser’s terms “interpellates” the individuals as subjects (54). This renders the ministry of Home Affairs’ argument hypocritical, as those values and morals that they claim to safeguard are infiltrated by them only, being the shareholders of power. Societal values and morals are reflections of the ideologies dictated by the state.

Resorting to the religious dogmas to formulate law in a secular country itself is a decision gone awry. But within the religious arguments posited by the religious representatives and the petitioners for criminalization of homosexuality, there exists a total misconstruction of history, appropriation of mythology and a dissemination of erroneous knowledge about Hinduism, Indian culture and values and what forms Indian morality and nationhood. The common contemporary notions in India about homosexuality being a western import is the biggest impediment to developing a tolerance for queer communities and an understanding of gender and sexuality in India. There are several You-tube videos where young You-tubers in India go around interviewing common people in Indian metropolitan cities about their opinions on homosexuality and section 377. The responses are diverse; some accept, some reject, some have stigmatized the queer so much that they refrain from talking about it (Tamashabera 2016). But what is homogenous across the majority is the lack of understanding of the nuances of gender and sexuality, and the false notion that homosexuality is a western product of changing times and modernity. The contemporary spiritual leaders coalescing with the right wing politics play a major role in perpetuating the homophobic ideologies and sustaining the hetero-normative and patriarchal hegemony, strengthening gender roles and a patrilineal family structure. Celebrated yoga guru Baba Ramdev on being questioned upon homosexuality and the retention of section 377, expresses his elation on the decision and calls homosexuality an “American disease”, reiterates common tokenism rhetoric by calling gays and lesbians “our brothers and sisters” who are a part of us, and that his yoga can cure such “wrong habits”, like same-sex intercourse and masturbation (News X and Bharat Swabhiman; 2016 and 2013). This reverberates Foucauldian analysis in his theory of *Repressive Hypothesis*, where, in 18th century Europe various discourses were formed about sexuality, knowledge was fabricated, “biologizing” sexualities, and the curative claims spread by various forms of power—medicine, pedagogy, psychology, biology, psychiatry etc., instead of blatant penalization (Foucault 33). Ramdev demonizes same sex intercourse, recourse to *bhartiya sanskriti* (Indian civilization) and *Hindu dharma*, posits the binary of *naitik/anaitik* (licit/illicit) and relegates non-procreative sexual acts to the category of the illicit. This surprisingly reflects more of a western, Christian binary construction as Foucault explains:
Up to the end of the eighteenth century, three major explicit codes—apart from the customary regularities and constraints of opinion-governed sexual practices: canonical law, the Christian pastoral, and civil law. They determined, each in its own way, the division between licit and illicit. (Foucault 37)

Ejaz Maqbool and Baba Ramdev both publicly express that no religion—Hinduism, Islam or Christianity—accepts homosexual intercourse, and all of them penalize it. The credulity of this claim is subverted by an Indological/historical analysis of sexuality in India by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai in their book *Same-Sex Love in India—A Literary History*. The book recuperates the myths and legends from the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and epics from various sects and beliefs of South Asian mythologies which collectively form what we call today ‘Hindu mythology.’ It narrativizes these legends from the entry points of the dialectics of gender and sexuality, and unveils the queerness, the fluidity, multiplicity and polymorphosity that Indian mythological history is brimming with. The book narrates the story of the most celebrated God of South India, Ayappa, who is a progeny of a homosexual intercourse between the two most important Gods of Hinduism (two of the three Gods who form the holy trinity) - Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva (Vanita and Kidwai 109). The *Mohini* avatar of Lord Vishnu, revered all across Hinduism, is a figure of subversion of the absolutism of gender/sex binary. Vishnu’s fluid mobility across genders can be co-opted to theorize the “performativity” (Butler 15) of gender and the continuum of cross-dressing which is integral to Hindu culture. The intercourse between the two male Gods does not take place as a result of deception of Vishnu’s disguise as a woman. Rather Lord Shiva is so enamored of the Mohini avatar that he supplicates Vishnu to take up Mohini avatar again so that he could make love to him, to which he consents and the entire erotic session happens before an embarrassed and jealous Parvati, Shiva’s wife. Though this reiterates the hetero-normative role play, it also problematizes the concept of “disembodied spirit” in Hindu mythology (Vanita and Kidwai 35). If socially constructed categories of caste, race, sex and gender are all mortal and less important than the eternal soul, which takes on different bodies in different births like changing clothes, then the corporeality of Vishnu-Shiva intercourse dwindles into a love of two spirits, that renders penalizing homosexuality in the name of Hindu culture inaccurate. Also Mohini getting pregnant and the pregnancy still remaining even when Mohini retreats to the original male form of Vishnu questions the contemporary laws and beliefs that rely on the heterosexual family set-up as the sole natural structure. Ayappa has two fathers, a homosexual parentage, which is evident by his other name Hariharaputra, which means the son (putra) of Hari (Vishnu) and Hara (Shiva) (Vanita and Kidwai 109). Another instance of cross-dressing found in Indian mythology is directly linked to Shiva’s homoerotic fixation upon Krishna, who is again an avatar of Lord Vishnu. To attend Krishna’s raas leela with all the gopiyan, Shiva cross-dresses as a beautiful woman, which is articulated in a popular Hindi devotional song, which translates as:

One fine day, Bhole Bhandari (Shiv)
Disguised as a pretty woman, entered Brij Parvati, exhausted of supplicating him to stop; But adamant tripurari (Shiv) ignored her

(Bhaktigaane.in 2013)

Linking this incident with the former Shiva-Mohini relationship affirms the homoerotic love that Shiva harbours for Vishnu despite his avatars. It is not the body of Mohini that he desired, but essentially Vishnu, whom he desires again in his Krishna avatar.

Yoga guru Baba Ramdev’s enterprise named Patanjali loses its cultural significance with a deconstruction of what the title Patanjali is loaded with. Patanjali, a large scale business unit, produces herbal, ayurvedic products and deals in healthcare, having many hospitals and yoga centers. Baba Ramdev claims that his yoga has cure for sexual deviations which are nothing but bad habits. What punctures his alienation of the queer as diseased is the meaning of Patanjali itself. Patanjali is second century BC commentator and grammarian whose studies form the basis for Baba Ramdev’s medical and yoga knowledge. An excerpt from “Same Sex Love in India” explains the plurality of gender and sexuality that Patanjali recognizes, which ironically Baba Ramdev derides as an American disease.

Patanjali’s second century BC texts, and Jain texts, have demonstrated that the concept of a third sex, with various ambiguous sub-categories have been a part of Indian worldview for nearly three thousand years. While categorizing men who desire men as ‘women’ on the basis of their desire but simultaneously as ‘men’ in gender, they also noted that desire may be fluid and transient. (Vanita and Kidwai 29)

The biggest potential subversive element to contemporary hetero-normativity is Vatsyayana’s Kamasutra, a compilation of all earlier erotic sciences. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai’s delineation of Vatsyayana’s intentions behind forming this compilation displays a stark contrast between the history of celebration of unbridled sexuality in India and the current moralizing and control of sexuality by an appropriation of the same history. The chapter on Kamasutra states:

The text commences by placing Kama in perspective as one of the three aims of life, pursued by all living beings. Vatsyayana advocates the study of this text by both men and women. He emphasizes that not just courtesans but other women too must study the kamasutra, and that young girls should be instructed by older, more experienced women, in its theory and practice. He lists sixty-four arts as necessary to be studied by all people in order to be attractive. (Vanita and Kidwai 54)

The current law of section 377 which our contemporary political and religious leaders claim, safeguards our Indian civilization, stands in stark contrast to what our civilization,
mythology and scriptures entailed. ‘Kamasutra in its narrative, portrays every possible kind of sexual positions, activities and orientations, ranging from self-pleasure, to having sex with animal, orgies, masochism, all possible kinds of genital piercings and sex-toys, all of which in contemporary Indian perception are western, pornographic imports. The modern category of Hinduism that is a consolidation of the south Asian sects and beliefs, has a history of celebration of the kama (sensual pleasures), which is one of the three most important goals of human life as opposed to western, Judeo-Christian morality which condemns ‘carnality’ and that Indian penal code apes on the pretext of saving Indian culture from western impure infiltration. Sex in Hindu mythology is not limited to procreation. Rather sexuality and pleasure are co-opted as means to re-unite with God. The book narrates various communities in the Indian history like the 17th and 18th century Vaishnava Sahajiyas’ men who engaged in ritualized sexual intercourse within the women of their own community who were married to a different man to ape the relationship between Radha and Krishna, which they believed turned them into a woman and “purified” their love for Krishna (Vanita and Kidwai 75). This validates homoerotic emotions as integral parts of Hindu mythology. Even if the community conforms to a heterosexual pattern, it legitimizes effeminate men as not alienated from Indian culture. It rather eulogizes effeminacy and homoerotic desires as divine and pure as opposed to current religious fundamentalists who are interpellated by the outdated 18th and 19th century colonial European ideologies of corrective sciences that de-naturalized deviant sexual behavior.

Relying entirely on the mythological evidences to counter contemporary heteronormativity can also dwindle into a redundant practise, as the normative status of heterosexuality remains unchanged there as well. Homoerotic desires find fulfilment only through a conformity to heteronormativity. Shiva indulges in carnal fulfilment with Vishnu only in his Mohini avatar or when he himself transforms into a gopi. A deviation from heterosexual carnality is received with ridicule and punishment. The birth of Kartikeya, Shiva’s son, does not involve a heterosexual sexual intercourse. He is born out of Shiva’s semen being swallowed by Agni, the God of fire, and this homosexual act is denounced by Parvati as ‘wicked’, ‘impure’, and even Shiva deems it as ‘improper’ (Vanita and Kidwai 93). Agni as a punishment suffers from the burning sensation because of Shiva’s semen in him, and Shiva suggests to him a corrective measure. He asks him to transmit this semen into sages’ wives, who in turn transmit it to Ganga from where it falls into a forest of grass and Kartikeya is born. An analysis of Padma Purana: Arjuni (Sanskrit) also depicts the fulfilment of homoerotic desires through subscribing to a heteronormative setup (Vanita and Kidwai 105). Krishna-Arjuna love making conjugates when Arjuna is transformed into Arjuni, a woman brimming with beauty, by bathing in a miraculous lake to be a part of Krishna’s Rasleela. Similarly, in Skanda Purana, Somavan’s desire for Sumedha finds its articulation only when Somavan is changed into Samavati (Vanita and Kidwai 85).

However despite the overarching heteronormativity, what makes it crucial to hark back to mythology is extreme gender fluidity and the constant troubling of the categories of gender
and sex. This holds relevance in connection to the modern Butlerian theorization of gender, where not just gender but even sex loses its binary, immutable and absolutist rigidity and becomes problematic and contingent. There are movements across not only gender, a social construct, but also across sex, puncturing the institutional “biologization” of sex. This intimates a possibility of breaking beyond the imposed identities for the accomplishment of desires. Fulfilment of desire holds utmost importance in achieving salvation in South Asian mythologies as opposed to the renunciation in the western ones.

According to the doctrine of Samskaras, one becomes what one desires to become and may be reborn as whatever one mentally dwells upon in one’s dying hours. Fulfilment of all desires may be seen as a necessary step towards ridding oneself of those desires and attaining liberation. (Vanita and Kidwai 86)

There also are instances of homosexual erotic fulfillments sans gender or sexual transformation. For instance, the birth of Bhagiratha, as mentioned in the medieval text *Sushruta Samhita*, is a result of the sexual intercourse between two women (Vanita and Kidwai 115). This not only defies the biologized sex but also ratifies homosexual affairs. In a version of *Krittivasa Ramayana*, after the death of King Dilipa, his wives, on Lord Shiva’s command, have sexual intercourse with each other which engenders Bhagiratha. Etymologically Bhagiratha is the one born through the divine blessing of two bhagas (vulvas). In another version of Krittivasa Ramayana, Lord Brahma commands Madan (Kama), the God of love, desire and beauty to bear the two queens a son, obeying which he casts a spell on them and they engage in passionate sexual intercourse.

Burning with desire induced by Madan, Chandra and Mala took each other in embrace, and each kissed the other

Chandravati played the man and Mala the woman; the two women dallied and made love [Dui nari mono ronge rongo krira kori]. (Vanita and Kidwai 119)

The relationship between fourteenth century mystic poet Jagannath Das and his master major mystic Shri Chaitanya can be considered to trace the homoeroticism as an integral part of divine devotion and spirituality.

In Chaitanyaganoddedipika, Jagannath is said to have been known by female names Bilasakya, Tinkini, and Kamalatika in previous births. Jagannath identified with Radha and her handmaids. Seeing Krishna in Chaitanya, he thought of himself as Chaitanya’s maidservant. As part of devotional ritual, he would massage Chaitanya’s legs and wear the clothes Chaitanya had taken off, including his loincloth. This intimate relationship continued till Chaitanya’s death. (Vanita and Kidwai 111)
Also, despite heterosexuality being the ‘norm’, it is often an imposition, rather than a free choice. It seems like a bondage that results in dissatisfaction, despair and eventually infidelity to break free or a feeling of contempt for heteronormative matrimony. The very idea of giving birth to Ganesha strikes Parvati as a result of the yearning for privacy and distance from Lord Shiva. She is disturbed by her husband’s chauvinistic intrusions into her private bathing sessions with her female friends. She places her freedom much above matrimony and goes to the extent of demanding Ganesha to rage a war against Shiva (Vanita and Kidwai 97). Shiva too transgresses matrimonial and monogamous boundaries in his escapades with various avatars of Lord Vishnu—be it as Mohini or as Krishna.

_Same-Sex Love in India_ through its narratives establishes that the discourses on gender and sexuality are not the monopoly of western philosophies. Rather the actual manifestation of fluidity, performativity, contingencies and problematics of gender are found in Indian mythology. We have texts loaded with subversive power which, if narrativized and historicized, could outlive the false consciousness of hetero-normativity.

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Abstract:

Ethnic identity as the primary attribute of a human being and ethnicity as genetically determined, as primordial, is a predominant notion in several nationalist and separatist discourses. An ethno-cultural conception of nationality lays emphasis on a community of believed common descent with a common history to which the members are bound by birth. In recent times, ethnic identity has emerged as the primary mobilizing force in the struggle for power and resources especially in third world spaces. The Story of Felanee, delineates the problematics of ethnic identity in the backdrop of ethnic conflict in Assam, between the ethnic-Assamese desiring complete dominance or even independence, the Boros claiming a separate state, and Bengalis who belong nowhere. I wish to demonstrate, through an analysis of the text, how the novel challenges the reification of human beings into ethnic subjects. The novel questions the preconceived notion of biological descent and therefore challenges the essentialist underpinnings of the notion of ethnic identity. The concept of ethnic identity, which usually confronts us as uniform and homogenous, is exposed as inconsistent and unstable. I also wish to discuss how ethnicity functions as a discourse of power propagated by dominant groups and therefore counter primordialist notions and argue in favour of constructivism as the basis of ethnicity. The analysis also reveals how ethnic ideologies construct signifiers of difference to recognise, isolate and identify the other and how the reducing of the human to the non-human, a migrant into a “locust”, facilitates the justification of violence against the ‘other’.

Keywords: ethnicity, identity, primordial, ethnic violence, Assam
The emphasis on ethnic identity and the violence it generates in Arupa Patangia Kalita’s *The Story of Felanee* (2011) compels a deeper consideration of the phenomenon of ethnicity and its consequences on individual life and subjectivity. Ethnic identity as the primary attribute of a human being and ethnicity as genetically determined, as primordial, is a predominant notion in several nationalist and separatist discourses. In discourses of nationalism, an ethno-cultural conception of nationality lays emphasis on a community of supposed common descent with a common history to which the members are bound by birth. The view had its origins in German romanticism and in organicist ideas of immemorial biological character of nations. Recounting the origins of ethnic nationalism, Stefan Wolff says that its roots may be traced back to the ideas generated in the writings of philosophers like Herder and Fichte and popularised by the German Romantic movement (53). The ideas of ethnic nationalism developed around cultural markers and language as these were regarded as “the embodiment of a people’s ‘essence’” (Wolff 53). Even in the age of globalization and the inevitable cultural mixing it brought about (or due to these very factors), these ideas continue to be emphasized in nationalist and separatist ideologies alike. The cultural domain as a site of power is increasingly exploited by such ideologies. Clifford Geertz, arguing that the people of newly formed states are more susceptible to primordial attachments, claims that a political consciousness centred on the structure of a state produces such sentiments: “it is the very process of the formation of a sovereign, civil state that, among other things, stimulates sentiments of parochialism, communalism, racialism, and so on, because it introduced into society a valuable new prize over which to fight and a frightening new force with which to contend” (270). Ethnic identity has therefore emerged as the primary mobilizing force in the struggle for power and resources.
The Story of Felanee delineates the problematic of ethnic identity in the backdrop of ethnic conflict in Assam, between the ethnic-Assamese desiring complete dominance or even independence, the Boros claiming a separate state, and Bengalis who belong nowhere. I wish to demonstrate, through an analysis of the text, how it challenges the reification of human beings into ethnic subjects. The novel was originally written and published in Assamese in 2003 and subsequently translated into English by Deepika Phukan and published in 2011. The plotline traces the story of Felanee from the brutal attack on their village, killing her husband and others and burning down the houses, to her impoverished condition in the rehabilitation camp, and finally to a meagre existence at the settlement at a forest beside a Rabha village where others like her had found a shelter.

The novel questions the preconceived notion of biological descent and therefore challenges the essentialist underpinnings of the notion of ethnic identity. The first chapter reveals Felanee’s ancestry and complicated ethnic inheritance and in this the seemingly uncomplicated novel locates its central problematic. The concept of ethnic identity, which usually confronts us as uniform and homogenous, is exposed as inconsistent and unstable. An ethnic group is generally conceived as a group perpetuated by descent. Max Weber held ethnicity to be a belief in common descent: “We shall call ‘ethnic groups’ those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent . . .” (35). In the words of Fredrik Barth, an ethnic group is a population that is “largely biologically self-perpetuating” (75). A common descent or at least a belief in common descent is, therefore, a founding principle of an ethnic group. The investment in the idea of biological continuity is so widely accepted that it goes almost unquestioned. This is where one finds the intervention of a novel like the present one so singular and important. Felanee’s ancestry is sketched out in the first chapter of the novel, a sort of ‘prelude’ that situates the novel in its narrative context. The
story of two generations, Felanee’s grandmother Ratnamala and her mother Jutimala, are compressed within a few pages. Ratnamala, who belonged to a prosperous and powerful Assamese family had eloped with a Boro ‘mahout’ Kinaram, and Jutimala was born of their union; Ratnamala died during childbirth and Kinaram was killed by Ratnamala’s family. Jutimala, brought up as a Boro by Kinaram’s family, married a Bengali trader Khitish Ghosh and both were killed in a brutal act of ethnic cleansing on the night Felanee is born. Felanee, therefore, borrows her ‘genes’ from Assamese, Boro and Bengali ancestors. She reflects on her own mixed antecedents after some boys belonging to an extremist group at the Settlement warn her against getting involved with “mixed communities”:

While rubbing the blood stains in her sador, she wondered about the various people whose genes ran in her blood.

Her Grandmother, Ratnamala’s?

Her grandfather, the elephant mahout Kinaram Boro’s?

What about her mother? Did she have more from Ratnamala or Kinaram? And what about herself? Did her blood have stronger genes from Khitish Ghosh? And what about the man who put the baby in her lap and decorated the parting of her hair with red sindhur? What about Moni’s blood? (185)

A biological notion of ethnicity that involves an insistence on blood descent, fails to circumscribe Felanee’s identity. She cannot conceive of herself as having one identity in preference to others, and therefore the warning issued to her and the expression “mixed communities”, leads to unresolved ambiguities.
The problem centres around Felanee’s ethnic affiliation: to which ethnic group does she ‘belong’? Is ethnicity a matter of choice? If ethnicity becomes for someone a matter of choice, is it then a matter of political or affective choice? Or, to put it in another way, is the fact of making such a choice a political act? Apart from all these considerations, however, the most significant intervention achieved by the novel is that the incorporation of choice deconstructs the fundamental basis of ethnic identity. The matter of ‘blood descent’ which is so consistent in the discourse of ethnicity fails to impose on Felanee a distinctive identity. As people belonging to different ethnic identities claim her as one of their own, ethnic identity, within the person of Felanee, becomes a fluid notion of belonging, and not something static and stable. The problematisation of ethnic identity reflects the turn in critical thinking about subjectivity: “While nineteenth- and early twentieth-century expressions of identity politics often separated out a single defining characteristic as a point of powerful and practical emphasis, late twentieth century theorizations of subjectivity often brought to the foreground complications and plural social engagements” (Hall 110). These words point towards the widely held perception of a gradual waning of essentialist tendencies in the conception of identity, and evolution of a plural notion of identity, a movement towards the conception of hybrid subjectivity. The perception has been subsequently revealed to be overly optimistic in view of the persistence of the violent and atavistic passions generated by ethnicity. This novel, however, foregrounds the postmodernist position of rejecting essentialism and conceiving identity as plural and hybrid. But it also goes a step further in re-establishing the primacy of the much critiqued liberal humanist conception of the individual ‘human’ essence.

Assamese nationalism is primarily based on ethno-linguistic identity and its violence is directed at “outsiders” on the basis of linguistic difference and place of origin (Baruah, 44-90). In the novel, however, we find that such an insistence on an exclusionary group identity
is largely uneven among the Assamese. It did not exist among the Assamese families in the village where Felanee had lived happily with her husband; it is rather the external forces that disrupt and destroy the peaceful local world of the village. Violence, it is hinted again and again, attacks and affects people irrespective of ethnicity: “Most people had locked their homes and left. In most of the Assamese, Boro and Bihari homes the men remained behind while their families had left. In the Bengali homes even the men had gone” (16). Felanee, in spite of belonging to an Assamese household is asked by her husband to get ready to leave the village along with the other Assamese and Bengali families, but unfortunately they are not spared. In a gruesome recurrence of the violence that had marked Felanee’s birth about two decades ago, the village is attacked by marauders and while Felanee and her son Moni barely manage to escape, her husband Lambodar is killed and her house burnt. In the interpersonal relationships depicted within the village, between the families of Biren Baishya, Rati Saha, Haren Das and theirs, or in the settlement, between Kali Boori, Jon’s mother, Minoti, Ratna’s mother and Felanee, ethnicity never becomes important enough to affect interpersonal relationships, and the incidents of violence are seen as external disruptive forces, threatening their meagre existence. Therefore, it may be argued that the uncritical notion of uniform attitude, feeling and sentiment within the ethnic community that usually attends the discourse of ethnicity is challenged in the text.

Besides, the text also responds to the inhumanity, often justified in identity politics to malign, reduce or eliminate the ‘other’. In the discourse of ethnicity, the ‘self’ is constructed on the basis of the ‘non-self’, or, to put it in another way the ‘other’ is ‘made’ to be the ‘non-self’. Here the legitimacy of the Assamese ‘self’ is constructed as opposed to the illegitimacy of the Bengali or Boro ‘other’, the “locust”, the parasitic ‘non-self’. Contributions to the psychoanalytic examination of ethnic and racial hatred includes similar categorisations such
as Mary Douglas’s concept of the “slimy” and Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of the “stranger” (Clarke 14-15, 4). Douglas shows that the boundaries of the body are symbolic of societal boundaries and illustrates how the discourse of ‘otherness’ constitutes the ‘other’ as dirty, polluting and dangerous that may contaminate and ultimately cause disorder in society; the emphasis on difference is used to preserve order, which in turn sustains the difference (Clarke 14-15). Bauman formulates the concept of the ‘familiar stranger’ who like the ‘slimy’ is a psychosocial character, “a manifestation, a projection and internalisation of our fear of difference, of being polluted, of being psychologically invaded by otherness” (Clarke 4). Ethnic ideologies often work by portraying the ‘other’ or the ‘non-self’ as the ‘non-human’, undeserving of human feeling, and therefore justify the use of violence against them. It is the propagation of this psychology of hatred by ethnic politics that the text portrays, such as the instance when “two senior leaders” leading the ethnic cleansing “told the Assamese people to forget words like humanity, love and compassion” (20). This dehumanizing aspect of ethnic politics is elaborated in the episode at the refugee camp where the doctors refuse to treat Felanee, who is at an advanced stage of pregnancy and sick with exhaustion and trauma, as they suspect her of being a Bengali and therefore an ‘outsider’, and enemy, due to the shell bangles in her hand:

She held up Felanee’s wrist with the white shell bangles, traditionally worn by married Bengali women, and asked, “Is this the reason for neglecting her?” Another boy in a white coat flung angry words at her, “Why do you have a such a soft spot for these people?”

“Because they are human beings,” she retorted.

“Do you call these locusts human beings? It is because of people like you that the Assamese people are in this plight,” the boy said accusingly. (30)
Ethnicity as identity politics is generally contemplated as providing a selfhood to people, but it may also be revealed to be a cruel force that reduces ‘other’ human beings to objects. When Felanee, lying down helpless and sick in the refugee camp, is charged about her identity by a doctor, she stares at him quite uncomprehendingly, almost unable to reply. The text reveals that ethnicity, especially in times of conflict, becomes so overwhelming that it seeks to subsume every other aspect of a human being, it does not recognise sickness or gender or even motherhood, so that a doctor, blinded by this overpowering discourse, may question a pregnant woman, “What are you?” The uncomprehending reaction of the doctors to the word “human” uttered by Felanee in response further emphasizes the power of the discourse of ethnicity, its power to render the category of the ‘human’ meaningless.

Another boy in a white coat, examined her, and remarked that the baby’s condition was not good. He then asked her, “What are you, anyway?” Stunned at this question, she kept looking at him. The boy stared back at her. Why was she taking so long to answer such a simple question, he thought. She, in turn, muttered the question to herself. “What are you?” Yes, she thought, What am I? “Just a human being, what else?” she said. Biren Baishya and the boy just heard that one word: “human”. (32)

There is, we notice, an objectification inherent in the framing of the question: She is asked “what are you”, instead of “who are you”. Felanee’s reply challenges this objectification. Felanee’s resistance to a “true Assamese” identity being imposed on her, albeit in order to escape being labelled a ‘locust’ outsider, shows her as retaining a subjective essence. She is unwilling to surrender her subjectivity to definitions available from society; rather she wills to resolve the question of her ethnic identity herself.
The text, it may be argued, considers ethnicity as a discourse of power propagated by dominant ideologies. It is akin to the view highlighted by theorists like Wan and Vanderwerf: “Ethnicity based on people’s ‘historical’ and ‘symbolic’ memory, is something created and used and exploited by leaders and others in the pragmatic pursuit of their own interests” (7). The text’s correlation of the politics of ethnicity with wilful lawlessness and display of raw power is evident in the depiction of the local events at the Settlement. The signing of the ‘historic’ Assam Accord in 1985 is represented in the following manner in the text:

Suddenly there seemed to be utter chaos in the market place. A group of boys arrived and started grabbing the ducks, pigeons and fowl that were left in the market. They also snatched all the meat at the butchers, as though the entire place belonged to them. It was obvious that these boys had no intention of paying what they had taken. Shouting slogans of “Long live Assam,” “Long live Assam Accord”, “Long live Bhrigu Phukan”, “Long live Prafulla Mahanta”, they started looting the shops. (112)

The text also constitutes in an ironic mode the rhetoric of a “golden” era promised by ethnic ideologues through the representation of a deceiving, manipulative and devious personality of Minoti’s lover. Minoti, one of the women Felanee befriends at the Settlement, had been exploited by this man, the spoilt son of a rich household. This man later becomes a political leader and subsequently joins a secessionist outfit. His manipulation of Minoti with the dreams of “a happy home in the golden State of Assam” (113), can be extended as equivalent to his role as a political leader selling dreams of a golden future to people. Through the paralleling of Minoti’s naive hopes and the incident encountered during the conversation, the text undertakes a virulent subversive attack on the desire for power and dominance that such
manufactured dreams conceal and reveals how even Assamese dissenters are turned into ‘traitors’ by the self-aggrandizing discourse of power:

[Minoti:] “He used to say that this was the only person who could drive out the infiltrators from Assam. He was the only person who could change the whole face of Assam and bring progress. And then the two of us could have a happy home in the golden state of Assam. . .

As they walked home amidst the turmoil, a scene in the corner of the road shocked them. An elderly man was arguing with a group of boys. . . . “You must take back your words about the future of the Assam Accord.”

[Old man: ] “No, I won’t. I tell you nothing is going to come of this Accord.”

[Boys:] “Why not? It is traitors like you that talk thus!”

[Old man: ] “Your leaders will be busy amassing wealth; Assam will soon become a graveyard.”

[Boys:] . . . “Beat him up.”

[Boys:] “Finish the traitor.” (113-114)

On a similar note, the confrontation between the Assamese lady and the young doctors at the medical camp reflects on the psychologically deadening power of a violent ethnic discourse that renders both humanitarian feelings and professional responsibilities redundant. The Assamese lady who comes to the rescue of Felanee, lying sick, traumatised and untreated by the doctors at the camp, severely criticises the Assamese leaders for propagating ethnic hatred for selfish gains:
Your revolutionary leaders want to lord over the common people. To sit on thrones, and deprive them of their hard earned money. You people call for blackouts in the name of revolution. There will come a time when Assam will have a perpetual blackout; do you understand?” The woman was trembling with rage. With his hand raised, one of the boys came charging at her. She too walked up to him aggressively. “Yes, come along! What do you want to do? If you kill me it would be like killing an ant. You want to break that person’s skull and throw him onto the road. You want to destroy anyone who wants to take Assam on the path of advancement. Your leaders are playing this game in order to enjoy princely comforts at the cost of the Assamese people!” (31)

The imposition of an Assamese identity that is ‘naturally’ violent to Bengali identity is therefore rejected in the text and a view of ethnicity as politically directed creation of difference is highlighted.

The text highlights the importance of ethnic markers and their symbolic value and the consequent objectification of the human. Ethnic ideology constructs signifiers of difference to recognise, isolate and identify the other. A strategy of the dominant ideology of reducing the human to the non-human, a migrant into a parasitic “locust”, facilitates the justification of violence against ‘it’. There are several instances in the novel when ethnic markers assume primary importance, relegating the human being to secondary status, objectifying the individual subject. Bulen, a distant relative, warns Felanee of dire consequences if she fails to show herself as a Boro by wearing a traditional Boro dress, a dokhona, as Bulen reminds her, “You have Boro blood in you. You are Kinaram Boro’s granddaughter, don’t forget!” and orders, “No one should wear the dress of other communities. As of now, all Boros must wear
Felanee challenges the essentialisation of identity that tries to devour her humanness. She does not wish to part with her shell bangles because she feels an inclination to her Bengali roots; she clings to them in spite of repeated warnings because they bear the memories of her mother: “brushing her lips against her bangles she tried to smell her mother’s fragrance” (15). The ‘otherness’ inflicted upon her cannot overpower her, neither does it inhibit her natural human sensibilities. The gruesome violence she faces does not induce feelings of vindictiveness within her. The text does not prop up any belligerent antagonistic identity as a reaction to the violence. Felanee, along with the other women depicted here, are all survivors, surviving the onslaught of belligerent ideologies, ideologies of conflict and hatred.
The politics of vendetta that ethnic ideology propagates justifies any kind of brutality against the dehumanized ‘other’. However, it may be argued that in text’s foregrounding of the battle between the humanistic attributes of the self with the vicious political ideologies, there is an attempt to depict the rioters, the ‘insiders’ who have imbibed the ideology of ethnic difference, as really the dehumanized beings. The depiction of the violence is so graphic that it seems to project a notion of ethnicity as pathological, not only irrational but as a sort of insanity, at least in its extremes (18-19, 22-24, 38-39). To these rioters symbols of the sacred become profane: the mob of murderers and arsonists had chosen the temple precincts and the temple drum for declaring their ethnic war: “Who would have imagined that the ‘doba’ would turn into a war drum? Who would associate the drum beats with blood, fire, brutal killings and death?” (36). The incoherent blabbering of the dim-witted Raghu reveals the incapacity of language to render the horror of the event. However, seemingly meaningless expressions like “people without faces” or “people without eyes and heads” (39) could be interpreted as the text’s oppositional strategy of exposing the rioters as transformed into ‘monsters’ by ideological brainwashing.

He looked retarded with his lisping speech and unsteady walk. But anyone who had seen him work realised his worth. He had basic intelligence.

. . . Lisping more than usual, Raghu started lamenting. “I was in school, Moni’s Maa,” he said, “There were so many people without faces that came at night. . . .”

In the temple the drums went dhoom, dhoom, dhoom and it was full of these people without eyes and heads. I went down to the ditch and covered myself with water hyacinths. And then they set fire to Shibani and Shibani’s father in your house, Moni’s Ma! And in the morning there were dogs and foxes. And there were bodies
like burnt fish!” After this incoherent and staccato delivery he started howling loudly. Slowly his crying turned into a sobbing moan as he continued, “Dadu, Dida . . . under the silk cotton . . . the two heads . . . goat’s head . . . Biren butcher’s shop . . . and red, red blood. More blood.” (38-39)

Biren Baishya, who describes these faceless men as really not men, but ghosts, evil spirits, further underlines this strategic demonization of the rioters: “Come, let’s get out of here;” he said. “This is a ghost village now. Didn’t you hear what Raghu said? By nightfall the place will abound in faceless ghosts” (40).

The text’s rejection of a general overemphasis on ethnic identity is in congruence with its insistence on our primary identities as human beings. Felanee was marked at her birth as the rejected one, by her name “Felanee – the throw away” (9), and in her turn, one may argue, she rejects the forces that try to subsume her subjectivity within the narrow confines of an ethnic identity. The image of her birth, her mother Jutimala throwing the new born away from the fire engulfing their house, is also an apt image, as the fire serves as a metaphor for the fires of vengeance that fuel ethnic violence. It may be said that in spite of several identities trying to claim her, she remains “just a human being”. Felanee may be considered as a representational figure in the text that takes an oppositional stand against ethnic ideologies, but her uniqueness lies in her genealogy – combining “true Assamese”, Boro and Bengali roots in one body and one consciousness. Her subjectivity is never represented as fragmented, or divided along the cultures she has inherited, but as stable. Considering Felanee as an individual, it is possible to trace in her a developing subjectivity in the course of the text. Just as the carnage at her birth had left her an orphan, the burning of the village and the killing of her husband leaves her destitute. It marks a transformation in her: from the
circumscribed though content life that she had led, she is thrown into a larger world. From the identities that had defined her previously – Ratnamala and Jutimala’s progeny and Lambodar’s wife, she can proclaim herself as “just human”. It is the self-sufficiency inherent in the words that also leads her, in her subsequent life at the Settlement, to a greater realisation of being a woman. In the Settlement she comes across a community of women – Kali Boori, Jon’s mother, Ratna’s mother, Jaggu’s wife and Minoti – who strive everyday against the dual shackles of poverty and patriarchy. In their empathy for each other they find the courage for a united act of resistance against the armed forces that threaten to disrupt their lives again. Their individual stories create a narrative of humanity against the powerful discourse of ethnicity that encompasses their lives.

The novel has thus deconstructed an essentialised notion of ethnic identity and the unthinking valorisation of blood descent in the conception of ethnicity through the representational figure of the protagonist. Such ethnicity becomes revealed in the text as an instrument of power in the hands of devious politicians for mass mobilization. The most important aspect, however, seems to be the text’s critique of the dehumanization provoked by the discourse of ethnicity that encourages violence against the ‘other’. Ultimately, however, it is the indivisibility of the self, and the sanctity of being ‘human’, in the face conflicting pulls of identity, that is proclaimed through the character of Felanee:

Felanee kept looking at the boys. What did they want to do? Who will live in their independent country? And who will live in Bulen’s state? What all will they divide? Could they divide the sky over their heads? Will they divide the water in the rivers; the trees, the land, the people? Will they separate Kali Boori from her, and Minoti
from Sumala? Will they divide Jon’s mother, Jaggu’s wife, Kali Boori and Phool?

How would they be divided? Would they be cut into pieces and divided? (184)

The ostensibly glorious dreams of emancipation broadcast by ethnic mobilizations for an “independent country” or “separate state” are challenged by the persistent questioning that underlines the vacuity and deceit of such claims. The interspersed rhetorical questions highlight the impossibility of achieving a ‘golden era’ by dividing human beings and sowing the seeds of hatred. The desire for an ethnically pure space could be a psychological problem, which can only lead to endless dissection and bloodshed; but equating such an imaginary space with a dream of development, economic self-sufficiency and cultural harmony is downright deceit. This deception is concealed in every ethnic ideology that seeks to eliminate the other. *The Story of Felanee*, therefore, presages the peril of subsuming the human under the ethnic.
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Works Cited


Innocent Akilimale Ngulube:

Politics of Migrant Voices: Multicultural Tolerance in Abdourahman A. Waberi’s *Transit*
Abstract

Although mass media today graphically captures travel perils of African migrants to Europe, it is deafeningly silent on racist, xenophobic and human rights perils they encounter there. This paper examines the resistance of both African and French migrants against racism, xenophobia and human rights abuses as emanations of neo-nationalism in Waberi’s novel, *Transit*. Waberi comes from Djibouti, a country located at edge of the horn of Africa between Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea in which the political turmoil ushered in by the 1991 civil war and the 2008 border conflict with Eritrea still forces Djiboutians in their droves into exile to France, the country’s former colonizer. Against this backdrop of mass migration to France, I argue that the monologues of different characters in the novel embody polemical calls for multicultural tolerance in the face of a new wave of racism, xenophobia and human rights abuses. To this end, the paper employs Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia in the analysis of multicultural tolerance in Waberi’s *Transit*. The suitability of heteroglossia lies in the Bakhtian postulation that “The novel orchestrates all its themes...by means of the social diversity of speech types (heteroglossia) and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions” (263). Thus, in order to examine the depiction of multicultural tolerance in *Transit*, the paper will analyze how different character monologues contribute to the theme thereof.

**Keywords:** migrant, multicultural tolerance, neo-nationalism, Djibouti, heteroglossia
Introduction

In the preface to Waberi’s novel, *Transit*, translators David Ball and Nicole Ball observe that apart from “migration, colonial and postcolonial suffering, and resistance…other themes and ideals dear to Waberi’s heart [are] multiculturalism, tolerance, and *metissage*” (9). In line with this observation, I argue that the narrative topos of different character monologues in *Transit* embody overtures to multicultural tolerance. For Nathan Glazer, “Multiculturalism is […] a universalistic demand [that] all [cultural] groups should be recognized” (14). As such, this article demonstrates how Waberi’s *Transit* imbeds our understanding of neo-nationalism as the root of racist, xenophobic and dehumanizing violence across the globe and that peaceful coexistence begins with mutual tolerance towards different cultural ethos.

In particular, the paper draws attention to monologic passages in *Transit* which advance multicultural tolerance by exposing racism, xenophobia and human rights violations. In doing so, this essay echoes Mikhail Bakhtin’s assertion that “The novel [is] a diversity of social speech types […] and […] individual voices, artistically organized” (262). Thus, although Bashir, Harbi, Alice, Abdo-Julien, and Awaleh speak individually and differently, they collectively inhabit the same narrative context and therefore coordinate related themes. Francoise Lionnet attests that “Waberi’s touching, funny, and poetic style, as well as his ear for spoken language, draws the reader into the subjective realities of his characters” (786). Bakhtin enlightens us that such panoply of diverse yet complementary voices evinces the operation of heteroglossia:
The novel orchestrates all its themes [...] by means of the social diversity of speech types (heteroglossia) and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel, each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (263).

Bakhtin shows that heteroglossia is the generative principle in a novel. The social diversity of speech types creates a narrative milieu in which objects and ideas come not only into being but also into interplay. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist appends that heteroglossia is “The base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance [by] insur[ing] the primacy of context over text” (428). It follows that the meaning of any speech type and the object or the idea it refers to depends on specific social conditions implying that the same utterance and its referents would have different meanings within different social conditions. *Transit’s* monologic but heteroglot voices enmeshed in the interface between multicultural tolerance and neo-nationalist fanaticism is a case in point.

Significantly, the appellation of Waberi’s novel, *Transit*, evokes a kinesthetic imagery that foregrounds continental and intra-African migrations. For example, Bashir and Harbi seek political asylum in France while Alice and her European compatriots, Hindis and Arabs migrate to Djibouti for nuptial and mercantile pursuits along with migrants from Somalia, Ethiopia, Mombasa, Sudan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Kurdistan, Albania and Bosnia and Djibouti’s civil war
mercenaries from Poland, Lebanon and Czechoslovakia. These migrations turn *Transit* into a locus of multicultural tolerance in that the reader witnesses different races in the quest for integration despite differences in skin color and cultural mores.

In fact, the alternate setting of *Transit* at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport in France and in various locales of Djibouti underpins the pursuit of multicultural tolerance. That is to say, the presence of mixed races in France and Djibouti highlights a semblance of hospitality. Jacques Derrida encapsulates that:

[…] absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only the foreigner (provided with a family name [and] with the social status of being a foreigner), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names […] Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right; not that it condemns or is opposed to it […] but it is strangely heterogeneous to it as justice is heterogeneous to the law (24).

Derrida affirms that by opening up national borders to migrants from all walks of life and granting them a right to a domicile within the borders, the host not only displays multicultural tolerance but also extends an invitation to peaceful coexistence. In other words, the heterogeneous nature of absolute hospitality
entails unconditional coexistence of hosts and foreigners within the confines of the same national borders on humanistic terms rather than on legal terms.

However, the scourge of xenophobic tendencies across the world continues to asphyxiate absolute hospitality. Saskia Sassen reveals that “today’s immigrants appear as threatening outsiders, knocking at, crashing, or sneaking through the gates into societies richer than their own” (1). Such intolerance emanates from neo-nationalism. Stephen Greenblatt acknowledges that:

[…] as the new century unfolds […] those who thought to have bid farewell once and for all to the heavily guarded borders of the nation-state and to the atavistic passions of religious and ethnic identity find themselves confronting a global political landscape in which neither nationalism nor identity politics shows any intention of disappearing (1).

Admittedly, jingoistic indoctrination forces aboriginals into xenophobic straightjackets which disable them to embrace foreigners into their cultural fold. Unsurprisingly, then, migrant yarns are rife with harrowing versions of xenophobic atrocities.

**Problematizing Neo-nationalism**

The ubiquity of xenophobic violence prompts critics to problematize the very notion of ‘nation’ upon which neo-nationalism is based. Timothy Brennan defines ‘nation’ as “both the modern nation-state and something more ancient and nebulous – the ‘natio’ – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging” (45). However, Brennan decries that “th[is] distinction is often
obscured by nationalists who seek to place their own country in an ‘immemorial past’ where its arbitrariness cannot be questioned” (45). By privileging modern nation-state over ‘natio’, neo-nationalists distort belongingness as a natural human expression into a chauvinistic instrument which, since time immemorial, has engendered cartographic bloodshed worldwide.

In view of border conflicts, critics like Brennan tend to challenge the arbitrariness of modern nation-states. For instance, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin contend that “nations are not ‘natural’ entities, and the instability of the nation is the inevitable consequence of its nature as a social construction” (135). These critics further contend that the instability of the nation manifests in its likelihood to “collapse back into sub-divisions of clan, ‘tribe’, language or religious group […] and the false tendency to assign this unstable condition to specific regions or conditions” (135). Thus, while the construction of the nation is designed to project a facade of cultural solidarity, it perpetuates cultural divisions even within national frontiers. To this effect, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin emphasize that:

Th[e] myth of nationhood, masked by ideology, perpetuates nationalism, in which specific identifiers are employed to create exclusive and homogeneous conceptions of national traditions. Such signifiers of homogeneity always fail to represent the diversity of the actual ‘national’ community for which they purport to speak, and, in practice, usually represent and consolidate the interests of the dominant power groups within any national formation. (135)
This emphasis outlines that the construction of nationhood is intrinsically fraught with self-incriminating contradictions. The overarching contradiction is that nationalist ideology advocates exclusive and homogeneous conceptions of national traditions in a culturally heterogeneous nation. Consequently, cultural interests of minority groups face perpetual marginalization. That is why Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin accuse nationalist oligarchs of using nation discourse as a smokescreen to attain hegemonic leverage.

On his part, Homi K. Bhabha considers the arbitrariness of nationhood construction as the cauldron of cultural ambivalence. He posits that:

[…] a particular ambivalence […] haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality (1).

To Bhabha, the notion, discourse and culture of the nation are marked by uncertainty because they are amorphous entities. The uncertainty finds expression in the realization that although historians regard the nation as a stable entity the temporality of its culture proves that it is unstable. The explanation is that culture is always in a flux so that the infinite play of its signifiers and signifieds blurs any signification certitude. No wonder, Bhabha deconstructs the certainty of nationalist discourse and asserts that:
[…] the Western nation is an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the 
*locality* of culture which is more *around* temporality than about 
historicity […] more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and 
identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary 
structuring of social antagonism (140).

Technically, nationalist discourse legitimizes the Western nation as a seamless 
form of living buttressed by historicity and not as an obscure and ubiquitous form 
of living characterized by its temporality. To justify the expediency of this 
lopsided conception, nationalists deny the unlimited free play of cultural signifiers 
and signifieds preferring instead hierarchical or binary articulation of cultural 
differences and identifications to hybrid articulation.

Like Bhabha, Maxim Silverman deconstructs the ambivalence of 
nationalism by arguing that “The ambivalence of the discourse of nation traverse 
social relations and […] cuts across class affiliations and creates numerous 
contradictions in the ideologies” (7). These numerous contradictions that attend 
the ambivalence of nationalism discourse undermine the homogeneous conception 
of the nation. It stands to reason, then, that the heterogeneous conception of the 
nation embraces hybridity of cultural differences and identities. In this light, 
Ernest Renan holds that “A nation is a large-scale solidarity [in which] Man is a 
slave neither of his race nor his language, nor of his religion [but] demand the 
abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community” (19-20). This 
implies that the accommodation of cultural differences and identities irrespective
of racial, linguistic or religious encumbrances epitomizes cultural elasticity in a nation.

In turn, cultural fluidity produces identities that are multicultural in orientation. Homi K. Bhabha avows that “It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond [...] the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity” (1). More importantly, Waberi himself substantiates Bhabha’s avowal by declaring that postcolonial subjects are “the transcontinental generation” (20). In other words, continental migration of postcolonial generations indicates their radical departure from neo-nationalist ideologies.

However, while cultural mobility is in vogue, a new wave of neo-nationalism stands in its way. Stephen Greenblatt notes that “Mobility can indeed lead to heightened tolerance of difference and an intensified awareness of the mingled inheritances that constitute even the most tradition-bound cultural stance, but it can also lead to an anxious, defensive, and on occasion violent policing of the boundaries” (6-7). To put it unequivocally, cultural mobility is a mixed blessing. Hence, this paper proceeds to analyze how the heteroglot voices of Bashir, Harbi, Alice, Abdo-Julien and Awaleh mitigate the surge of neo-nationalism as the bedrock of racism, xenophobia and human rights abuses.

The Cancer of Racism, Xenophobia and Human Rights Abuses in Francophone Migration
The mass media today is awash with images of African migrants in do-or-die journeys to Western countries, especially Europe. What is equally disturbing is the pejorative language that is used to describe these desperate attempts. A critical ear to such media discourses captures subtle racist undertones which stereotype African migrants. Russel King and Nancy Wood disclose that:

Often acting as the mouthpiece of political parties or other powerful groups, [host-country] media discourses have been shown to be immensely influenced in constructing migrants as ‘others’, and often too as ‘criminals’ or ‘undesirables’. Such a focus on migrant criminality creates stereotypes which are very far from the truth and very hard to shake off (2).

These racist attitudes and stereotypes are not strange considering the xenophobic history of Europe. Liz Fekete delineates the extent to which the institutions of xenophobia and racism are entrenched in contemporary European society as follows:

Those seeking asylum are demonized as bogus, as illegal immigrants and economic migrants scrounging at capital’s gate and threatening capital’s culture. And it is this demonization of the people that the capitalist western world seeks to exclude – in the name of the preservation of economic prosperity and national identity – that signals the emergence of a new racism (19).
Fekete suggests that modern European states hide their xenophobic and racist inclinations under the guise of economic prosperity and national identity. However, cancerous traces of deep-rooted xenophobia and racism in the fabric of modern European societies concretize Maxim Silverman’s opinion that “Questions of immigration and racism are not adjuncts to the development of modern nations but a fundamental part of that development” (6). In practice, France is one of the European nation-states infected by the cancer of xenophobia and racism as Bashir’s opening monologue exemplifies:

I’M IN PARIS […] not really Paris yet but Roissy. That the name of the airport […] I was stocked, no I mean scotched – taped – in the last row of the Boeing 747 where the cops tie the deportees up tight when the plane goes back to Africa. That’s true, that the way they do it. Moussa, he told me that a little while ago. Moussa, you know he can pray the good Lord sitting down without lifting his behind from the seat of the plane, believe me faithfully (14).

Bashir’s monologue depicts the racist treatment of African migrants to and from France. According to David Ball and Nicole Ball, Bashir’s “monologues are delivered in a slangy, comical language very much his own, a mix of naïveté and sly, often cynical, observation” (8). In this specific monologue, Bashir’s cynicism is directed at the inhumane transportation of African exiles and deportees to and from France respectively. In Bashir’s case, he was stocked; cello taped to his seat to be exact as if he were a commodity. This debasement also applied to Bashir’s fellow asylum seeker, Moussa, who failed to maneuver into a praying posture during the flight. In Marxist terms, such debasement of human beings into
commodities may be identified as reification or commodification or thingification or objectification. Tom Bottomore specifies that reification is the “transformation of human beings into thing-like beings” (463). The reification of Bashir and Moussa is racist in the sense that they are stocked in the same dingy alcove that is occupied by African deportees from France. Besides, Harbi’s monologue gives more evidence of racist ill-treatment that African deportees endure at the hands of French airport personnel:

Boarding time for the Africans being deported “of their own free will.” A dozen or so scheduled to be transported the usual way; three male individuals will be docked up in the cramped space of the restrooms, piled in and immediately incarcerated quick as two whiffs of a cigarette. A man wearing a glaring yellow vest with the word “technician” on his back, helped by three PAF agents, has struck a thick roll of gray tape on the restroom door so the passengers who happen to have missed the caging or whose eyes had avoided it won’t venture into these restrooms. Strange how the same scene keeps being repeated almost every day on other flights always bound for some African destination (16).

This passage disturbingly unmasks the high-handedness of French deportation policies. As Liz Fekete maintains, “the 1951 Refugee convention is under threat from […] the introduction of EU deportation programme, with its target-based system for removals and its reification of failed asylum seekers as commodities to be parcelled and dispatched out of Europe” (135). Given France is one of the heavyweights in European Union, it is unsurprising that her airport personnel
display a cavalier disregard for asylum seekers of African descent on the basis of skin colour. For Fekete, this European Union programme “eats away at a political culture that professes respect for human rights” (135) or to put it bluntly, European societies are hypocritically multicultural and accommodative. Indeed, Harbi exposes more human rights abuses that African deportees undergo in the following passage:

Each time, the unfortunate deportee tries squealing like a tortured whale just to stir the conscience of the ordinary passenger, usually a tourist. Today’s deportee is Congolese, supposedly a shopkeeper from Pointe Noire, and his fate seems sealed. At least he’s alive, luckier than the ones who die of dehydration in the Arizona desert or freeze to death inside the undercarriage of some cargo plane (16).

This passage conveys the heartrending truth that human rights violations culminate into death of African deportees. That is why African deportees resort to last-ditch appeals for pity from equally unconcerned white passengers. This is evident when Bashir reflects upon Moussa’s advice to “Act dumb with the cops [...] don’t show you speak French. Don’t mess things up, so shut your trap. Or cry, to fish pity from French people” (14). Naturally, such racist debasement of fellow human beings is a recipe for counter-racial resentment as the musing of Harbi shows: “I have an old debt of memory to settle with France; people think migrants arrive naked in a new land at the end of their odyssey; yet migrants are loaded with their personal stories and heavier still with what is called collective history” (16). Here, Harbi refutes the French predilection for making sweeping
generalizations that all African migrants seek asylum because they are economically wretched ignoring other different individual and collective motivations like escaping civil strife and political persecution.

All the same, African asylum seekers suffer worse indignities when they disembark at Roissy. Harbi recounts indignantly that “The first natives of the country we glimpsed at the airport counter were already frowning with animosity […] All we could see of them was their closed faces and the accusing hooked index finger” (143). The atavistic animosity and accusation that African asylum seekers are greeted with proves that they are unwelcome guests in France. Harbi further reveals that racist hostility assumes blatant proportions:

We hear that the personnel managing the reception centers of the Red Cross and the Secours Populaire avoid all contact with us. Can you believe it, they wash us from a distance with a hose. Aseptic masks protect their faces and rubber gloves their hands as they pass us a little splinter of soap, as if we were cankered with mold and covered with mange. The boldest of us walk out of the retention center in the night and find themselves in disaffected squats next to some railroad station or port, before the city files an eviction notice with the municipal authorities, and the zones around the trains and ports set up a heavy surveillance system with steel wire fencing and automatic doors. Every vehicle leaving these zones will be inspected from top to bottom by security guards equipped with thermal and carbonic gas detectors (146).
Such evidence of racial discrimination and human rights abuses summarizes the fate of African asylum seekers as social lepers and pariahs in French society. This inhumane disregard for human rights turns African asylum seekers, to borrow the words of Orlando Patterson, into people “without a legal personality” (22) just like their African-American ancestors back in the days of slavery. Like Harbi, Bashir expresses his suppressed indignation at the treatment of African asylum seekers as legal non-persons by accepting Moussa’s advice half-heartedly that “OK I don’t say nothing cause Roissy’s danger, they might say Africans, pains in the ass” (14). Thus, while Bashir embraces France as his new home, he has no illusion whatsoever that his overtures of racial solidarity are reciprocal. However, the cost of reifying fellow human beings into legal non-persons is the inducement of defensive vengeance. To be sure, Bashir’s evocation of Osama bin Laden’s name; the generally accepted al-Qaeda mastermind behind September 11 attacks on United States of America in 2001 is an apt manifestation of defensive hostility:

For six months now my name been Binladen, Moussa he choked on his coffee in plastic cup they give you. *Never* say that again here he say. That get the French fierce, and the English, and the Americans, and even the nice Norwegians who pay NGOs for us and keep their traps shut. But me, I like that, you say Binladen and everybody drop dead with panic […] in front of barbwire and sandbags of the American Embassy in Djibouti. Binladen, dunno who he was before but anyways […] In Djibouti, they said, yell “Long live Binladen” everywhere, that’s how I know his name,
then stop right away or else it Gabode prison for everybody, mamas, uncles, kids, everybody (14).

The evocation of Osama bin Laden’s apparition is significant as it illustrates how victims of Western racism and human rights violations feel inclined to identify with bin Laden’s act of terror as a form of emotional release. Bruce Lawrence affirms that “Osama bin Laden has become a legendary figure in the West, not to speak of the Arab world” (xi). While not necessarily condoning the murder of innocent Americans, victims of Western racism develop a natural affinity with the people of Islam and hence perceive bin Laden as their titular liberator from the fetters of common injustices. That explains why Djiboutians of all ages shout the name of bin Laden as a battle cry against socio-political yokes even under the duress of imprisonment. Such problematic affiliations, especially on the wake of the atrocities caused by global jihad, foreground the complex ambivalences generated by the cauldron of racism, discrimination and human rights violations.

The cancer of French racism also showed itself in colonial anthropology and history. Abdo-Julien claims that “the history books, articles, and newspaper chippings Maman used for her research [contain] numerous terms and insulting denominations, the wild theories of anthropologists or preposterous tribologists” (31). Frantz Fanon testifies that colonialists regarded the African continent as “the haunt of savages…riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals” (211). Abdo-Julien testifies on his mother’s behalf that the literary text that provided the
impetus for this racist discourse is the totemic *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad:

> In the editorials of the time, we were always subjected to the risks of mutilating voices: convert or exploit them, educate or emasculate them, develop or crush them. “Exterminate all the brutes!” vociferated Conrad’s counterpart, someone who knew how to speak the language of truth. As a young [...] sailor, he had commanded a steamer that went up the Congo River in 1890 (31).

This testimony establishes that not all French citizens subscribed to Conrad’s racist template. In Alice’s case, the description of racist discourse as “risks of mutilating voices” and Mr. Kurtz, Conrad’s main character in *Heart of Darkness*, as “someone who knew how to speak the language of truth” sarcastically vents her disapproval of racist conditioning during her time as a student back in her native France. Moreover, Alice concedes that “At that time [...] I wrapped up my studies of history with a college degree, and disgusted by what they were teaching me about Africa and the French Empire, I registered for the entry examination to the school of Journalism in Paris” (81). Relatively speaking, Alice’s anti-racist stance was rare in a society embedded with racist foundations.

However, Waberi’s *Transit* also portrays the cancer of African racism. Recollecting the colonial climate of Djibouti when she had arrived from France with Harbi, Alice tells Abdo-Julien that: “Your father dreaded the ordinary racism on both sides of the fence and what people might say once we were settled there.
Soon, they put you in a ready-made box: you’re the mixed couple people look at suspiciously” (81). That is to say, both France and Djibouti suffered from racism as evidenced by the latter’s ingrained suspicion of mixed marriages which Alice describes as the “situation of insidious adversity” (82). Alice details the enormity of racist adversity in Djibouti that:

Your father received a cool welcome from his family, and even from some of his friends who had recently returned to the fold. The time was not ripe for mixed race love or mixed flavors in this erratic country, this womb so fertile it cannot keep its children unless it uses a straightjacket and holds them in neurotic silence (82).

The account of this cold reception shows the propagation of racist propriety in colonial Djibouti. Even Harbi’s family and friends were intolerant not only towards Alice for being French but also towards Harbi for marrying a French woman when he was a Djiboutian man. However, Alice seems to contradict herself when she downplays such atmosphere of racial intolerance as the logical product of the political acrimony that attended France’s colonization of Djibouti. This way, the evocation of a straightjacket concretizes the trouble that colonial Djibouti took to institutionalize the demonization of French citizens:

I felt terrible when they associated me with the last little bunch of colonists just because I was French. In fact, I was a walking disgrace; maybe you’ll understand that some day. An animal with horns avoided by your father’s so-called friends. I couldn’t have cared less about their
distrust, aside from the fact that all around us the atmosphere was insurrectional (84-85).

The effect of this arbitrary demonization on Alice was not so much her isolation from her husband’s family and friends as her disillusionment with the entire racism establishment which finds explication in her wistfulness:

When we landed we were dreaming of a world in which people looked each other straight in the eye and spoke to each other like human beings, a world where people spoke man to man the way South Americans address each other [...] with no distinctions of class, race, or nationality. Alas, this country and its sun drove me mad. Their way of living in apnea infuriated me (82).

The craving for a world without class, race, or nationality distinctions suggests the possibility of multicultural tolerance. Alice cites racial solidarity of South Americans to underscore the fact that French and Djiboutian people can emulate it. To further underline her desire for multicultural tolerance, Alice directs her fury towards the docility of Djiboutians in the face of their country’s propagation of racism during the colonial epoch.

**The Possibility of Multicultural Tolerance and its Challenges**

In recent years, multiculturalism has become the catchword in cultural parlance. Will Kymlicka points out that “Multiculturalism today is a global phenomenon” (17). Bhikhu Parekh concurs with Kymlicka that “Almost all societies today are multicultural and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future; this is our
historical predicament, and we obviously need to come to terms with it” (336). Kymlicka justifies the currency of multiculturalism by arguing that:

What all struggles of multiculturalism have in common […] is that they reject earlier models of the unitary, homogenous nation-state. Until recently, most states around the world have aspired to be ‘nation-states’. In this model, the state was seen as the possession of a dominant national group, which used the state to privilege its identity, language, history, culture, literature, myths, religion and so on […] Anyone who did not belong to this dominant group was subject to either assimilation or exclusion (17).

Multiculturalists, like critics of neo-nationalism, refute models of homogeneous nation-state because they are culturally divisive. By constructing a dominant national group that mirrors the cultural homogeneity of a nation-state, oligarchs perpetuate the marginalization of minority groups for their own hegemonic benefits. That is why most nation-states embrace multicultural models today. May Joseph explicates that in postcolonial states “Since the 1930s, various conceptual frameworks for galvanizing ideas of plurality and multicultural citizenship against monocultural national identities within the state have been pursued by positing notions of a “third” space politically, geographically, and historically” (141). In African postcolonial nation-states, the movement from monoculturalism to multiculturalism is in the main reflected by migrant narratives.
For all practical purposes, Waberi’s *Transit* reflects the praxis of multicultural tolerance. Corbin Treacy verifies that *Transit* “exposes the nomad’s infinite possibility […] of necessity, a condition in which exilic migration is not a monolithic experience, but rather one heavily influenced by class and social position in the postcolony” (64). In other words, *Transit* spotlights migration as a diverse phenomenon that offers boundless possibilities for postcolonial subjects in pursuit of their personal wants. Indeed, the monologue of Abdo-Julien first introduces us to the multicultural possibilities in *Transit*:

Maman kept repeating to whoever would listen that this country was hers too. This is where love made me put down my bags, she would say […] Everything in this land is mine: its volcanic hillocks, its skinny fauna; the tragic, camel-like swaying of its hips; the aquatic flora pictured on postage stamps; the desert islets like the famous Guinni Koma […] Yes, everything here is mine […] my country sad and beautiful like the oilcloth of a village café in Brittany on a rainy Sunday morning (27).

Alice’s claim that she belongs to Djibouti when she is a French native illustrates the existence of multicultural identities in Djibouti. Actually, Dominic Thomas states that there are “symbiotic dimensions of relations and population flow between France and the Francophone world” (3) which manifests in Alice’s comparison of Djibouti’s sadness and beauty with the oilcloth of a village café in Brittany where she grew up. As Bhikhu Parekh puts it, “Every culture is exposed to others and cannot avoid comparing itself with them. A section of its members might be attracted to some of the latter’s beliefs and practices, and either
genuinely read them back into their own tradition or reinterpret it to legitimize the foreign import” (175). The exposure of Alice to Djiboutian culture has therefore made her not only to compare it with French culture but also to adopt it. However, Alice’s reflection affirms that exposure to different cultures breeds split identities:

What on earth made me go there, in the midst of those strange strangers with their Afros and bell-bottom pants? You always like to think of yourself as different; you want to escape the common fate, out of pride perhaps [...] I let myself be sucked up by destiny, something stronger than myself [...] Why would a young student, a girl from Brittany like me, set out for this crazy place? Fate took over and I dove into it headfirst (27-28).

The schizophrenic alienation from and identification with Djibouti exposes the downside of multiculturalism. Pnina Werbner elucidates that “Migration creates a sense of “double consciousness,” an awareness, as W.E.B. Du Bois (1994) argues in relation to American blacks [...] of a subject’s sense of belonging and alienation” (107). The fact that Alice inhabits the cultural third space means that she is caught up in a vortex of simultaneously identifying with Djiboutian culture and/or feeling alienated from it. However, Alice shows that the combination of time and personal effort extenuates migrant schizophrenia:

They seemed lost; so was I but a lot less than they were. They looked gentle, sweet, harmless. So did I, they said, afterwards. I knew nothing about them, about their country, their language, their culture. I had just turned twenty [...] Then I got used to their gregarious ways, their nomadic flesh that would start moving only as a group, with their worries locked inside themselves more often
than not [...] I was friendly with all of them, laughing with one, laughing with all (28).

This passage highlights the fact that multicultural overtures are instinctively reciprocal. Bhikhu Parekh stresses that “unless human beings are able to step out of their culture, they tend to absolutize it, imagining it to be the only natural or self-evident way to understand and organize human life and they cannot step out of their culture unless they have access to others” (167). In this sense, both Alice and Djiboutians step out of their respective cultures and mutually coexist in spite of their cultural differences. Such is the manifestation of multicultural tolerance in Djibouti that Bashir also pinpoints in the following monologue: “OK, I gotta confirm this story right away: yes, in the army everyone’s not native, plenty cousins from Somalia there! Some come from Mengistu’s army, specially with the rebels. (34-35). The reference to neighboring Somalis as cousins epitomizes the prevailing multicultural spirit. Furthermore, Alice demonstrates the cultivation of racial tolerance and solidarity across the African continent by recalling that “[Harbi] would make a date with me and then cancel at the last minute, saying he had forgotten his Interafrican soccer game. It was trendy at the time to form teams by countries and fight on the soccer field” (28). The participating teams would come from lands as far as Togo and Morocco. This, once again, proves the exercise of multicultural tolerance, through sports, among people of diverse cultural experiences and outlooks.
Another form of multicultural tolerance in Waberi’s *Transit* is *metissage* or mixed-blood identities. As an immediate example of mixed-blood identity, Abdo-Julien meditates on his mother’s declaration that:

ALL BLOOD IS MIXED and all identities are nomadic, Maman would have said, talking about me, Papa, herself, or the whole wide world. This business of mixed blood is a very old story, she would add, raising her voice – so old that the first traces of African migration in the Italian peninsula, to give just one example, date from the conquest and fall of Carthage (37).

This passage illuminates that multicultural tolerance is a global phenomenon. Migration and mixed marriages produced generations of mixed-blood identities and since these processes repeated themselves, they naturally produced a world of mixed blood. For example, Abdo-Julien describes himself as “the product of love without borders; a hyphen between two worlds” (46). Tess Lewis argues that Abdo-Julien’s disposition derives from “simultaneous identification with and sense of isolation from the two cultures he must negotiate in establishing a sense of himself” (455). In other words, Abdo-Julien’s sense of himself is multicultural given he is part Djiboutian and part French.

Bashir gives further evidence of multicultural tolerance in Djibouti by referring to the coexistence of different tribes and races. He claims that “In a lot of neighbourhoods of the capital, in Einguela, Ambouli, Districts 1, 2, 4, Plateau, etc. Wadags, Walals, and Arabs, we all mixed, with plenty Hindis an even some
Whites married to our girls, or just weirdos” (42). Like Bashir, Abdo-Julien foregrounds Djibouti’s multicultural landscape by referring to the absolute hospitality of his father:

People from all walks of life come to our house: Blacks and Whites, browns like me, the nobodies of the lay and the phantoms of the night. Opponents of the regime who slip in stealthily. Reciters of 114 suras of the holy Book. He listens to their complaints and dips into his pocket more often than he should (105).

This passage ascertains that unconditional friendship is the prerequisite for multicultural tolerance. Harbi’s hospitality without regard to race, political or religious affiliation shows that he first and foremost considers all his visitors as friends. Likewise, Awaleh retrospectively describes refugees as “our relatives driven from Ethiopia or Somalia by the war between the Somalis and the Ethiopians, two age-old enemies in the Horn of Africa” (122). Thus, although Somalis and Ethiopians view each other as sworn enemies, Djiboutians consider them both relatives as shown by the solidarity to receive them as refugees. However, Harbi’s closing voice that “we left the country […] where retracing one’s tribal genealogy was becoming more and more pressing” (147-148) reveals that while multicultural tolerance is exercised in Djibouti, it faces colossal challenges of tribalism and territoriality which culminated into the 1991 Djiboutian civil war and the 2008 Djibouti-Eritrea border conflict respectively.
Conclusion

The bane of racism, xenophobia and human rights abuses heralds a bloodier future for the global community. Timothy Brennan sadly acknowledges that “We live in a world obsessed with national pride, and rampant with boundary wars, with nationalism on the banner of countless parties” (44). Similarly, Stephen Greenblatt adds that “While the older conceptions of rootedness and autochthony seem intellectually bankrupt, the heady theories of creative metissage have run aground upon the rocks of contemporary reality” (1). Suffice it to say that the 21st century has been riddled with acts of terror that expose the pitfalls of the neo-nationalist shibboleth.

Until the West changes its discriminatory policies on migrants and asylum seekers especially of African or Arabic descent, the war on terror will always be a chimera because racism, xenophobia and human rights abuses are a breeding ground for extremist violence as recent terrorist attacks on France demonstrate. While in no way endorsing terrorist massacring of innocent citizens as collateral damage, Western oligarchs have to face up to the fact that they are willy-nilly caught up in the fire they ignited in the first place by alienating and antagonizing minority groups.

The same bloody precipices face the African continent. Neo-nationalist policies have hitherto abetted a deluge of civil wars, genocides, coups, revolutions and sectarian violence. For example, the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the 2015 Al-Shabaab Garissa University massacre in Kenya and the lingering menace of Boko Haram in West Africa serve as wounding reminders that racism, xenophobia and
human rights abuses all too automatically beget counter-violence in which innocent people become both shields and targets between warring factions. It is against this cataclysmic presage that overtures of multicultural tolerance emerge as salvific antidotes to the cancerous proliferation of the whole gamut of man’s inhumanity to man in the name of nation, race, tribe or religion.
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