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Special Issue: Precarious Lives, Uncertain Futures

Issue 8

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Gitanjali and Beyond

Special Issue: *Precarious Lives, Uncertain Futures*

Issue 8, Summer 2023

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Edited by

Elisabetta Marino and Bootheina Majoul

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Precarious Lives, Uncertain Futures

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Foreword

In his essay, 'Wealth and Welfare', Rabindranath says,

> Property is [the] medium for the expression of our personality…. Our highest social training is to make our property the richest expression of the best in us, of that which is universal, of our individuality whose greatest illumination is love. As individuals are the units that build the community, so property is the unit of wealth that makes for communal prosperity when it is alive to its function. Our wisdom lies not in destroying separateness of units, but in maintaining the spirit of unity in its full strength.'[1]. 623-624, 1930)

We can apply this passage to the current situation where the super-rich who possess most of the world's wealth, are busy increasing their property and profits at the cost of the majority, oblivious to the universal human values that consolidate a society, relying on love of and concern for all humanity. This has led to the rights of the majority being eroded by a new code of practice which gnaws away at the very foundations of community, eschewing the spirit of unity that would assure a cohesive society thriving on a sense of social justice that has social welfare as not just its mission, but its core value. In recent times, the whole idea of a just distribution of wealth and welfare that was seen as a necessary criterion to build societies in Europe after World War II, has been brushed aside as untenable for the 1% who possess and control most of the world's assets. They are responsible for creating the fissures in society which continue to grow into unhealable gashes, as a new class of insecure workers is forced into being and their numbers continue to increase at an incredible rate, as they are affected by policies framed by employers of big manufacturing firms and business houses, having free rein under governments who work closely with finance.

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, 'Wealth and Welfare' (1930), in Sisir Kumar Das, Ed., *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996, rpt. 2012) Vol III, A Miscellany, 623-625, pp. 623-624.

In 2007-2008 Ford Motors convinced thousands of their employees to leave their secure salaried positions and reinvent themselves as self-employed, lured by a one-off lump sum payment. The reality was that after six months their healthcare benefits disappeared. General Motors followed Ford's example, offering 74,000 employees buy-outs. The meltdown was thus kick started and in 2008 we had the recession brought on by risky and reckless investments by banks, insurance houses and the top management taking home six-figure salaries and undefendable bonuses.

The myth of hard work bringing just payment and security has been subverted by a class which no longer works hard to pile wealth on wealth. Guy Standing calls them the rentier class, which like the old landlord and bailiff, thrives on collecting rent from tangible and intangible sources like land and property on the one hand, and stocks, shares, intellectual property, patents and off-shore assets on the other, as the old labour capitalism is replaced by a rentier capitalism. The post Keynesian era has shown that there is no end to the amount of wealth the rich can continue to accumulate while the poor are expected to live within their limited means. The latter forms the new precariat as identified by Guy Standing, who describes this as 'a class in the making'[2]. He has identified the collapse of the 'old labourist model' led by trade unions with the casualisation of labour silencing the collective voice with the rise of neo-liberalism, facilitated by politicians who are, as has been said, strongly linked to finance and not their people. This has led to 'the new legions of the precariat, flitting between jobs, unsure of their occupational title, with little labour security, few enterprise benefits and tenuous access to state benefits'. They are the 'flexi-workers' who are in 'non-regular statuses', lacking 'employment security', 'occupational security' and a 'Voice' in society.[3] We are warned by economists that

[2] Guy Standing, *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 31)

[3] See Guy Standing, *Work After Globalisation: Building Occupational Citizenship* (Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, MA USA: Edward Elgar, 2009), pp. 109-110.

the precariat needs to be heeded as they are a 'dangerous' class as they are against the neo-liberal 'right' or the 'labourism of social democracy'.[4] However, this was the reality in 2014.

In 2015, Metropolitan University Prague held a conference on Tagore on Discrimination, coordinated by the renowned Bengali scholar, Dr Blanka Knotkova, where I presented a paper on Tagore's poem, *The Child* - his only poem written in English. It was composed by the poet after he had watched The Passion Play at Oberammergau in 1930. A special issue was subsequently published with edited articles from the conference in *Tagore on Discriminations: Representing the Unrepresented*, Ed., Blanka Knotkova-Capkova (Prague: Metropolitan University Prague Press, 2015). The various presentations at the conference made it clear how acutely aware Tagore was of inequity and social injustice. Today, as we confront a world where the gap between the haves and have nots is widening, we realise how relevant Tagore's words and work remain as he strove to bridge the rural and urban divide through his cooperatives at his family estates and rural reconstruction initiatives at Sriniketan.

In January 2020, the University of Rome Tor Vergata, in partnership with Auro University (Surat, India) and with the "Challenging Precarity: A Global Network", held an international conference on 'Precarious Lives, Uncertain Futures' over three days. I was invited to do a keynote at this conference, my paper being on 'Myths of Modernity: Living Between Poverty and the Pavement'. At that time, we all wondered why Rome was organising a conference in a bleak winter month when we could have waited till the end of February or even the beginning of spring to gather together. The conference, however was a vibrant event with strong contributions to a subject that had become globally relevant since the post-Fordist era and the global recession in 2008. Precarity was a situation recognised as a seemingly unstoppable trend engendered by an unconscionable super rich group comprising of corporates

[4] Standing, 2014, p. 31

and thriving on crony capitalism, who dominated a global market economy where human personnel could be replaced by computerised services with the virtual world dominating the real world.

It was at the University of Rome Tor Vergata, that we proposed that some of the presenters could be invited to edit their papers and submit them as articles for a special issue of *Gitanjali and Beyond*, on a subject that resonates with Rabindranath's call for job security in work that allows the creative principle in every individual to find expression, bringing out their full potential, ensuring their robust contribution to society, which can then enhance a nation's prosperity and strengthen its economy. Issue 8 of *Gitanjali and Beyond* is a fulfilment of that decision taken in January 2020. The editors, Dr Elisabetta Marino and Dr Bootheina Majoul have selected and reviewed the contributions in this issue, making it a strong contribution to the continuing debate on and the repercussion of precarious lives leading to uncertain futures.

At that time of the conference in Rome, we knew about a new mysterious virus which had appeared in Wuhan and spread across Chinese cities in December 2019, transmitted from human to human, challenging the very notion of society and the sanctity of the community. As China imposed local lockdowns, blocking and barricading cities, preventing people from leaving or entering affected metropolises and then banning international travel, we felt the danger was far away on the other side of the world. What we did not anticipate was how rapidly this virus could spread across the globe. And by the end of February, a wave of fear gripped us as doctors and scientists struggled to understand, counter and contain the virus and governments fumbled with policies that could protect their people. In the UK, February was a month of speculation of what would happen if the virus spread in the country and by March, all myths of the possibility of acquiring herd immunity were extinguished as lockdown became the only option left to protect people within the walls of their homes and close institutions, factories, shops, restaurants, hotels, travel by car – emptying city streets of the populace and

most private vehicles. As planes were grounded across the world, the skies cleared and people heard birdsong as never before. The animal world frolicked free as people remained imprisoned in their homes. And overnight, those who had had scant recognition as workers dwelling on the margins of society like carer workers, cleaners, nursery nurses, delivery workers, delivery drivers, super market shelf fillers, part-time and zero-hour contract lecturers, support teachers, firefighters, couriers, Uber drivers, and the many who worked for an agency/company, were suddenly given recognition as 'key workers', placed alongside the category of medical staff working in hospitals. The precariat of a 'gig economy' was valued during these times, but not with fair pay or secure contracts.

In 2020, the COVID 19 pandemic led to small businesses going under. The lockdowns meant that huge employment and enterprise sectors had to shut down, affecting hospitality and travel, and those working in the arts and culture were left stranded and without work. The loss of jobs and opportunities created an ever-expanding precariat, a class which is no longer in the making, but is here to stay. The parallel development is an ever-diminishing salariat who have so far formed the middle class, those who have had the security of healthcare, legitimate leave benefits like maternity/paternity leave, often travel allowances, and retirement benefits, who are now no longer the responsibility of conscientious and humane employers.

With the middle class of the salariat being made redundant, retired and unreplaced, the class that can pay and has been paying taxes till now, is being slowly thinned out. And it is the taxes collected from citizens that pay for the public services which we take for granted as a citizens' rights in all modern civilizations. These services like health, education, libraries, health and leisure centres, youth clubs and community organizations, are now being compromised and diminished. In this new world order, the casualization of labour creates an ever-increasing precariat who are in no position to ensure being able to pay rent regularly, buy houses, pay mortgages and taxes. The middle class has, till now, also held the moral values of a society,

giving voice and credence to culture, the arts and literature and has passed on their values to the next generation, while stressing the centrality of a good liberal education for a nation's development. Today, rather than parents and teachers, social media has a tremendous influence on taste and ideas, setting trends, fashions, framing opinion, shaping perspectives, fabricating news which masquerades as 'truths', thus jeopardizing the moral fabric of society that has so strenuously and painstakingly been woven by the middle classes, aided by the working classes. They have, till now, provided the moral dimension to society and a nation, upholding the simple values of decency and respect for humanity.

Governments are coming into power with funding from corporate houses, and catchy slogans rather than responsibly thought through policies, are motivating the voting public. The political rhetoric capitalizes on the notion of the danger of the 'other', the outsider in the immigrant, asylum seeker, the migrant worker, raising alarm bells for citizens of a dangerous invasion from those displaced from elsewhere by forces often beyond their control. Yet, as Standing has said, the precariat is a dangerous class, as their insecurity makes them ready to face risks with no reasonable cause to take on social responsibility in nations which have stopped caring about them. In Britain, corporation and wealth taxes are far lower than income taxes, favouring the rentier economy. The War in Ukraine and the pandemic have been blamed for the rising energy bills and cost of living, yet the repercussions of earlier austerity, of unstoppable ruthless profits made by multinationals, big industries like oil companies and now Brexit, need to be recognized as creating precarious lives and uncertain futures for the majority population in the UK. This makes the subject of precarity both relevant and crucial for a new global consciousness and reckoning. The six articles in this issue highlight precarity through a study of literature which reflects the social reality, something that Rabindranath did through his own writing and work.

Tagore said,

> The standard of living in modern times has been raised far higher than the average level of our necessity. Where the temptation of high living, normally confined to a negligible small section of the community, becomes widespread, its ever-growing burden is sure to prove fatal to civilization.[5]

However, when this temptation is limited to a small number who make free with the vast resources of the planet for their own benefit, depriving huge swathes of society, they accelerate the danger of this very fatality which Rabindranath warns about, a fast-descending avalanche that we need to avert through literary critiques and a revaluation of literature which can raise social consciousness and responsibility.

Bashabi Fraser

Editor-in-Chief

Gitanjali and Beyond

[5] Tagore, 'Wealth and Welfare', in Das, 1996, p. 623.

Broken Lives: Politics and Affect in the Semiotics of Untouchability

Sofia Cavalcanti

Abstract

In August 2019, on the occasion of Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary, the end of "Clean India" campaign promoted by president Modi was celebrated. Over the last five years, millions of toilets have been built and sewerage networks have been expanded across the country not only to develop sanitary awareness among Indians, but also to put an end to social inequalities linked to the practice of manual scavenging by Dalits. However, are changes in the infrastructural and institutional landscape viable solutions to dismantle the structure of untouchability? Can the precarity of the untouchables' lives, both in terms of individual safety and caste discrimination, be challenged once and for all? In my paper, I will discuss the effects of the installation of advanced sanitation technology both on the untouchables' daily lives and the national imaginary of untouchability. Starting from a reading of Mulk Raj Anand's novel, *Untouchable* (1935), through the perspective of Affect Theory, I will compare the past and present conditions of Indian sanitation workers. I will think of the new infrastructure and technology of waste as semiotic structures which are unable to act on an affective level and, consequently, inapt to cure the "wound of the soul" (Anand 1981) of "broken subjects," the Dalits. Finally, I will argue that the irreducible otherness of the untouchables as well as the vulnerability of their condition can be revised only through a "political subjectivity" (Berlant 2011) inasmuch as the shame of discrimination is located corporeally and psychologically as much as socially. In conclusion, "salvation by machinery" (Aguiar 2011) is a much too optimistic approach to make untouchability a thing of the past. The implementation of infrastructure can lay the groundwork for a shared and inclusive idea of society, but in order to put an end to the trauma of excrementalized subjectivities, a revision of what is meant by the political is necessary, thus engaging its notion with emotional, affective, and embodied experiences.

Keywords: Affect Theory, Dalit, Subjectivity, Trauma, Untouchable

1. Introduction

According to a Western ideal, which took shape during the imperialist period, specific nations

or races are associated with specific types of filth. While images of and references to Africa, for instance, repeatedly appeared in advertisements for soap at the beginning of the nineteenth century – suggesting that the African body is an unclean body – the West has historically associated the Indian body with excrement. As William Kupinse has noted, nineteenth-century British accounts stress the colonizers' disgust towards Indians' hygienic codes and excretory practices[1]. The Nobel Prize winner Vidiadhar S. Naipaul, in his book, *An Area of Darkness* (1964), reports that, still during the twentieth and twenty-first century,

> Indians defecate everywhere. They defecate, mostly, beside the railway tracks. But they also defecate on the beaches; they defecate on the hills; they defecate on the river banks; they defecate on the streets.[2]

The idea of the abject body, the desire for distance from what is thought to be a disgusting body, considered as dirty and polluting, and should therefore be 'radically excluded'[3] and confined to a place of banishment, constitutes 'a formative aspect of modern industrial imperialism'[4], as Anne McClintock has argued in her study of the cultural policing of dirt during the Age of the Empire. However, dirt and poor sanitary conditions in India are not a mere invention of colonizers to justify their superiority over a non-white colonized subject. In India, both poor sanitary conditions and actual dirt, as well as how dirt has been thought of, have objectively represented a major social problem, especially throughout the postcolonial period. More specifically, as Susan E. Chaplin[5] underlines in the introduction to her book, *The Politics of Sanitation in India* (2011), India's central government failed to implement a modern

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[1] William Kupinse, 'The Indian Subject of Colonial Hygiene', in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*, ed. by William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 250–76 (p. 254).
[2] Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (London: A. Deutsch, 1964), p. 74.
[3] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2. All subsequent references to this book: (Kristeva, 1982).
[4] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 72.
[5] Susan E. Chaplin, *The Politics of Sanitation in India. Cities, Services and the State* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2011), 'Introduction'. Kindle Edition.

and equitable sanitation infrastructure in the post-British period due to its inability to face developmental problems arising from urban growth and, consequently, to provide adequate public funds to local authorities.

A document issued by the Sulabh International Social Service Organization in 2015[6] pointed out that in India only 929 towns out of 7,935 have sewerage systems and UNICEF data[7], updated in 2016, show that nearly half the Indian population still defecates in the open. It is within this context that on 15 August 2014, India's Independence Day, India's Prime Minister Modi announced the biggest toilet campaign in the nation's history: the 'Swachh Bharat' or 'The Clean India Campaign'[8]. The Prime Minister launched the challenge that by 2019 a hundred million toilets would be built in order to make India a country free of open defecation. According to Modi, however, meeting this goal could perhaps help in reaching another important goal, which would be the elimination of the professions of manual scavengers and sweepers – which is to say the elimination of the caste of the untouchables, the Dalits[9] – made up of all those who constitute the sanitation workforce in India. According to the most recent updates, as of October 2019, about 100 million household toilets have been built since 2014, which corresponds to 100% of the total envisaged by Prime Minister Modi[10]. Hence there has been a success with regard to building flush toilets and a modernized sewage system, but what impact has this had on eliminating the problem of 'untouchability'?

In 2013, the Indian state had already intervened in this matter by issuing the *Prohibition*

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[6] Sulabh International Social Service Organization, *National Conference On 'Fulfilling the Dream of Hon'ble Prime Minister to Provide Toilet in Each Household by 2019 – Challenges and the Way Ahead' and Celebrating the World Toilet Day.* (New Delhi: Sulabh, 2015).

[7] Unicef Press Centre, *"Team Swachh" uses cricket to take on open defecation in India* (press release) (15 March 2016) <https://www.unicef.org/media/media_90465.html> [Accessed 27 August 2020].

[8] Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, *Swachh Bharat Mission* (n.d.) <https://swachhbharatmission.gov.in/sbmcms/index.htm> [Accessed 1 September 2020].

[9] The word Dalit, which means oppressed or broken, refers to the people within Hindu society who belong to those castes that the Hindu religion considers to be polluting by virtue of hereditary occupation. For further information, see John C.B. Webster, 'Who is a Dalit?' in *Untouchable. Dalits in Modern India*, ed. by S.M. Michael (Boulder: Lynne Rienne Publishers, 1999), pp. 11–22.

[10] Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, *Swachh Bharat Mission* (n.d.), <https://swachhbharatmission.gov.in/sbmcms/index.htm> [Accessed 1 September 2020].

of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act[11]. The law promulgated by the Ministry of Law and Justice establishes that the manual handling of human excreta by untouchables is a historical injustice and their rehabilitation in society can only be achieved through the collaboration with local authorities and the implementation of modern sanitation technology. The failure of this law, however, demonstrated that tackling untouchability as a mere hygienic problem – as if its roots were in sanitary awareness instead of social awareness – is not an effective way to follow. As it happens, even though the logical premises of untouchability have been condemned by the State, caste continues to exert force in everyday social life. Therefore, in this paper I aim at answering questions such as: are the installation of flush toilets and the modernization of sanitation infrastructure viable solutions to dismantle the structure of untouchability, both as a caste and as an idea? Is mechanization the only alternative to the heinous practice of manual scavenging? Can untouchables' subjectivities be cleaned up simply by retreating from the excremental?

In light of Modi's campaign success in terms of number of toilets built, these questions might seem self-evident, but they are actually deeply relevant if considered in relation to the Indian social and religious context. The Hindu caste system represents the most striking example of a social, moral, and religious system based on the opposition between pollution and purification, the pure and the impure. According to this view, anything related to that which is polluted is part of a system of signs which forms a code of repulsion and abjection in relation to the polluted, and this system is kept in place in order to preserve the identity of being one of the clean. This ideology is very well explained by Rabindranath Tagore who, with sharp objectivity, describes the Indian society as follows:

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[11] Ministry of Law and Justice, *Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act,* 2013.
<http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/manualsca-act199136357385163824446l0.pdf> [Accessed 28 August 2020].

> The world that we live in is narrow and too familiar. All its affairs and inner currents have rotated year after year, generations after generations, in unchanging circles. The prejudices and superstitions of our life have accumulated solidly around them. The construction of our peculiar world has been completed by the hard bricks and stones of those prejudices and superstitions.[12]

In this paper, I will argue that the change towards a more secular approach to filth through the new sanitation infrastructure, free from the prejudices and superstitions mentioned by Tagore, is only apparent as it is still ideologically related to pollution and defilement. Therefore, the same rules of abjection apply to that technology and those who work with it.

In the next section, I am going to show how caste operates semiotically by examining the past and present conditions of Dalits. Starting from a reading of Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* (1935)[13], I will demonstrate that flush toilets simply replace an old sign system with a new semiotic related to filth. Therefore, the abject status of untouchables due to their proximity to the excrement they have to clean up is confirmed. Then, I will explore the concept of political subjectivity and claim that if the institutional intervention against untouchability wants to be effective, it needs to take into account not only the sanitary aspect, but also the historical, moral, and affective underpinnings of this social plague. Finally, I will conclude that the pressure of caste, which makes the Dalits at one with the excrement they have to clean up, cannot be alleviated merely by investing in machines, but by revising the semiotics of filth on which the Indian belief is ingrained.

2. The Semiotics of Untouchability

According to the social and religious imaginary on which the Indian caste system is based, the

[12] Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali* (Collected Works of Rabindra Nath Tagore, Centenary Edition) (Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, 1961), volume 13, p. 209.
[13] Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (London: Penguin Classics, 2014) (original work published in 1935). All subsequent references to this book: (Anand, 2014).

bodies of untouchables signify dirt, disgust, and repugnance. They become abject, i.e. physically rejected or expelled, like the bodily substances we want to separate ourselves from, and consequently, they are placed beyond an exclusionary border which protects the Indian society from filth.

The abject condition of untouchables – who are considered as 'out-castes' – is related to their proximity to the dirt they have to clean up daily either as sweepers or as manual scavengers. As Sara Ahmed points out in her essay, 'Happy Objects'[14], certain objects – or substances – have an affective value which influences us and our orientation in the world. In this respect, she claims:

> [I]n rejecting the proximity of certain objects, we define the places that we know we do not wish to go to, the things we do not wish to have, touch, taste, hear, feel, see, those things we do not want to keep within reach.[15]

In other words, we instinctively move away from the things we do not like or which are socially considered as bad. This affective value is arbitrary and is preserved over time through habit and history to the extent that certain feelings (either good or bad) remain stuck to certain objects and, consequently, to the people who circulate around them. The bodily substances that we produce – which are both familiar and uncanny, alien to us – can be included in the category of abject things, that is, those things which we tend to be distant from or which we fling away from ourselves. As Julia Kristeva explains in her book, *Powers of Horror* (1982), subjectivity is founded on the de-identification from the abject through the creation of a border. According to her view, filth is not a quality in itself, but relates to a boundary and represents 'the object

[14] Sara Ahmed, 'Happy Objects', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). Loc. 390–731. Kindle Edition. All subsequent references to this essay: (Ahmed, 2010).
[15] Ahmed, 2010, loc. 432.

jettisoned out of … a margin'[16]. For instance, matter issuing from the orifices of our bodies is marginal stuff which traverses the boundary of the body. Hence, Kristeva claims, '[i]t is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules'[17]. Following this logic, as the 'I' can only become clean (and, therefore, survive) by performing a series of expulsions, in the same way the Indian society can only be clean by expelling the abject – embodied by untouchables – from within itself, thus placing them beyond the border of caste. Barbara Creed explains the abject marginal status by claiming that

> the abject threatens life, it must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self.[18]

The presence of this border, albeit imaginary, within the Indian society is palpable and influences tangibly people's social life to such an extent that caste can be considered a sensuous entity, felt through signs involving all the human senses. Instances of this condition can be found both in the past – when untouchables did not have a social nor political status whatsoever – and in the present – when they have formally acquired the status of citizens but still experience substantial forms of exclusion.

2.1. Signs of Abjection in the Past

An eloquent example which shows clearly the idea of exclusion as well as the strict hierarchical division on which the Indian society is based is represented by the incipit of Anand's novel

[16] Kristeva, 1982, p. 69.
[17] Kristeva, 1982, p. 4.
[18] Barbara Creed, *Horror and The Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 65.

Untouchable:

> The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from the Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of the dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, …. The absence of the drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made the quarter a marsh which gave out the most offensive stink. And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony and the ugliness, the squalor, and the misery which lay within it, made it an "uncongenial" place to live in. (3)

The non-discursive signs included in this passage – e.g., the location of the colony outside the borders of the town, the daily view and contact with the filth of the public latrines, the smell of the quarter, the ugliness and squalor of the landscape – are marked by a strict hierarchy. The description of the untouchables' spatial abjection also points out how ideology is conveyed through visual, tactile, and olfactory signs. In this respect, Joel Lee claims that 'it is our fingertips, nostrils, eardrums and pores that are our primary receptors of ideology'[19]. Moreover, the reference to the dead carcasses of the tanners, the mutation of the brook from fresh to squalid waters, and the description of how the lack of proper drainage ditches and a succession of rains led to a fetid marshy mixture surrounding and running through the area suggests the inevitability of this condition as a permanent force in everyday life. It is within this context that

[19] Joel Lee, *Recognition and its Shadows: Dalits and the Politics of Religion in India*. (Columbia University: 2015), p. 47. All subsequent references to this work: (Lee, 2015).

untouchables lose their individuality and become mere signifiers of dirt as well as an embodied threat to the clean selves of others. Kristeva argues that this idea underpins any exclusionary society[20], as is also confirmed by Mary Douglas who claims that 'pollution is a type of danger which is likely to occur where the lines of structure are clearly defined'[21]. The dividing lines within the Indian society aim at excluding untouchables because of a fear of defilement, as if the untouchables' physical proximity to excrement could contaminate their own subjectivity as well, thus making it polluted and impure. According to this view, it may be claimed that Dalits have developed excrementalized subjectivities, that is, compromised subjectivities in a permanent state of abjection. In this respect, Kristeva talks about individuals who interiorize impurity, thus living with a 'sense of the abject'[22] as blank subjects who have to cope with fear, emptiness, and shame. This would suggest the possibility that untouchability is a fact of the body as much as of the mind. Tagore described untouchables as 'nameless people … the beasts of burden who have no time to become men'. He comments on their condition saying:

> They grow up on the leavings of society's wealth, with the least food, least clothes and least education, and they serve the rest. They toil most, yet theirs is the largest measure of indignity. At the least excuse they starve and are humiliated by their superiors. They are deprived of everything that makes life worth living. They are like a lamp stand bearing the lamp of civilization on their heads: the people above receive light while they are smeared with the trickling oil. [23]

In the light of this condition, a step further should be taken in order to understand more thoroughly the complex phenomenon of caste discrimination. More specifically, a third

[20] Kristeva, 1982, p.65.
[21] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 113.
[22] Kristeva, 1982, p.6.
[23] Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali* (Collected Works of Rabindra Nath Tagore, Centenary Edition) (Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, 1961), volume 10, p. 675.

dimension needs to be added to the physical and mental premises of the hierarchical division of the Indian society, that is, the affective dimension.

As William Miller argues, for 'an account of class rank, or social hierarchy' to be thick, it must be 'accompanied by an account of the passions and sentiments that sustain it'[24]. The passions and sentiments referred to by Miller can be included in the term 'affect', which I will use with the meaning it has been attributed in psychoanalysis, one of the main fields of application of this concept. In *The Fabric of Affect* (1999), the psychoanalyst André Green defines 'affect' as a categorical term, related to the sphere of feelings, grouping together 'the qualifying subjective aspects of the emotional life in a broad sense'[25]. He also adds that the 'affects', whether they are produced from outside or from within, 'belong to that contrasted domain of the states and of pleasure and pain, which form, in a way, the psychical matrices'[26]. In other words, affect refers to the sphere of feeling and the emotional including a series of different states which are part both of our psychological and social life. Mulk Raj Anand's novel, *Untouchable*, provides an in-depth representation of the extent to which untouchability is a condition which is not merely experienced at the level of the conscious and the unconscious, but it is a state deeply rooted in one's affective sphere. In other words, he depicts untouchability as a 'wound of the soul'[27] inflicted by emotional, affective, and embodied experiences of irreducible otherness. He focuses his narrative on a single day, as experienced in the life of its main character, Bakha, a young boy from the sweeper caste. The story is set in a cantonment town in the Himalayan foothills and sees Bakha in relation to the ritually polluting profession he has inherited from his forefathers. Although he tries very hard to keep a certain kind of dignity – by dressing like an Englishman and maintaining his body as clean

[24] William Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 245.
[25] André Green, *The Fabric of Affect in the Psychoanalytic Discourse*. Translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 8. All subsequent references to this book: (Green, 1999).
[26] Green, 1999, p. 4.
[27] Mulk Raj Anand, *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 24 (original work published in 1981).

as possible – he has to surrender to a life of abjection which had started long before his birth. On Bakha's attempt to resist history through little gestures such as wearing unusual clothes, M. R. Anand writes:

> On this [a pair of ammunition boots] and other strange and exotic items of dress he had built up a new world, which was commendable, if for nothing else, because it represented a change from the old, ossified order and the stagnating conventions of the life to which he was born. (66)

The boy's form of resistance might be interpreted as a reaction against a feeling which dominates every aspect of untouchables' lives: shame. This affect, explored by Anand in his novel, highlights the bond between the semiotics of caste – lived corporeally and experienced through the vulnerability of the body – and the affective sphere. As emerges from Eve Kosofski Sedgwick's study, shame is a powerful affect 'integral to and residual in the processes by which identity is formed'[28]. As a keystone affect to self-psychology, shame defines a space wherein a sense of self develops. Such space, as represented in Anand's work, is first of all physical, as is evident from the following description which shows a group of Dalits who take a moment to rest:

> As they sat or stood in the sun, showing their dark hands and feet, they had a curiously lackadaisical, lazy, lousy look about them. It seemed their insides were concentrated in the act of emergence, of a new birth, as it were, from the raw, bleak wintry feeling in their souls to the world of warmth. The taint of the dark, narrow, dingy little prison cells of their one-roomed homes lurked in them, however, even in the outdoor air. They were silent as if the act of liberation was too much for them to bear. The great life-giver had

[28] Eve Kosofski Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 63. All subsequent references to this book: (Sedgwick, 2003).

> cut the inscrutable knots that tied them up in themselves. (27)

As the quotation suggests, these people's spatial abjection has an impact on their most inner beings, which are enclosed as within the little prison cells of their homes. This passage – describing a quite exceptional moment compared to the usual untouchables' routine – also evokes the very physical effect of shame, that is, hiding oneself from the rest of the world. The word 'shame', as Elspeth Probyn writes in her essay, 'Writing Shame', etymologically comes from the Goth word *scham*, which literally means to cover the face[29]. The whole scene is about describing how, for a brief moment, the 'knots' that have tied these people in themselves are loosened by the warmth of the sun. The same happens to Bakha while he is walking out of his cantonment towards the town:

> He sniffed at the clean, fresh air around the flat stretch of land before him and vaguely sensed a difference between the odorous, smoky world of refuse and the open, radiant world of the sun. He wanted … the warmth to get behind the scales of the dry, powdery surface that had formed in his fingers. (25)

The sensuous side of caste is very well conveyed by the visual, olfactory, and tactile experiences lived within the outcastes' colony. Shame, then, enters the bodies of untouchables through the places they live in and physically shapes them:

> He [Bakha] seemed a true child of the outcaste colony, where there are no drains, no light, no water; of the marshland where people live among the latrines of the townsmen, and in the stink of their own dung scattered about here, there and everywhere; of the world where the day is dark as the night and the night pitch-dark. (71–72)

[29] Elspeth Probyn, 'Writing Shame", in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), loc. 997–1280 (loc. 1019). Kindle Edition.

It is within this type of environment that shame develops and becomes part of the body to such an extent that it starts affecting social interactions. A self-effacing attitude has grown within Bakha as a result of the series of abuses he receives every day as a member of the lowest caste among the outcastes. Anand writes: '[S]ome deep instinct told him that as a sweeper-lad he should show himself in people's presences as little as possible' (33). He feels he is a burden on society as people have to bear his presence through a series of purification rituals which make them waste time and patience. For instance, when Bakha stops at a betel-leaf shop to buy some cigarettes, he has to put his money on a specific board, then

> the betel-leaf-seller [dashes] some water over it …. Having thus purified it he [picks] up the nickel piece and [throws] it into the counter. Then he [flings] a packet of "Red-Lamp" cigarettes at Bakha, as a butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing round the corner of his shop. (33)

Low-caste men and women's dignity is constantly at stake as they experience abuse and humiliation on a daily basis, even in the most common circumstances. Indeed,

> shopkeepers always deceived the sweepers and the poor people, charging them much bigger prices, as if to compensate themselves for the pollution they courted by dealing with the outcastes. (36)

However, abuses can go well beyond this subtle form of discrimination and become deeply traumatizing experiences for these people, thus contributing to increase their servility and humility. The main event in the novel happens when Bakha is walking along a street and inadvertently touches a man who is passing by. He ends up being insulted and risks being lynched by the crowd:

> 'Keep to the side of the road, you low-caste vermin!' … . 'Why don't you call, you swine,

> and announce your approach! Do you know you have defiled me, you cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now, I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. …' [H]e realized that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier,…but a moral one. (37– 39)

This passage shows how untouchables are not seen as individuals in their own right, but as signifiers of dirt, even when they are not doing abject actions. Moreover, the fact that they are supposed to announce that they are approaching is a further example of how caste and hierarchy are not based on discursive premises but on a system of non-discursive signs – in this case represented by the sound they must emit while walking. While Bakha is going to the village, for instance, he suddenly remembers his warning call:

> 'Posh, posh, sweeper coming.' The undertone, 'Untouchable, Untouchable,' was in his heart; the warning shout, 'Posh, posh, sweeper coming!' was in his mouth. (42–43)

Once shame has literally entered the body of the Dalits through spatial abjection and an abject sensory environment, it roots itself in the self, as a state of being, leaving its mark on the soul. Indeed, shame cannot be reduced to the physical management of excreta, but becomes an integral part of subjectivity, felt at the unconscious level. As Anand describes, Bakha

> worked unconsciously. This forgetfulness or emptiness persisted in him over long periods. It was a sort of insensitivity created in him by the kind of work he had to do, a tough skin which must be a shield against all the most awful sensations. (13)

Resignation and numbness become forms of instinctive self-defense against the intoxicating environment in which Dalits are condemned to live. The psychologist of affect Silvan S. Tomkins, in fact, places shame at the opposite end of interest by claiming that shame may disenable the ability to be interested in the world and is responsible for the reduction of interest

or joy[30]. It is impossible for Bakha to rationally understand the reason for his sad condition:

> He was a sweeper, he knew, but he could not consciously accept that fact. He had begun to work at the latrines at the age of six and resigned himself to the hereditary life of the craft …. (30–31)

When a certain condition has been part of your life forever, it can easily become a mediator of identity, as Sedgwick claims in her book, *Touching Feeling* (2003). She also points out that

> the structuration of shame differs strongly between cultures, periods, forms of politics …, from one person to another within a given culture or time.[31]

In the Indian culture, for instance, shame plays a key role in the hierarchical division of society and for the marginalized it is the first – and remains a permanent – 'structuring fact of identity'[32]. Indeed, unlike guilt, which is related to something you have done or think you have done, shame attaches to the sense of what somebody thinks he or she is. This is very well conveyed by Anand's description of a moment of epiphany experienced by young Bakha, who suddenly realizes the true meaning of the word 'untouchable':

> 'For them I am a sweeper, sweeper – untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!' Like a ray of light shooting through the darkness, the recognition of his position, the significance of his lot dawned upon him. It illuminated the inner chambers of his mind. Everything that had happened to him traced his course up to this light and got the answer. (42)

He understands that the problem is not in something he has done, but in who he is according

[30] Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Negative Affects* (New York: Springer, 1963), vol. 2, p. 123.
[31] Sedgwick, 2003, p. 63.
[32] Sedgwick, 2003, p. 64.

to his religion. Untouchability is knitted into his psyche as part of his identity as if the stink was imbedded in the name 'untouchable'. In this respect, in his essay, 'Away from the Hindus', Babasaheb R. Ambedkar writes:

> The name 'Untouchable' is a bad name. It repels, forbids, and stinks. The social attitude of the Hindu towards the Untouchable is determined by the very name 'Untouchable' …. People have no mind to go into the individual merits of each Untouchable no matter how meritorious he is. All untouchables realize this ….[33]

The awareness of his stigmatized identity, judged by society independently of his personal qualities and values, makes Bakha feel ashamed and affects every interpersonal contact he has in his everyday life. For instance, when he goes to visit one of the few people who are kind to him – an upper-caste soldier – and arrives in front of his place,

> [h]e walked past it, because he was embarrassed. He was always ashamed of being seen. He felt like a thief. Luckily for his self-consciousness, the door of the room was shut …. He was a sweeper and dared not to go within defiling distance of the veranda. (90)

Shame, then, manifests itself in a series of circumstances and behaviors which go from living in the dark – where untouchables' slums are built – to hiding or covering oneself, as Bakha instinctively does when he walks along the street.

The most dramatic aspect of it is that such condition of exclusion is permanent and immutable, as several passages of the book show. Bakha's father's words, for instance, resonate like a death sentence:

> 'You have got to work for them all your life, my son, after I die.' Bakha felt the keen

[33] Babasaheb R. Ambedkar, 'Away from the Hindus', in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, compiled by Vasant Moon (Bombay: Education Department of Maharashtra, 1989), vol. V, pp. 403–421 (p. 419).

> edge of his sense of anticipation draw before his eyes the horrible prospect of all the future days of service in the town and the insults that would come with them. (65)

No dreams of becoming a *sahib*[34], learning to read and write in English, and being treated with respect are ever going to come true for Bakha. His body will be considered permanently abject and the cleaning work he is forced to do will be a constant reminder of that. As Bakha states, '"[t]hey think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt"' (67). According to this idea, dirt expresses a relation to social value. However, if excrement is attributed a social value, it stops being a merely private bodily act but becomes the objective correlative of moral impurity, shame, and abjection. The Indian system of power, principally based on caste and religion, establishes that there is no distance between one's subjectivity and bodily excrement, as Bakha's father tries to explain: '"We must realize that it is religion which prevents them from touching us"' (70). The coding of repulsion in relation to the other within the castes of India is the reason for social immobility. According to the rules of abjection, autonomous subjectivities lose their uniqueness and are condemned to a permanent state of exclusion. Bakha's most intimate part is aware of that: 'Somewhere in him he felt he could never get away from it, but to a greater part of him the place didn't exist. It has been effaced clean off the map of his being' (86). As a young boy, he cannot resign himself to be considered as the filth of India. On the other hand, he is aware of the limit between himself and the rest of the people, which is institutionalized through signs (e.g., the scavengers' brooms and baskets, their khaki garments, the sound of their voices while they are approaching, etc.), cathartic rites, and physical exclusion. As Anand explains,

> [t]here was an insuperable barrier between himself and the crowd, the barrier of caste.

[34] According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, *sahib* means sir, master, and is a term used especially among the native inhabitants of colonial India when addressing or speaking of a European of some social or official status.

> He was part of a consciousness which he could share and yet not understand. He had been lifted from the gutter, through the barriers of space to partake of a life which was his, and yet not his. He was in the midst of a humanity which included him in his folds and yet debarred him from entering into a sentient, living, quivering contact with it. (121)

This passage conveys the deepest meaning of untouchability by pointing out the logic of separation on which it is based as well as the lack of individuality experienced by the members of this social group. It also underlines the painful duality untouchables have to face, divided between a self they feel they have and a life which prevents them from developing it. To use Tagore's words, India's caste regulations divide society "into so many islands insulated from each other by a narrow sense of localism and driven by self-sufficient inertia"[35].

One of the main questions of the book is whether changing the context of dirt (i.e. from pre-modern latrines to modern sewage infrastructure) is the same as changing the cultural system itself. The author guides the readers towards an answer by showing that what is called the 'cultural system' is nothing more that the people's daily attitudes towards untouchables as well as their unconscious fear of defilement as a threat to their identity. Through Bakha's eyes, Anand represents the banal – and yet socially signifying – forms of abuse people carry out. After a day full of traumatizing events, Bakha, disheartened, complains: '"I only get abuse and derision wherever I go. Pollution, pollution, I do nothing else but pollute people. They all say that: 'Polluted! Polluted!"' (101). On the other hand, he feels incredulous in front of a man's kindness towards him, as if kindness and compassion were a privilege he could never dream to be granted:

> 'Drink it, drink the tea, you work hard; it will relieve your fatigue,' said Charat Singh.

[35] Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali* (Collected Works of Rabindra Nath Tagore, Centenary Edition) (Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, 1961), volume 13, p. 31.

> … ‘Now what about a new hockey stick for you!’ he said … . His [Bakha’s] face was hot with tea, his teeth shone even in their slavish smile, his whole body and mind were tense with admiration and gratitude to his benefactor. (94)

What emerges from these rare moments of humanity in Bakha’s life is that everything depends on the people’s will to adopt certain beliefs and behaviors. Anand lets Gandhi speak in his place about this. At the end of the book, Gandhi, India’s most influential man, goes to visit Bakha’s village to speak against untouchability. At the beginning of his speech, he says that ‘the fault does not lie in the Hindu religion, but in those who profess it’ (130), thus claiming that discrimination is the material, tangible consequence of a voluntary behavior enacted by the people and not an abstract condition imposed by an external force. Gandhi, then, argues that it is necessary to purify Hinduism by purging it of the sin of untouchability. This view was also shared by another prominent Indian man of the time: Rabindranath Tagore. Although, unlike Gandhi, he criticized fiercely the Hindu religion for erecting hard walls between people, he believed that the issue of untouchability was less religious and political than social. In other words, according to his view, spiritual regeneration was the key to inclusive humanity and social harmony.

After listening carefully to Gandhi, Bakha’s attention is caught by another man, a poet, who is speaking to the crowd. His main point is that a surer and swifter route than that suggested by Gandhi should be followed, that is, the adoption of the Western technology of the flush toilet. He claims:

> [India] has chosen to remain agricultural and has suffered for not accepting the machine. We must, of course, remedy that, I hate the machine. I loathe it. But I shall go against Gandhi there and accept it. And I am sure in time all will learn to love it. And we shall beat our own enslavers at their own game …. (134)

Although the technology of sanitation is associated with the British colonizers, it could represent a solution to eliminate the profession of sweepers and manual scavengers. The poet adds:

> 'When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine, will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it – the flush system.' (137)

According to this view, the shame attached to these humiliating practices, and consequently, to the people who were born to do them, will be eliminated at once. The underpinning of the poet's reasoning recalls a Western mentality according to which, as Aurobindo Ghose points out ironically, 'get the right kind of machine to work and everything can be done …'[36]. Bakha is extremely fascinated by this prospect and sees it as the solution he has been waiting for all his life. In fact, the very final passage of the book depicts the boy going back home with hope and optimism:

> 'I shall go and tell father all that Gandhi said about us, … and all that the poet said. Perhaps I can find the poet some day and ask him about his machine.' And he proceeded homewards. (139)

As Lauren Berlant writes in her book, *Cruel Optimism*, 'even those you would think of as defeated are living beings figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it, and to protect what optimism has left'[37]. However, more than eighty years after Bakha's story was told, we still read and talk about untouchability as an inescapable condition for Indian low castes.

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[36] Aurobindo Ghose, *War and Self-Determination* (Pondicherry, India: Aurobindo Sri Ashram, 1957), p. 3. All subsequent references to this book: (Ghose, 1957).

[37] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 10. All subsequent references to this book: (Berlant, 2011).

2.2. Signs of Abjection in the Present

After Modi's campaign, one of the most ambitious national campaigns ever led by the Indian government, it is possible to summarize and evaluate achievements as well as verify whether investments in technology – envisaged by the poet in Anand's novel – have actually changed the untouchables' lives. In other words, has the installation of flush toilets all over India contributed to eliminate the social stigma of untouchability and, consequently, to improve the Dalits' life conditions?

An analysis of the present conditions of the lowest caste highlights that the Dalits are still the ones who are usually employed in the sanitation workforce as they are those in charge of cleaning the sewage pipes of the septic tanks of the Indian towns. Despite the emphasis placed upon toilets, little effort has been made to ensure that modern waste management systems are in place. As a result, excrement is still cleaned manually from open drains, sewers, and septic tanks and Dalits are still surrounded and impregnated by a permanent olfactory environment which condemns them to an unavoidable contact with the smell of human abjection. Before the 'Clean India Campaign', sweepers were pervaded by the smell of dust and manual scavengers by the smell of human excreta; nowadays, sewer-men and drain cleaners are imbued with the smell of sewage, liquid waste, and toxic gases. Evidently, India's smell-scape is still hierarchically stratified. And the untouchables' tactile environment has not changed either, since they often have to be lowered into sewage pipes and tanks in order to fix them or free up blockages, as can be seen in the video *Lives Wasted in Gutters* (2011)[38], by the correspondent Kumar of the community news service 'India Unheard'. The bodies of the people who work in this sector are in contact with extremely corrosive substances which leave their marks on the skin, as if to remind them and the others who they are. The result is a high number of deaths

[38] Jai Kumar, *Lives Wasted in Gutters*, online video recording, YouTube, 15 April 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7cF9883aH0&feature=share&has_verified=1> [Accessed 31 August 2020].

from accidents or debilitating ailments such as leptospirosis, viral hepatitis and typhoid, as S. Anand writes in his article, 'Life inside a Black Hole' (2007)[39]. As for the visual space which surrounds untouchables, Lee writes that scavengers usually live near public latrines, in slums and mud-walled houses. This is because the municipality either builds public latrines where sanitation workers already live or erects toilets and designates land for rubbish dumps on land which also designates adjacent plots for sanitation employees to build upon[40]. This way of thinking signifies an underlying order of things, a persisting condition of spatial abjection which the new sanitation system has not managed to improve. The lives of Dalits continue to be precarious, vulnerable, and endangered by one of the country's deadliest jobs and most insidious forms of caste discrimination. Official estimates say that one worker every five days dies while cleaning sewers or septic tanks, but campaigners maintain that this is just the tip of the iceberg as many deaths go unreported.

On 27 March 2014, the Indian Supreme Court held that India's constitution requires state intervention to end manual scavenging and 'rehabilitate' all people engaged in the practice. This meant not only ending the practice but also ending the abuses faced by communities engaged in manual scavenging. However, when manual scavengers manage to leave this profession, they frequently have to face social discrimination and isolation. For instance, in an interview published on the website of Human Rights Watch in 2018, an 18-year-old boy belonging to the caste of Dalits said: 'We don't get any other job no matter where we go. I have tried. I know this is discrimination, but what can I do?'[41]. Not only are Dalits denied social inclusion through work, but they also face injustice in terms of access to the most basic resources. While the Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955) prohibits obstructing access to water

[39] S. Anand, 'Life inside a black hole'. *Tehelka Magazine*, Volume 4, Issue 47, December 2007.
[40] Lee, 2015, p. 74.
[41] Jayshree Bajoria, 'Swachh Bharat Should Also Eliminate Caste Discrimination'. *Human Rights Watch* 26 September 2018.
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/26/swachh-bharat-should-also-eliminate-caste-discrimination> [Accessed 31 August 2020].

sources on the basis of untouchability, people working as manual scavengers and who have worked as scavengers but no longer do are often excluded from water sources in their communities. As Sunita, who left manual scavenging in 2002, explained, '[w]hile doing dirt-cleaning work, I was not allowed to fill water from the well. I am still not allowed to fill water from the well'[42]. On a practical note, those who practice manual scavenging are routinely denied access to communal water sources and public places of worship, prevented from purchasing goods and services, excluded from community religious and cultural events, and subjected to private discrimination from upper-caste community members. Children of manual scavengers also confront discrimination within schools from both teachers and classmates, resulting in particularly high dropout rates[43]. As the research carried out by Shikha S. Bhattarjee shows[44], parents from a Dalit community in Ratanpur village, in Gujarat, confronted teachers at the government school after learning that their children were made to come to school early in order to clean toilets. Faced with these forms of discrimination, the government's commitment to modernize sanitation is just a feeble answer to the untouchables' social and emotional impasse.

Based on the examples above, two observations can be made. First, the modernization of the sanitation infrastructure envisaged by Prime Minister Modi has changed the location of filth from pre-modern latrines to a more modern sewage system, but has not dismantled the premises of social exclusion of Dalits. In fact, social hierarchy is still encoded in the sensory environment which, for untouchables, remains a place of abjection. Second, a process of rehabilitation at the level of the affective is necessary not only for those who experience or

[42] Shikha Silliman Bhattacharjee, 'Cleaning Human Waste: "Manual Scavenging", Caste, and Discrimination in India'. *Human Rights Watch* 25 August 2014 <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/25/cleaning-human-waste/manual-scavenging-caste-and-discrimination-india> [Accessed 31 August 2020]. All subsequent references to this report: (Bhattarjee, 2014).
[43] Jan Sahas Social Development Society, *Socio Economic Status of Women Manual Scavengers: Baseline Study Report, 2014* (New Delhi: UN Women, Fund for Gender Equality, 2014).
[44] Bhattacharjee, 2014. [Accessed 29 August 2020].

have experienced untouchability, but also for the community as a whole. As Tagore also argued, civilized individuals are effective agents of social and cultural change and individual freedom can only be achieved within the harmony of the whole. Governmental programs, sanitation, and rehabilitation schemes should be supported by a new way of dealing with politics as something experienced in the sphere of feelings as well as in the daily practical life. In other words, forms of recognition through which individuals gain voice should be imbued with an emotional and ethical dimension, thus engendering processes of political subjectification.

3. Political Subjectivity

The analysis of both the past conditions of untouchables – through the close reading of Anand's novel – and their present conditions after the conclusion of the 'Clean India Campaign' has shown that sound, smell, space, sight, etc. provide the atmosphere or, to use Berlant's word, the ambience in which people develop their individualities, and consequently, their sense of citizenship. Hence, it is by acting on these informal elements that it is possible to make a real difference in the way certain people live. Berlant points out that 'citizenship is … a mode of belonging … that circulates through and around the political in formal and informal ways, with an affective, emotional, economic and juridical force that is at once clarifying and diffuse'[45]. Consequently, aiming at creating an 'ambient citizenship', as she calls it, means to try to incite a conscience in people so that everyone can experience affectively the political. Ambient citizenship, as Berlant explains, raises questions of whose noise, space, olfactory and visual environment really matters. Although they might seem trivial aspects of people's social life, they are imbued with political meaning. Michel Thompson, in his book, *Rubbish Theory* (1979), has claimed that 'what goes on in certain regions of social life that we tend to exempt

[45] Berlant, 2011, p. 230.

from scrutiny is crucial for any understanding of society'[46]. Therefore, in cultures like that of the Indians, where even the most private aspects of an individual's life have a social impact, politics is responsible for the development of a political subjectivity. As Kristine Krause and Katharina Schramm have underlined in their article, 'Thinking through Political Subjectivity'[47], the concept of political subjectivity is closely connected with the notions of belonging and citizenship. They are based, respectively, on emotional attachment and legal incorporation, which are the basic conditions for social participation. According to this idea, political projects should engender processes of subjectification, thus allowing individuals or groups to gain a position which makes them recognizable as such. As is evident, an emotional as well as ethical dimension adds to the institutional discourse, which is consequently able to answer certain people's need to be seen and recognized as subjects.

Shifting this conceptual framework to the Indian context, it may be claimed that thinking of untouchability through political subjectivity can result in the formal recognition of an individual not only as a rights-bearing subject but also as an affective being who deserves to be included at the emotional and moral level, too. As Kalpana Kannabiran *et al*. argue, belonging 'is not just about rights and duties, but also about the emotions that such memberships evoke'[48]. Hence, social rehabilitation of Dalits – which consists of their identification as subjects – needs to be dealt with at the intersection of the personal, the political, and the moral. It is from this perspective that a revision of what is meant by the political – combining the institutional engagement with a more subjective dimension – is imperative. In other words, modern sanitation should be a demand coming from the population as much as the government and the change in the Indian ideological system should be enacted

[46] Michel Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 4.
[47] Kristine Krause and Katharina Schramm, 'Thinking Through Political Subjectivity,' *African Diaspora*, 4 (2011): pp. 115–34.
[48] Kalpana Kannabiran *et al*., 'Introduction,' *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40 (2006): pp. 189–195 (p. 189).

by the community, in the first place. As Ahmed states in her essay, 'Affective Economies', emotions are not a private matter nor simply belong to individuals[49]. On the contrary, they bind subjects together by aligning individuals with communities. This confirms the idea, also expressed by Sadeq Rahimi[50], according to which there is a relationship between the subjective experience and the cultural, political, and historical paradigms in which the individual is embedded. In other words, private experience is shaped by collective structures, and as a result, it is within the political that the new subjectivity which Dalits deserve to develop needs to be conceptualized.

4. Conclusion

In my paper, I have shown how a thorough analysis of the semiotics of caste can shed new light on untouchability as an interplay of religion, politics, history, and subjectivity. Dealing with untouchability from the point of view of abjection and the abject has involved a focus on the most intimate side of life, such as bodily acts and the feelings related to them. This, however, has not meant to ignore larger political structures but enter them from an unexpected perspective: that of people's affective sphere.

First, the analysis of untouchability at the semiotic level has shown how caste is something felt, intrinsically corporeal, and related to physical repugnance and revulsion. It is from this perspective that it may be claimed that caste, namely that of the Dalits, operates corporeally through a system of non-discursive signs, such as sound, smell, touch, and sight. The sound of the broom on the street, for instance, immediately reveals the presence of a sweeper who is approaching so that everyone gets prepared to avoid him or her either by changing direction or by keeping a safe distance from them. At the same time, the examination

[49] Sara Ahmed, 'Affective Economies,' *Social Text*, 22 (2004): pp. 117-39 (p. 117).
[50] Sadeq Rahimi, *Meaning, Madness and Political Subjectivity A study of Schizophrenia and Culture in Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2015).

of the sensuousness of caste has highlighted the paradox on which it is based, that is, the capacity of making present what is not actually present. Brian Massumi's question summarizes quite effectively this paradox: 'How can a falsity have a superlatively real hold on experience?'[51]. In this respect, he makes the example of a false fire alarm. The alarm is an immediately performing sign, which despite asserting nothing, makes bodies take immediate action. In the same way, the preemptive power of the semiotics of caste has become a productive process and, thus, has enforced a series of discriminatory behaviors by people that condemn untouchables to a social and emotional impasse.

Second, the close reading of *Untouchable* has demonstrated that untouchability has deeper roots than the lack of sanitary awareness or effective sanitation infrastructure. Rather, it is the internalization of an abject marginal status encoded in the sensory environment. Hence, the installation of flush toilets and the modernization of the city space can lay the groundwork for a more inclusive idea of society but are not the ultimate solutions against excremental abjection. Politics, indeed, should also take care of the Dalits' 'wounds of the soul' inflicted by emotional, affective, and embodied experiences of irreducible otherness. The idea of 'salvation by machinery', expressed by Ghose[52], is part of a modern creed which the Indian culture is not ready or willing to embrace fully. Therefore, before acting at a material level, a deeper change should be enacted at the level of affect and emotional involvement of a whole citizenship. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that affects act in the nervous system not of persons, but of worlds[53], which means that they are not experienced individually but by community as a whole. Moreover, by referring to the nervous system of subjects, they also suggest that the emotional environments in which people find themselves are nervously

[51] Brian Massumi, 'The Future Birth of the Affective Fact. The Political Ontology of Threat', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), loc. 732–997 (loc. 904). Kindle Edition.
[52] Ghose, 1957, p. 3.
[53] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'Percept, Affect, and Concept', in *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 163–99.

compelling, thus eliciting a series of responses, either positive or negative. It is from this perspective that it may be concluded that any social change cannot be enacted through politics or economic investments alone, but principally through people's desires and decisions as affective beings.

In conclusion, the government should start working on a new semiotics of filth, separated from the concepts of caste or social hierarchy. Indeed, nobody is inherently dirty. What is dirty is the link between private bodily acts and a system of signs which regulate certain people's individual and social life. More specifically, the connection between excrement and the untouchables' subjectivity is totally arbitrary, like, in linguistics, the connection between the signifier and the signified. So far, Dalits have been considered as signifiers of pollution, containers of filth, metonymies of excrement. However, practically speaking, the contiguity between the container and the contained does not mean that they form one inseparable whole. On the contrary, they will always be two separate entities. In the same vein, the contiguity between untouchables and the dirt they clean up does not mean they constitute an indivisible unit. It is the pressure of caste that makes the Dalits at one with what they touch. Therefore, it is necessary to revise the belief ingrained in the Indian society according to which the proximity to filth means to be one with it. As this paper has demonstrated, such a link cannot be broken by politics' investment in machines – which are the means, not the end of a process of change – but rather through an affective involvement and rehabilitation of the whole community.

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Precarious Mechanisms in Ravi Subramanian's Novel *Don't Tell the Governor*

Monali Chatterjee

Abstract

The uncertainty of human existence caused by upheavals and radical transformations in recent politics and society has instigated numerous manifestations of precarity. The masses of dispossessed and deprived people have long been victims of political social and economic neglect. However, the plurality of the multifaceted deliberations about the precarity of life is yet to lead to possible solutions that can help to allay the uncertainties and persistent insecurities. Ravi Subramanian recent novel *Don't Tell the Governor* explores and questions the lofty ideals of resilience, security and autonomy that often conceals the gruesome reality of insecurities, exploitation and ostracizing within the labour force. Documenting some of the recent changes in the political and economic policies of India through controversies, scams, scandals and faulty decisions taken by the hegemony, the novel depicts issues that are realistic representations of the precarity of the present time. This is pertinent not only to India but the world over where life is dominated by the precarity of existence. The paper examines the veracity of Subramanian's perspectives about financial turmoil, urgent decision making and the fickleness of human nature, psyche and morality that makes way for such volatility and instability.

Keywords: Instability, Policies, Precarity, Resilience, Uncertainties

The mobilization of the labour force has blurred the distinctions between class and affinity. The advent of neoliberalism capitalism is characterized by incredible resilience and a continual precarious condition of the workforce especially due to high levels of insecurity, cut-throat competition and consequent vulnerability in a general state of being. This lack of security of people due to turbulences as well as sudden and drastic changes have resulted in various manifestations of precarity. Masses of people from diverse ethnicities, who have been dispossessed and deprived, have been prey to social, economic and political manipulations, neglect and intrigues. However, the multitudinous deliberations about such precarious conditions are yet to yield substantial solutions that can be implemented to reduce the repercussions of precarity and increased vulnerability. A recent novel, *Don't Tell the Governor*

by Ravi Subramanian minutely chronicles some of the recent changes in political and economic policies of India through controversies, scams, hoaxes and hasty conclusions and decisions taken by the hegemony. It questions the lofty ideals of security, resilience and autonomy that exist under the garb of insecurities, exploitation and banishing precariat from the labour force. The novel raises questions that are based on realistic descriptions of the precarity of the present day. The insights generated through this deliberation may be pertinent to not only India but also the rest of the world wherein life is dominated by the precarity of existence. This paper attempts to speculate upon the authenticity of the perspectives proposed by Subramanian about the financial overhaul, sudden decisions and the capriciousness of human nature, psyche and morality that paves the way for such vulnerability and instability.

Precarious has been derived from the Latin word *precarious*, which has a number of implications. The most primitive was attained by entreaty or prayer. This is not part of the present meaning in English any longer. According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the Latin word also means "doubtful" or "uncertain," like the *precarious* in Modern English.[1] In a dynamic world, where change is the only constant and uncertainty is the new certain way of life, precarity is the new norm and precariats have been emerging as the new class of people. The notion of precarity is essentially used to describe various psychological, physical and emotional influences of neoliberal living and working conditions. In speculative and scholastic discourse, the terms such as ‘precarity’, ‘precariousness’ and ‘precariat’ have echoed extensively and have given illustrative accounts to speculate upon the influence of worldwide capitalism on ordinary life. It is due to this, that precarious predicaments have perennially featured as an essential component of any contemporary literature that projects sensitivity to

[1] Merriam-Webster, ‘Precarious Is Not “Before Carious”: The History and Meaning of Precarious’, *Merriam-Webster*, 2019 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/precarious-word-history-and-definition> [accessed 8 November 2019].

the present issues of the day. Various kinds of literature that expose such subjects are now gaining ground and garnering scholarly attention and interest.

The plot of the novel centres on some key events: Le Da Spire's huge clandestine payment to Danish Khosla is suddenly uncovered by some whistle-blowers and published in the *Panama Papers*. Le Da Spire has been supplying India security paper and machines for printing currency notes. However, the RBI Governor, Harsha Ranjan had detected that they had also been supplying paper to printing presses in Pakistan that manufacture fake Indian currency notes. Harsha Ranjan stops business with Le Da Spire and its promoter Carlo Pinotti wants Danish Khosla, a Central Government fixer, to retrieve this business for Pinotti as it constitutes 40% of Le Da Spire's total business. The Prime Minister (PM) and the finance minister are unhappy with Harsha as he refuses to manipulate the repo rate of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) according to the demands of the Central Government. So instead of renewing his term, the Prime Minister appoints somebody who would act according to his wishes. So, he chooses Aditya Kesavan, a Professor at NYU who recently separated from his wife and his daughter. Vicky Malhotra, the CEO of Tiara Jewels, UK patronizes the floundering actress Pallavi Soni and marries her after she wins a reality show in the UK. They go to settle in Mumbai and befriend Aditya. Vicky sets up three businesses all of which fail. He leaves Pallavi to be rescued from those scams by Aditya and escapes. Aditya and Pallavi become intimate. Khosla discovers this and helps Aditya by siphoning government money so that Pallavi gets 300 crores to pay her debtors. The day Aditya gets her to be paid, Pallavi disappears and Aditya's heist is discovered. He escapes punishment as he agrees to be the rubber-stamp Governor of the Prime Minister and the finance minister for the rest of his tenure. Pallavi, Vicky Mehul and Kangana settle in St. Kitts to escape extradition by the Indian government. After fleeing with one thousand crore rupees Vicky throttles Pallavi so that no one tells the governor about his heist.

A number of real incidents has been depicted in the corporate thriller *Don't Tell the Governor*. The difference between reality and fiction almost begins to blur and prompts the reader to question the accepted norms as dictated by the Central Government. It centres on the recent controversies involving the RBI scams and demonetization amongst many others. Given the general condition of precarity and flux, the characters in the novel face similar trials and tribulations as did those in real life, which they are modelled on. Hence the novel becomes a fertile ground for speculating about precarity and uncertainty and how to possibly deal with them in the turbulent times of the day. In this paper, diverse theories about precarity and vulnerability have been discussed with instances elaborately mentioned from this novel. Since the novel describes a series of contemporary events that focus on precariats as an emerging class of people, a detailed analysis has been made about the same in this paper.

The word 'precarity' gained currency in Italy in the late 1980s to describe the situations of those who were employed in temporary jobs without any social security. Biglia and Martí pointed out, "With the debilitation of collective bargaining agreements and the welfare state, the number of well-educated young Europeans facing labour precarity increased quickly." [2] However, in the novel, most of the significant characters are well-established in their chosen field of expertise and deft. Yet, they bargain not with their employers but with their capacity to transgress the acceptable norms of society and legal decorum. Characters like Aditya Kesavan (a married man involved sexually with his student), Vicky Malhotra (a Managing Director of a company devoting his duty hours to his clandestine relationship with his then-girlfriend, Pallavi Soni), and Danish Khosla (tried to manipulate the decisions of the Government of India to give advantage to Le Da Spire, being heftily bribed by them) illustrate this point.

[2] B. Biglia and J.B. Martí, 'Precarity', in *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, ed. by T. Teo (New York NY: Springer, 2014), p. 1489.

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, reputed philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler argued that precarity is a fundamental condition of life for all regardless of their differences.[3] It can affect all irrespective of their economic or social class or political influence. Aditya has been caught by his wife, frolicking with his Ph.D. student in the kitchen. Though his wife does not make the matter public, which would have made him lose his job as a tenured professor at NYU, she separates from him taking their daughter along with her. It is thus clear that marital transgression bordering on adultery can shake the foundations of any marital relationship. As soon as this transgression begins, one ceases to remain indispensable in a relationship. This can be seen as an example of, in the words of Biglia and Marti, "Life Precarity" [4] They have described it as:

> being flexibly involved in a network of social groups and (im)material, continuously moving, contingent realities. This implies a lack of life security and a feeling of permanently living in a "state of flux" – an unstable environment with no options for making plans for the future, even the very near one. [5]

The beginning of the novel describes the crisis that a paper supplier for printing currency notes faces as a result of a sudden and unexpected unravelling of a scam. The *Panama Papers* in Central America had exposes confidential documents for over two hundred and fifty thousand companies worldwide including that of Le Da Spire, Hampshire in England. Le Da Spire is the founding member of the Banknote Ethics Initiative, which has been established to encourage fair business practices in the currency printing industry. It is the world's leading commercial banknote printer and has 140 countries around the world as clients. India contributes to 40 per cent of Le Da Spire's global business. The most serious allegations made against it involve the clandestine payments made to Danish Khosla in India in exchange for

[3] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006).
[4] Biglia and Martí.
[5] Biglia and Martí.

receiving favours from the Government of India on behalf of Le Da Spire. If the Indian government takes offence and ceases transactions with this company, it would significantly reduce Da Spire's turnover.

According to Butler, precarity

> …describes a few different conditions that pertain to living beings. Anything living can be expunged at will or by accident; and its persistence is in no sense guaranteed. As a result, social and political institutions are designed in part to minimize conditions of precarity, especially within the nation-state, although, as you will see, I consider this restriction a problem. (Butler ii) [6]

However, in the hands of the kind of Prime Minister and Finance Minister, Siddharth Pande, as described in the novel, political institutions as the central government are corrupted by moral depravity. The Prime Minister says,

> Does he (RBI Governor, Harsha Ranjan) not understand that inflation is not a concern (of the government)? It's economic growth that needs to be driven. If the country doesn't see 7 per cent growth, we will be roasted. The opposition will not leave an Opportunity to shame us. Interest rates are critical. We need them to come down. We need people to pay less for their loans. That's the only way they can get more money in their hands. We had committed to doing all this when we came to power. People believed us and voted for us. We need to come good on the promises we made. (Subramanian 33)[7]

[6] Judith Butler, 'Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics', *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, 4.3 (2009), i-xiii (p. ii) <%3C www.aibr.org%3E>.
[7] Ravi Subramanian, *Don't Tell the Governor* (Noida: HarperCollins, 2018).

It is evident from this declaration that on one hand, the Prime Minister projects that his moves would benefit the entire nation but on the other, he is more preoccupied with the concerns of his political alliances and position in the political arena of the country. Schram suggests,

> Butler's theorizing of precarity has been characterized as an ethical turn away from political contestation toward a "mortalist humanism" that appeals to an ethical consensual concern for people's shared condition… Precarity brings diverse bodies into alliance, if tenuously and contingently, in the name of representing a shared condition that needs to be challenged and contested in conflict with the powers that be." [8]

Banki suggests that "precarity describes the condition of being vulnerable to exploitation because of a lack of security. Precarity suggests the *potential* for exploitation and abuse, but not its certain presence. Thus, precarious work is not the fact of consistent unemployment, but the looming threat, and perhaps frequent fact, of it." [9] Early in the novel, Harsha Ranjan is made to feel this threat due to his refusal to obey the unethical dictakts of the Prime Minister. Lloyd refers to "a physical dependence on other humans for their survival. Clearly violence – individual or state-sponsored; pre-emptive or retaliatory – is one of the principal means by which that survival is put at risk," indicates Lloyd. [10]

Butler proposes in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2006) that there is no *I* without the first *we,* forcing against the present functioning boundaries and toward a politics of coalition, cohabitation and interdependency. [11] This can be seen in the frantic proclamations of the Prime Minister when he seems agitated by the RBI Governor, Harsha Ranjan's refusal to be dictated terms by the Central government and manipulate the repo rate

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[8] Sanford F. Schram, 'Occupy Precarity', *Theory & Event*, 16.1 (2013).

[9] Susan Banki, 'Precarity of Place: A Complement to the Growing Precariat Literature', in *Power and Justice in the Contemporary World Conference*, ed. by Maurits Bever Donker (New York, 2017), p. 2 <https://irows.ucr.edu/cd/courses/soc179/readings/banki.pdf>.

[10] M.S. Lloyd, 'Towards A Cultural Politics of Vulnerability: Precarious Lives and Ungrievable Deaths', in *Judith Butler's Precarious Politics: Critical Encounters.*, ed. by T. Carver and S.A. Chambers (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 92–105.

[11] Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*.

of interest at which the other banks borrow money from the RBI. It is evident that even to remain in power the Prime Minister needs the support of his alliances. He claims:

> I don't need to tell you that the next two years are crucial for us. We need someone in the RBI who will work with us and support us to the core. Someone who does not have any political leanings. Someone who can be moulded. Someone who is willing to be led. And, most importantly, we need someone who needs the job rather than someone we need for the job. And that someone has to be from outside the country. That is the only way we can get a learned man to step in and deliver the nation's agenda (Subramanian 35). [12]

To remove the precarious situation and vulnerability of his government the Prime Minister replaces the powers of the RBI governor with decisions of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) which constitutes his own supporters it is insignificant to the Prime Minister that the development of the entire nation has to be uniform rather than be dappled with the disproportionate growth of a few capitalists leading to an oligarchy under his own dictatorship. In order to avoid Harsha Ranjan's protest, the MPC is made up of the RBI Governor, the Deputy Governor, in charge of monetary policy, the Executive Director of the RBI, and three nominees of the Government of India – all of whom are reputed economists and academicians. Harsha Ranjan would be made the Governor of Tamil Nadu to appease him. Nobody would notice that the two things were connected and if they did the Prime Minister would ignore it.

Guy Standing comments that labour market flexibility has transferred risks and insecurity onto workers and their families giving rise to the global 'precariat' consisting of masses of people around the world without

> an anchor of stability. They are becoming a new dangerous class. They are prone to listen to ugly voices, and to their votes and money to give those voices a political

[12] Subramanian.

> platform of increasing influence. The very success of the 'neo-liberal' agenda, embraced to a greater or lesser extent by governments of all complexions, has created an incipient political monster. Action is needed before that monster comes to life. [13]

The digitization of the banking sector has eroded the historical independence of the banking industry, as it has done in every other sector. In the novel, after becoming the RBI Governor, Aditya addresses the heads of eminent banks in our country and brings to light the precarity and vulnerability of the future redundancies of the banks. "We also have an obligation to society – our social cause towards banking for the poor and generating employment. How will we continue doing that? Hiring people is not enough; having them gainfully employed is the challenge." (Subramanian) [14] Aditya echoes Standing's idea as the "precariat" which is the "new class in the making" [15] and solicits solutions to leverage the vast population of the country to their advantage. Any wrong move would instigate depleting the trust of the people and the State. [16]

According to Simon During, "Relatively geographically and culturally stable relations of dominance and subordination are being replaced by relatively unstable and dispersed conditions of deprivation and insecurity." (During 20) [17] The precarious mechanism of power echoes through the Prime Minister's frantic outbursts at RBI Governor, Harsha Ranjan's refusal to lower interest rates to secure the overheated economy and avoid an impending inflation. "Leaving a legacy is not as important as creating history. And we are creating history here. We cannot allow him (Harsha Ranjan) to derail our vision. His actions can drive our fate. Our country's progress depends on him." (Subramanian 34) [18] Intense uncertainty is the

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[13] Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).
[14] Subramanian.
[15] Standing.
[16] Standing.
[17] Simon During, 'Choosing Precarity', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38.1 (2015), 19-38 (p.20).
[18] Subramanian.

defining attribute of our life. When Aditya first gets appointed as the RBI governor and welcomed warmly, he starts "He was enjoying his moment in the sun. He had no idea how things were about to change. No one had told him that in life, nothing is permanent." (Subramanian 50) [19]

Butler suggests, "Those who are excluded from existing polities, who belong to no nation-state or other contemporary state formation may be "unreal" only by those who seek to monopolize the terms of reality." [20] In the novel, Aditya, the RBI Governor makes an impressive speech about the uncertain future of the banking sector. Though the heads of banks in the audience receive it with applause, Aditya is flagrantly reprimanded by the finance minister for dismissing the lifetime work of the bankers as futile. The latter thinks that it is very arrogant of Aditya to mistrust their identity. Similarly, when Aditya offers possible solutions to resolve the issue of non-performing assets (NPAs) in the public sector banks (PSUs), the finance minister dismisses it as unrealistic and monopolizes a plan with the Financial Services Secretary, Ranjeet Kumar to recapitalize the ailing and loss-making banks. While much of the speculation on precarity relates to the precariats and those who fall prey to the persistent uncertainty of life, this novel affords a glimpse of people and actions behind the scenes, who give rise to the condition of precarity amongst the masses.

A report from Poverty and Employment Precarity and Southern Ontario states that precarity is also characterized by status frustration because of undertaking jobs below one's station (in the case of those with higher educational qualifications). (Poverty and Employment Precarity and Southern Ontario 42) [21] In the case of Aditya, his job becomes frustrating because he has no power to take any decision. The discrimination of treatment Aditya receives from the

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[19] Subramanian.

[20] Judith Butler, 'Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street', in *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (London: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 9.

[21] Wayne Lewchuk, *The Precarity Penalty: The Impact of Employment Precarity On Individuals, Households and Communities—and What to Do About It. Ontario: Poverty and Employment Precarity and Southern Ontario* (Ontario) <https://pepso.ca/documents/precarity-penalty.pdf>.

finance minister between himself and Ranjeet proves that the two are in an alliance and this riles him to no end. He helplessly contemplates,

> … did he even have any decision-making powers anymore? He had left a serious role in academia to be a part of this circus. And that's exactly what it was, wasn't it? A circus? All of them with their official, important-sounding designations were really just clowns dancing to someone else's tunes. (Subramanian 115-116) [22]

Following the psychoanalytic insights of Emmanuel Levinas, Jean Laplanche and Judith Butler, Mari Ruti points out that

> Even when we are not treated badly, we are treated unilaterally, which means that we are completely at the mercy of others. And when we *are* treated badly, our masochism is inevitable in the sense that we are forced to cathect to those who harm us; our very survival depends on such wounded attachments, with the result that being injured – and injurable – becomes the status quo of our lives. [23]

This is exemplified through Pallavi's regret in the novel when she recalls that her best friend had seduced her boyfriend and married him. It is only when she marries Vicky that her mental agony and injury begin to heal. Campesi indicates that Police control and military activities are pitted against the dangerous classes and, more specifically, against that specific category of individuals represented by illegal immigrants. [24] In the novel, a scene in Pathankot wherein Major Tarachand Rajput successfully prevents the infiltration of a notorious and violent money counterfeiting, illustrates this point. (Subramanian 128-129) [25]

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[22] Subramanian.

[23] Mari Ruti, 'The Ethics of Precarity: Judith Butler's Reluctant Universalism', in *Remains of the Social: Desiring the Post-Apartheid*, ed. by Maurits van Bever Donker and Et Al (Wits University Press, 2017), p. 93.

[24] Giuseppe Campesi, 'The Control of the New Dangerous Class', *Sortuz: Oñati Journal of Emergent Socio-Legal Studies*, 1.2 (2007), 105–20.

[25] Subramanian.

In the novel, the loss of integrity summarily enhances the sense of precarity. This poetic justice has been ironically depicted and illustrated. Through Vicky's anxious choleric outbursts, Subramanian refers to the volatile nature of human integrity at the time of crisis, "Do what you have to do, but don't get caught… The problem with greed is that one doesn't realize where to draw the line" (Subramanian 147) [26] Vicky shares this anxiety about Sanat Rao, the Vice-captain of his IPL team, Telangana Tigers, being involved in a match-fixing scandal. However, soon after this episode, Vicky Malhotra gets booked, being allegedly involved in the scandal of match-fixing of his IPL team and his MyBestDeal.com debacle still remains unresolved; Suyog Gold is faced with a game-changing impact which makes it a quasi-deposit scheme. Similarly, his wife, Pallavi, deceives him and is involved in a clandestine adulterous relationship with their friend Aditya. It evinces their visceral impulses rather than logical, moral and ethical decisions.

Every character has to thrive under the ironical impact of uncertainty to combat his or her sense of vulnerability. Vicky launches the Suyog Gold scheme to save MyBestDeal.com from stumbling. However, Gen (Retd.) Nestor Marquez, the Defence Minister of Venezuela overthrows the government of President Nicholas Maduro which upset the precarious international balance of power. This causes the rise of crude oil prices and the fall of the value of the rupee against the dollar, thereby causing the RBI to propose such a policy, that Vicky can never follow without becoming bankrupt. Secondly, while Vicky arrogantly brushes aside Mehul Modi's warnings while launching the Suyog Gold scheme, it is Mehul Modi who rescues the former from being arrested with the aid of the shrewd and corrupt Danish Khosla. Similarly, while Aditya evades Khosla, knowing about his alliance with the manipulative Le Da Spire, Khosla uncovers his adulterous relationship with Pallavi and controls his movements, making him feel vulnerable and exposed. It is to evade such vulnerability and precarity, that

[26] Subramanian.

the finance minister cautions the RBI Governor to capture Vicky Malhotra, the absconding culprit. He says, “After the Ranvijay Malya episode, we cannot afford to have one more guy scooting from the country with billions. Or we’ll soon become known as a nation of looters and scooters.’ (Subramanian 148) [27] The finance minister tries to mobilize a mechanism to evade precarity on one hand and ironically induces another mechanism for the RBI to work with the corrupt currency note counterfeiting company, Le Da Spire.

The need to safeguard some "chosen ones" puts the survival of so many others at stake making the situation precarious and vulnerable and susceptible to lethal violence from terrorism. On learning about the ransom, Khosla is alarmed but he knows that it is done for Pinotti. He observes, “Some lives are more precious than the others. Carlo Pinotti holds more secrets than any other living individual. Everyone, including our politicians, cutting across party lines, needs him.” (Subramanian 251) [28] The precarity of the existent government is even more pronounced. Pande points out “If the public found out about the ransom pay-out, the repercussions would definitely hurt their chances in the upcoming elections next year.” (Subramanian 253) [29] The Prime Minister's question is even more ironical: “’How long do you think before this money makes its way back to disrupt economy and life in sensitive areas?’ the PM asked. He knew that the money being fed back into Kashmir would mean increased insurgency and enhanced unrest in the valley.” (Subramanian 253) [30]

Much of Aditya’s support for Pallavi and his resorting to illegal means to support her recall a famous play called *Justice* by John Galsworthy. It is perhaps indicated through both these writers, that loss of integrity can never be condoned, no matter how noble the larger intention may be. Through Aditya, the author probably demonstrates the fickleness of human

[27] Subramanian.
[28] Subramanian.
[29] Subramanian.
[30] Subramanian.

nature and the flaws of hasty decision-making being overwhelmed by emotional outbursts and insecurity.

The precarity of individual positions further gets accentuated when Pinotti offers to reimburse the Prime Minister of India the ransom money that has been paid to the terrorist in exchange for the former's life, but the Prime Minister refuses politely. He justifies to the finance minister that he is more anxious about those who

> will plough back the money into Kashmir and fund anti-national activities. We now have to worry about the terrorists handing over the cash to anti-social elements and stone-pelters in the Kashmir valley, who in turn will disrupt life there. We have to worry about that money being used to support manufacturing of arms and ammunition in Kashmir, to be used against us. (Subramanian 256-257) [31]

The precarious mechanisms of alliances surface when the Prime Minister writes off Aditya, declaring: "He is not our guy." (Subramanian 257) [32] At a certain point, the Prime Minister chooses Aditya to be his "guy", and at the other rejects him for his ethical but divergent stances.

Demonetization is declared as the government's measure to render the lives of the hoarders of black money precarious. However, according to the novel, the coveted reasons seem like reasons a way to conceal another form of questionable input of money within the Indian economy. The moral degradation of the capitalist society can be visible through various characters like Carlo Pinotti, the world's largest currency printer, Danish Khosla, the fixer with the central government, the Finance Minister, Siddharth Pande, the Prime Minister and Aditya Kesavan, the RBI Governor.

Much like his previous novel, *Bankerupt*, this novel does not propose a direct solution to precarity, volatility, uncertainty and vulnerability that may be imitable to encounter the

[31] Subramanian.
[32] Subramanian.

repercussions of precarity. Nevertheless, it projects instances that bear a close resemblance to what has been recently experienced. Subramanian has handpicked examples to demonstrate, "…unless you do what you are supposed to, there will be no redemption." (Subramanian 51) [33] In the novel this appears in a different context when Mike Smith, the CEO of Le Da Spire threatens Danish Khosla to retrieve the former's lost business for him, for which the latter has been paid. However, the author probably tries to indicate through this aphorism that unless we conform to what is morally and ethically correct, we shall have no respite from precarity. Through other instances in the novel, Subramanian exhibits the notion of the moral and ethical can be extremely subjective and that the actions of the people are largely governed by the force of their personal interest as well as external coercions.

The regular predicament of precarity can be faced by resilience. However, it puts the blame back on the victim. Followers of neo-liberalism like to use this precarity to their advantage. Precariousness is not an exception or anomaly but a constant predicament, triggered by a cognitive framework of mind.

Vicky Malhotra's reckless exorbitant lifestyle attracts the wrong kind of attention from those around him. Critiquing this ostentatious display of wealth in his collection of essays, Rabindranath Tagore points out,

> When we accumulate wealth, we have to account for every penny; we reason accurately and account with care. But when we set about to express our wealthiness, we seem to lose sight of all lines of limit. In fact, none of us has wealth enough fully to express what we mean by wealthiness. When we try to save our lives from an enemy's attack, we are cautious in our movements. But when we feel impelled to express our personal bravery, we are willing to take risks and go to the length of losing our lives. We are careful of expenditure in our everyday life, but on festive occasions, when we express

[33] Subramanian.

> our joy, we are thriftless even to the extent of going beyond our means. When we are intensely conscious of our personality, we are apt to ignore the tyranny of facts. We are temperate in our dealings with the man with whom our relation is the relationship of prudence. But we feel we have not got enough for those whom we love. [34]

Perhaps our politicians never shared the vision of Rabindranath Tagore of common humanity, bonded together by a shared existence that transcends all else. Science has made the world so small that all of us are now close neighbours, if not yet one family. A fight among neighbours can concern us all and we are now at a stage of development where the attempted destruction of one could easily result in the total destruction of all. Everyone is imperilled. For thousands of years, we have been taught the message of love, of caring for one another, but something perverse in human nature seems to make this impossible. As Hobbes had observed, we seek to compete, strive to defeat, to prove our superiority over others. Women and the poor have been the notable victims down the ages. There could be enough for all if we were not so greedy, not so demanding of more and more; whilst others, our neighbours get less and less.

In his speech 'Crisis in Civilization,' Rabindranath Tagore stated that he hoped for a 'new chapter in history after the cataclysm is over'. In this case, the 'cataclysm' refers to the neo-liberal society we stay in, that places material gains above the value of human life. [35] Likewise, Christine Marsh points out:

> Recent studies by economists show that the 'post-war golden age' started to unravel in the 1970s, leading eventually to the recession in 2008. Now we have neoliberal market-fundamentalism, an enormously expanded financial sector, the shrinking state, personal debt and austerity. The neoliberal turn and the long crisis of democratic capitalism from

[34] Rabindranath Tagore, 'What Is Art?', in *Personality: Lectures Delivered in America* (Delhi: Macmillan Pocket Tagore Edition, 1980), p. 33.
[35] Rabindranath Tagore, 'Crisis in Civilization', in *Towards Universal Man* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 353-9 (p. 359).

> the 1970s could make the globalised political-economic system unviable. Since economic liberalisation in 1991, India has had strong economic growth and a privileged urban elite, but its problems of rural poverty and deprivation were never solved... Now may be the time for Tagore's ideal of human unity.[36]

The postcolonial interface among centres of first-world modernity, former colonial centres and centres of hegemonic power (cultural; political; economic; militaristic) offers an escape to absconding, influential criminals from low- and middle-income countries or developing nations, which renders such countries from the global south more precarious while mitigating the precarity that would ordinarily attend such figures in such circumstances (fugitives; refugees; asylum seekers etc). With the above in mind, the postcolonial dimension here would allude to the way in which a precarity of social and criminal justice is perpetuated in certain (developing) countries because richer countries offer structural support (in the form of an escape for certain characters like Vicky Malhotra and Ranvijay Mallya, in the case of this novel) for the conditions that contribute to the precarious realities in countries such as India, Pakistan etc.

What offers such figures (criminals) a veneer of respectability or seeming lawfulness is the fact that they ape a certain moneyed identity on the back of money pilfered from their nations or public/private institutions (/enterprises). Such identity is a mimicry of and integration with cultural and social practices common to an oligarchic class whose genealogy stretches to the bourgeoisie of Europe and America (who themselves, certainly in the late 19th and early 20th century, aped the culture of the aristocracy). Included in this derisive diatribe are politicians, petrodollar sheikhs and prominent businessmen (to name but a few).

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[36] Christine Marsh, 'Understanding Rabindranath Tagore's Spirituality', *Gitanjali & Beyond*, 1 (2016), 135–54 <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.14297/gnb.1.1.135-154>.

All such individuals, from low- and middle-income nations frequently move to developed nations to escape justice in their own countries because developed nations offer them a sanctuary of one kind or another. In so doing, developed nations buttress an arrangement that perpetuates the power dynamics of a world inherited from the days of empire.

As Germany recently celebrated the 30th Anniversary of Fall of the Berlin Wall, it is time to crumble the walls of our personal interest to allay the general condition of precarity. Through this novel, Subramanian probably indicates that integrity and a utilitarian approach are the urgent need of the day that can reduce the precariousness of life, in general. Subramanian's novel points to the precariat as a global group which comprises people from diverse religions, classes and cultures. They are overcome by the class division of capitalism, comprising both bourgeois and proletariats, and in which subjectivity becomes increasingly exposed to a lack of belongingness and greater vulnerability.

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Precariat, Precariousness, Precarity: A Linguistic Analysis of Insecurity of Life and Employment

Laura Diamanti

Abstract

In an influential work, the philosopher Judith Butler has tackled the issue of "linguistic survival" concerning individuals injured by speech, highlighting that the act of "surviving takes place in language" (Butler, 1997: 4). Moreover, in the interview by Eliza Kania, she has focused on gender disparity and on how this term effects vulnerability and social change: in particular, she has noted that "precariousness is a general feature of embodied life, a dimension of our corporeality and sociality. And precarity is a way that precariousness is amplified or made more acute under certain social policies. So precarity is induced" (Butler, 2013). As regards these terms, they both stem from the lexeme 'precariat', a concept according to the economist Guy Standing that is to be referred to as "a harbinger of the Good Society of the twenty-first century" (2011: vii). Precariat in his stance has in fact become "global" (2011: 1) and should be even defined a "*class-in-the-making*" (Standing, 2011: 7). From a linguistic approach the term precariat appears to cover a broad category of meanings: it was coined in mid seventeen century, originated from the Latin 'prĕcārĭus', and is linked to 'precārī', in English to 'pray', as obtained from 'prex' that is 'entreaty, prayer' (Online Etymology Dictionary; English-word Information). Whereas 'precarity' is mostly utilised in sociology, 'precariat' and its related forms 'precariously' and 'precariousness' are generally used in legal, political, economic, and other contexts. The lexical features of the aforementioned terms are thus analysed, on the one hand by looking up their meaning in the standard English language dictionaries such as Collins Dictionary, Oxford Reference, Lexico.com. On the other hand, a selection of the occurrences retrieved from two language corpora, namely the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) are examined, along with some language variation occurrences from CORE: Corpus of Online Registers of English, aiming to discuss the implications of their linguistic use (and usage) when dealing with the process of translating from the English into Italian language texts.

Keywords: Disparity, Language, Linguistic Approach, Precarity, Vulnerability

Introduction: Life's Precariousness, Precarity and the Precariat

The issue of 'linguistic survival', which refers to individuals injured by speech, is discussed by the philosopher Judith Butler stressing how this act is plainly enacted through language (1997: 4). Considering the interrelation between body and speech, Butler also explains the forms of addressing the body that entail alternate menace and support (1997: 5). Thus, epitomising the metaphor whereby 'linguistic injury acts like physical injury', Butler points out the shift that occurs when an individual is addressed by the other's injurious statements: his/her 'body'[1] is brought into social life by 'the interpellation'[2] that renders the individual's subject conventionally dependent on 'the Other' and socially distinguishable. Interpellations are embodied in the 'process of subject-formation' (1997: 153) and constitute a ritual, which socially takes place in the hate speech: this affects the individuals' reputation and effects 'the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects' (1997: 4-5). Accordingly, the subject is involved by language preceding and exceeding his/her own living experience, thus taking the risk of losing control over the unrestrained history of language constructs developed in complex structures which would determine the subject to survive or die (1997: 28). This entails the subject reacting against the effects of detrimental language by means of an argumentative response, inasmuch as inevitable: the counterpart's reaction thus epitomises 'a risk taken in response to being put at risk' (1997: 163). Moreover, the reaction is addressed in a 'mode' unavoidably become an 'obligation' as the subject is involved by the Other not just with the aim

[1] Butler spells out Pierre Bourdieu's conception of the body as linked to speech: 'Bodies are formed by social norms, but the process of that formation runs its risk' (1997: 156). Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Edited and Introduced by John B. Thompson, Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. (Polity Press, 1991). Butler also deals with Shoshana Felman's view: 'Speech is bodily, but the body exceeds the speech it occasions; and speech remains irreducible to the bodily means of its enunciation' (1997: 155-156). Cf. Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body, Don Juan with J L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[2] Butler refers to Louis Althusser's conception of 'interpellation'. Cf. Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. In: *Lenin and Philosophy*, transl. by Ben Brewster. (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 170-86.

to restore its good reputation: in this respect, Butler spells out the obligation is due to a necessary 'consideration of the structure of address itself' (2004: 129) which should not be left out.

However, the ethical individual's responsibility is also involved in the issues concerning 'precarious life' as well as 'the interdiction on violence'. To explain how to interrupt the predominance in favour of the understanding of life's precariousness, Butler draws upon the concept discussing the 'face' of the Other developed by Emmanuel Levinas (Butler 2004: xvii-xviii), which is based on the ethical principle stating that 'the other's right to exist has primacy over my own'[3]. In this regard, the statement clearly expresses the necessity to consider "[t]he face as the extreme precariousness of the other", in order to raise the awareness of how precarious life is, for the Other as well as 'of life itself' (Butler 2004: 134).

Moreover, interviewed by Eliza Kania, Butler discusses the implications linked to gender disparity reflecting on the effects of social change and epitomising the life's vulnerability and instability led by an increasing group of workers, due to anti-democratic forms of nationalism, as well as to privatisation laws in the field of labour market. In this respect, Butler focuses on the distinction between the concept of 'precariousness', that she deems 'a general feature of embodied life, a dimension of our corporeality and sociality', and 'precarity', which she considers 'a way that precariousness is amplified or made more acute under certain social policies' (R/evolution 2013: 33). On such premise, Butler states that 'precarity is induced'. Whereas, in defining the precariat, in her view the concept should be seen as semantically separated from that of the proletariat (R/evolution 2013: 33), by considering a shift in meaning of the term precariat if compared to the original use, which was lexicalised as a blend stemming from the lexemes 'precarious' and 'proletariat'. In fact, Butler associates the precariat with an

[3] Butler draws upon Emmanuel Levinas's concepts of 'the face' and 'the Other'. Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, and Richard Kearney, *Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas*, in *Face to Face with Levinas*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), pp. 23-4.

emerging 'social phenomenon' denoting a society wherein precarious labour conditions have developed and turned into an established practice. The precariat thus consists of a community characterised by an increasing range of individuals sharing the same position for whom 'labor is considered dispensable': persons being 'targeted by war' and 'living in regions that have been decimated by development' are numbered among this particular group (R/evolution 2013: 34).

Lexical and Semantic Features of 'The Precariat' and 'Precariat'

According to the British economist Guy Standing 'the precariat' is 'a harbinger of the Good Society of the twenty-first century' and has become a globalised phenomenon (2011: vii). It results from the policies of neoliberalism adopted by The UK and The USA aiming at productivity and prosperity based on the employment model, whose tenets around the concept of flexible labour market act in the name of the ideal of competitive market (2011: 1). By analysing this phenomenon, Standing elaborates 'an agenda for the precariat' (2014: Preface): in particular, he associates 'the precariat' with the status of 'denizens' and spells out their related connotative meaning from the denotative content. Standing discusses the precariat from a political and socioeconomic view and deems it 'an emerging class' living in constant insecurity disconnected from the traditional labour norms (2014: §I). Correspondingly, he carries out an in-depth analysis of the several forms of precariat and firstly explores denizenship, which historically entailed an 'in-between' social rank whereby a denizen, deemed an 'alien', would advance eventually, 'from being an outsider to a partial insider, with some rights'. On this premise, 'a denizen was usually denied political rights, but was granted designated economic rights'. Nowadays, immigrants are still denied rights, the first being citizenship, which is not granted automatically to those legally residing in the country of immigration (Standing 2014: §I) and they have to meet specific criteria to apply for it. Denizenship differs from citizenship inasmuch as a resident is a 'non-citizen' with a duty-based rather than right-based status. The conception of 'deninzens' in-betweenness' is also discussed by Hélene Oger in her analysis of

social and human rights, which are denied to immigrants aspiring to citizenship in western European countries. They are subjected to disparaging laws, by residing in the country of immigration to the extent that their permanence turns a 'temporary derogation into the rule'. Due to their social and professional position, they carry the derogatory connotation of 'outsiders-inhabitants' (2003: §I), and the first inequity they face is that they live and work in a country 'as permanent residents' rather than 'as citizens' (Oger 2003: §III).

The policy of workfare is also deemed to play a crucial role in the increase of the precariat as favoured by a large consensus from different political ideologies: workfare appears to be responsible for the growth of social and economic inequality and insecurity. In fact, unemployed and unprotected categories of citizens, immigrants, and vulnerable people have access to welfare benefits on the condition that they are subjected to the government programme whereby labour is compulsory (Standing 2014: Art. 20). In this sense, labour is seen as a duty rather than a right an individual should have.

From a different viewpoint, the term 'precariat' is discussed by the British sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman and considered 'a social category'. Interviewed in 2013 by Eliza Kania for the Journal R/evolution, Bauman did not judge, the similarities individuals may share according to their personal, social and working history, an applicable criterion to turn them into a class characterised by a community coordinating their actions engaged in the process of integrating with the same interest and purpose. In his view, 'precariat' is the category originated from a combination of two factors: deregulating the labour market and acting in favour of individualisation, upheld by employers who take advantage of the deregulation in their business to the detriment of workers' welfare. In so doing, they render 'the plight of employees dependent on the abilities and resources at the disposal of an individual' (R/evolutions 2013: 26-27).

Correspondingly, investigating the contemporary social stratification, Jon-Arild Johannessen's analysis identifies a typology of precariat which he divides into four categories, whereof the first, 'underemployed', is made up of professionals: they are usually 'hired on short-term contracts' when needed, and accept extra work, mainly unrewarded, hoping for advancement and waiting for an available permanent position (2019: 4). The second category, 'underpaid', consists instead in skilled but inexperienced workers incapable to get lucrative positions. As to the third, 'knowledge entrepreneurs' are Master- or PhD-educated experts having had lucrative positions and subsequently working with short-term contracts by selling their professional experience, although their earnings are inferior to those they would receive if they were employed by the same organisation. The fourth category, 'vagabond workers', are educated or skilled although they are immigrants or bear disabilities: akin to the 'knowledge entrepreneurs' the 'vagabond workers' are pleased with their working conditions, as they feel they were given the opportunity to move to another country and work (2019: 5). From these assumptions, Johannessen points out that

> 'precariat is not yet a class with a shared ideology. Rather it is made up of isolated individuals who sit on the side-lines of society peering into a world populated by successful people' (2019: 6).

Hence, taking the different viewpoints into account, it could be stated that the concept of precariat involves individuals sharing the position of a constant uncertainty and reflecting a social and professional status of in-betweenness in countries who do not acknowledge their rights as for the other citizens. From a linguistic point of view, the lexeme 'precariat' is by definition a derived form of the adjective 'precarious'. Namely 'precarious' would first appear in 1646 and was used in legal contexts, to mean "[h]eld by the favour and at the pleasure of another": originated from the Latin, 'prĕcārĭus' derives from 'prec-ārīus', the stem being in English to 'pray', obtaining 'prec-em' that is 'entreaty, prayer' (Oxford English Dictionary 2nd

Edition 2009)[4]. The noun 'precariat' is mainly found in social contexts: in Collins Dictionary, for instance, it refers to 'the class of people in society who lack a reliable long-term source of income, such as permanent employment', and it is defined as a blend of two stems, the lexemes 'precarious' and 'proletariat'[5]. Lexico.com provides similar information by analysing precariat semantically as a blend having been used since 1980s[6]. Interestingly, in the MacMillan Dictionary, the entry precariat is seen as a concept focusing on 'a social group in advanced western societies consisting of people whose lives are difficult because they have little or no job security and few employment rights'. Moreover, 'the precariat' is the form categorised in the Buzzwords, in that stemming from jargon, become fashionable and hence used by the media, by bearing the meaning of 'a new social class': it dates back to 1980s as a derived form of precarious. It is identified as a neologism appearing to be firstly used by 'French sociologists', then borrowed from French 'précariat', in the form of a loan translation, translated into Italian 'precariato', German 'Prekariat', and recently English 'precariat', and utilised in informal register[7] namely as social, economic, jargon.

It might be also argued that 'precariat' is a semantic field linked to 'precariousness' by a hierarchical sense relation, which concerns the different aspects of life and working conditions reflecting people's state of 'precarity'. Hence, considering precariousness as superordinate and quoting Standing's analysis, hyponyms would be the main features analytically dealt with: 'precariousness of residency', precariousness 'of labour and work', precariousness 'of social protection', namely the innermost features resulting from 'societal transformations' (2011: 3) which affect unemployed, unprotected and vulnerable people by depriving them of their human rights.

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[4] John Simpson, *Oxford English Dictionary*, OED. (2nd Edition, 2009).
[5] Cf. Collins Dictionary <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/precariat> [Accessed 23/09/2020].
[6] Cf. *Lexico.com* <https://www.lexico.com/definition/precariat> [Accessed 23/09/2020].
[7] Cf. *MacMillan Dictionary* <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/the-precariat?q=precariat> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

With regard to variation and frequency of use in large language corpora, for instance, it can be noted that no occurrences are retrieved from the British National Corpus (henceforth BNC)[8], whereas seventeen appear in The Corpus of Contemporary American English (henceforth COCA)[9], along with the sixty-seven found in The Coronavirus Corpus[10]. Seen as Key Word in Context (KWIC), 'the precariat' is used in all the aforementioned occurrences as synonym of 'class' or 'social state' in sociological, economic and political contexts. It is noteworthy that, in the Coronavirus Corpus, 'precariat' is once used in attributive position as a modifier of the compound in 'poverty and precariat situation', stemming from a comment to a letter of the Daily Blog as follows: 'the low waged poverty and precariat situation, like the situation where many migrants come from now'[11].

Lexical and Semantic Features of 'Precariousness' and 'Precarity'

As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (henceforth OED), the noun 'precariousness' is another derived form of the adjective 'precarious' stemming from the Latin, 'precārius': it is principally synonym of 'insecure', 'unstable', 'uncertain'. Precariousness is thus synonymous with 'uncertainty' and even 'weakness', as referring to '[t]he quality or condition of being *precarious*: in various senses of the adj.; esp. insecurity, liability to fail' (2nd edition 2009). The term usually concerns life's conditions which reflect the persistence of physical and psychological fragility and insecurity, by affecting the individual's identity who mainly

[8] Cf. The British National Corpus BNC, 'a 100-million-word collection of samples of written and spoken [...] British English from the later part of the 20th century'. It is made up of 'extracts from regional and national newspapers, specialist periodicals and journals' as well as 'academic books and popular fiction' etc. <https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

[9] Cf. The Corpus of Contemporary American English COCA, the 'genre-balanced corpus of American English', which 'contains more than one billion words of text (25+ million words each year 1990-2019) from eight genres: spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic texts' etc. <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

[10] Cf. The Coronavirus Corpus consists of about 656 million words of data 'on the medical, social, cultural, and economic impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in 883,565 texts from online magazines and newspapers in 20 different English-speaking countries from 1 Jan 2020 to the current time'. <https://www.corpusdata.org/corona_corpus.asp, https://www.english-corpora.org/corona/> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

[11] Cf. The Daily Blog, *An Open Letter to Jacinda Ardern from the Migrant Workers of New Zealand*, May 1 (2020). <https://thedailyblog.co.nz/2020/05/01/an-open-letter-to-jacinda-ardern-from-the-migrant-workers-of-new-zealand/> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

experiences an existential weakness due the extended period of instability, often accompanied by the reduction of social rights in his/her working condition. In general, 'precariousness' is associated with individual's social and physical contexts, family, education, work, and the political and economic organisation of society. In a final report on 'Precarious Work and Social Rights (PWSR)'[12], discussing the individuals' exclusion from social rights and benefit owing to their precarious positions, it appears 'precariousness' semantically occurs as a broad term expressing the aforementioned meanings: 'Both this exclusion and cuts in social protection may create precariousness, as workers then enter unregulated forms of employment in order to survive' (2012: 7). Another instance is given by the passage 'some evidence suggests that both physical and psychological health may be harmed by precariousness' (2012: 10). A further example is in the passage 'occupational health and safety risks, also associated non-standard work with precariousness' (2012: 17).

Comparing 'precariousness' to 'precarity', it might be argued the latter tends to occur in economy, sociology, law, in more specific contexts, especially those related to labour market, social rights. This might be deduced from the excerpt

> 'The exclusion of workers on non-standard contracts, such as those in bogus selfemployment, from rights associated with maternity and parental rights, impacted negatively on women workers and reproduced precarity' (2012: 53).

Notwithstanding the strict lexical relation between 'precariousness' and 'precarity', another passage of the aforementioned Report provides a neat distinction in their meaning:

> 'Some ‘elite’ migrants – those who were highly skilled and internationally mobile - were also not subject to precarity since they could mobilise their skills and resources to challenge precariousness' (2012: 61).

[12] Sonia McKay, Steve Jefferys, Anna Paraksevopoulou, Janoj Keles, *Study on precarious work and social rights, Carried out for the European Commission*, (Working Lives Research Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, London Metropolitan University, 2012).
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7925&langId=en> [Accessed 10/10/2020].

The lexeme 'precarity' is a further derived form of 'precarious': Edmund Heery and Mike Noon consider it as

> a term used by the sociologists to refer to the spread of contingent work and insecure employment within the labour market. The term is also used to refer to the subjective condition of those who experience insecure work[13].

It occurs in current usage[14] in broad sense translated from Italian, Spanish and French, respectively from '*precarietà*', '*precariedad*', and '*précarité*', which mainly expresses uncertainty and instability of working conditions whereby temporary contracts or posts are assigned without benefit or social security payments (Biglia, Martì 2014: 1488). In this regard, the individual's prospect in a precarious position unavoidably shifts and changes the individual's attitude to life, making him/her feel precarious in every respect.

The term 'precarity' may be said a 20th-century neologism which was seemingly first used in an article issued in May 1952 in the USA, written by Dorothy Day, a journalist for The Catholic Worker Movement: it is entitled 'Poverty and Precarity' (Roberts 1984: vii). Examining the title syntactically, the parataxis consists in the singular noun 'Poverty' in combination with the singular noun 'Precarity' by means of the overt signal of the conjunction 'and' which marks a syndetic coordination functioning as coordinator (Quirk et al. 1985: 918). It could be inferred that this links two equal constituents, two interdependent states in a bilateral relation. In the article, however, the lexeme poverty is seen as a semantic field, representing the hypernym to which precarity is hierarchically related in meaning. Poverty is discussed in its complexity as the social state of indigent living conditions: it is also described through some individual stories that shed light upon the issue of welfare services and social security. In this

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[13] Cf. *'precarity'* in Edmund Heery and Mike Noon, *A Dictionary of Human Resource Management* (2 rev ed., Oxford University Press, 2008).

[14] Here 'usage' is meant according to the descriptive definition from John Simpson, *Oxford English Dictionary OED*, (2nd Edition, 2009): 'usage, n. 8. Established or customary use or employment of language, words, expressions, etc.'

regard, on the one hand, precarity is foregrounded as Day points out the derogatory connotation of a life position which is denied or neglected by the society. On the other hand, precarity is contextualised as 'an essential element of poverty' which characterises it: accordingly, the journalist describes the implications of living in precarity as an opportunity and a necessary condition to achieve the voluntary poverty, to which one should aspire to convey love by helping the needy (1952: 3-4). Hence, Day exhorts the reader to reflect on the significance of this concept, plausibly epitomising Henry David Thoreau's voluntary poverty, an inspired choice he first expressed and developed in *Walden* and whereby one should aim by embodying 'a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust' (1854: 15)[15].

In the last decade, the noun 'precarity' has been used in the mainstream press increasingly, and it is also in a report issued in the UK and authored by the economists Stewart Lansley and Howard Reed, wherein the term occurs again in combination with poverty. An excerpt of the aforementioned report is quoted by the journalist Jessica Lindsay in her article issued in 2019 about the future of work, in order to draw attention to the precarious living conditions:

> 'These reforms offer a significant modification of the existing system of social security – creating one more suited to the new risks of insecurity, precarity and work-based poverty of the 21st century'[16].

As to authoritative dictionaries such as the Collins Dictionary[17] or the OED[18], no entry for 'precarity' can be retrieved. Conversely, Lexico.com[19], which is the result of the cooperation between Dictionary.com and Oxford University Press (OUP), provides two definitions for 'precarity' that are available when looked up either in the UK or in the US standard varieties of

[15] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (The Internet Bookmobile 1, 1854), p. 15: "None can be an impartial or wise observer of human life but from the vantage ground of what *we* should call voluntary poverty."
[16] Metro.co.uk, *What if the future of work was no work at all?*, by Jessica Lindsay. (9 May 2019). <https://metro.co.uk/2019/05/09/future-work-no-work-9385679/> [Accessed 23/09/2020].
[17] *Collins Dictionary*. https://www.collinsdictionary.com/ [Accessed 23/09/2020].
[18] John Simpson, *Oxford English Dictionary*, OED. (2nd Edition, 2009).
[19] *Lexico.com*. https://www.lexico.com/en [Accessed 23/09/2020].

the English lexis. The lexeme, a mass noun, bears two main meanings whereof the first concerns a) 'The state of being precarious or uncertain' in a situation or position revealing insecurity or instability, and the second focuses on the living condition which may be caused by or resulting in b) 'A state of persistent insecurity with regard to employment or income'. Thus, the latter meaning results in an extension of the former, particularly when they involve a person's life or work in a fashion that one condition affects the other.

Concerning variation and frequency of use in large language corpora, the search of matching strings for 'precarity' as KWIC in BNC[20] reveals no occurrences. Differently, in COCA[21], 60 occurrences are found: the usage mainly refers to temporary or flexible labour conditions and unpredictable and insecure living conditions. Interestingly, in the Coronavirus Corpus[22] 263 occurrences are retrieved, with recurrent adjectives such as 'social', 'financial', 'economic', collocating with 'precarity' as modifiers; or with collocational nouns recurring in the semantic context to intensify the meaning of 'precarity' such as 'poverty', 'livelihood', 'vulnerability', which mostly also display a further co-occurrence with 'COVID-19'.

Focusing on the mainstream press, for instance in the Daily Mail, 'precarity' tends to collocate with 'financial', as it can be seen in two different articles[23]. Furthermore, three occurrences are found in The Times: one shows the same collocation as in the previous articles, in the phrase 'the financial precarity of the women's league'; another presents the syndetic coordination

[20] BNC. <http://bncweb.lancs.ac.uk/cgi-binbncXML/BNCquery.pl?theQuery=search&urlTest=yes> [Accessed 23/09/2020].
[21] COCA. <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/?c=coca&q=91467989> [Accessed 23/09/2020].
[22] CORONAVIRUS. <https://www.english-corpora.org/corona/?c=corona&q=92353485> [Accessed 23/09/2020].
[23] Daily Mail: 1) 'I'm disturbed by nightmares and pain': One of Joseph McCann's 11 victims tells how 'psycho' robbed her of life as a 'thriving' 25-year-old professional woman who dreamt of a family - as he's jailed for 30 years for rape rampage, By Ed Riley. (9 December 2019). <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7771689/Serial-rapist-Joseph-McCann-gets-33-LIFE-SENTENCES.html> 2) How a postcard changed my world, by Patricia Hammond. (21 July 2019). <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-7233641/Classical-singer-Patricia-Hammond-unwittingly-sent-postcards-total-stranger-six-years.html> [All Accessed 23/09/2020].

'"precarity and casualisation" of the economy'; the third occurrence sheds light upon the dangerous and insecure working life of ethnic minorities in the UK:

> 'It's brought up a lot of ideas around precarity and who really is at the frontline, because the same NHS workers who come from ethnic minorities are now actually the first ones to die"[24].

As to 'precariousness', in BNC[25] 18 occurrences are retrieved; whereas in COCA[26] 195 are found and in The Coronavirus Corpus[27] 202 occurrences are listed. In the three corpora, the term mainly refers to the concepts of social existence and employment. It is deemed noteworthy the usage in the string 'Precariousness, Precarity, and Family'[28] denoting a clear and subtle difference in meaning between the nouns: precariousness and precarity in that semantically, the latter mainly refers to the labour market. It might be thus deduced the usage of 'precarity' entails a specific meaning in the fields of economy, law, politics and sociology, as linked to the social and financial instability of the labour market or vulnerability of the living conditions. Whereas, precariousness appears to be used with overall meaning especially in cultural and social contexts, and chiefly reflects individual vulnerability.

A Focus on Affixation Processes in 'Precariousness' and 'Precarity'

Inquiring into the structure and the processes of the English phonologic system with regard to the derivational affixes, Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle note that, amongst others, *-ness* is to be categorised into the class 'neutral' with the conventional boundary # 'before and

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[24] The Times: 1) 'Women's football is simply not sustainable', by Rebecca Myers. (Sunday March 29 2020). <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/womens-football-is-simply-not-sustainable-cdcl7ks70>; 2) Tutorials on knitting at campus picket line, by Nicola Woolcock, (Friday February 21 2020). <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tutorials-on-knitting-at-campus-picket-line-smrbnvwtq>; 3) Glasgow artist Alberta Whittle's prizewinning film could go viral…, by Mike Wade, (Tuesday September 01 2020) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/glasgow-artist-alberta-whittles-prizewinning-film-could-go-viral-glm9hm658> [All Accessed 23/09/2020].

[25] <https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/?c=bnc&q=92352069> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

[26] <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/?c=coca&q=83938086> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

[27] <https://www.english-corpora.org/corona/?c=corona&q=92353310> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

[28] Cf. Cristopher Harker, *Precariousness, Precarity and Family: Notes from Palestine. Environment and Planning A.*, 44 (4). (2012), pp. 849 -865.
<http://dro.dur.ac.uk/8889/1/8889.pdf?DDD14+> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

after each string to a lexical category', with 'each string dominated by N, A, or V in the surface structure' (Chomsky, Halle 1968: 85). The *#ness* affix is akin to the other affixes carrying the # boundary: they are mostly 'assigned to a word by a grammatical transformation' (1968: 86). As a result, the deadjectival noun from the stem 'precarious' has no stress shifting in the nominal derived 'precariousness'. Differently, the affixes with stress shifting in the syllable preceding them are mainly identified as 'internal to the lexicon', and bear the conventional boundary + (Chomsky, Halle 1968: 86). In this regard, it is worth noting that the *+ity* ending should be examined as *-i+ty*, and thus included in the 'Main Stress Rule': this is due to the stress falling on the syllable that is immediately before the *–ity* ending, 'since the "stem-forming" element *-i-* that precedes the final affix is lax' (Chomsky, Halle 1968: 86-87). Hence, 'precarity' shows the lax mid front vowel /ɛ/ before the *–ity* ending.

Aronoff investigates productivity in the English language and analyses two Word Formation Rules (henceforth WFRs), by comparing the pair of deadjectival nominal suffix *#ness* and *+ity* ending. The former seems to be more productive than the latter when attached to the word-type form '*Xous*' (Aronoff 1976: 37-38). This phenomenon shows a difference in the suffix *#ness* and *+ity* ending when attaching to lexemes, as respectively the former is attached to 'a word boundary', and the latter to 'a morpheme boundary'. Considering the phonetic surface analysis for the aforementioned forms, no stress shifting appears in the word-type forms '*Xous*' and '*Xousness*', differently from the shift of stress to the syllable immediately preceding *+ity* and containing a lax vowel by effect of 'trisyllabic shortening'. As a result, the analysis reveals that: 'The + boundary suffix thus makes the derived word phonetically further from the base' (Aronoff, 1976: 40).

To carry out the study, Aronoff draws upon Noam Chomsky's lexicalist hypothesis whereby grammar is 'context-free' and is structured in 'a base' containing 'a categorial component' and 'a lexicon' composed of 'lexical entries' which belong to 'a system of specified

features'. In this respect, Chomsky also considers that the 'nonterminal vocabulary of the context-free grammar is drawn from a universal and rather limited vocabulary' (1970: 184-185). On this premise, lexicon is deemed by convention 'the repository' containing the inventory of items in the grammar of a language, where certain lexical items in English mostly appear to be derivations. Accordingly, as long as they bear 'at least one of their various features', it could be deduced that 'the *+ity* derivatives of most *Xous* adjectives must be entered in the lexicon' (Aronoff 1976: 43).

The difference in the word formation rule (henceforth WFR) lies in 'the denominal adjectives', which always carry the ending *#ness* in nouns but never take *+ity* such as in '*fashionableness, *fashionability; sizableness, *sizability*'. Whereas, 'the deverbal adjectives' may carry both the endings as in '*acceptability, acceptableness*; *moveableness, movability*' (1976: 48). Furthermore, the *+ity* form, being referred to bases stemming from Latin, is opposite the suffix *#ness*, insofar as for the latter no discrimination occurs 'between *latinate* and *native words*' (Aronoff 1976: 51). In this regard, the evidence collected reveals that the *latinate* feature, which is abstract by definition, namely 'an abstract syntactic feature', is 'a property of morphemes' (Aronoff 1976: 51).

Considering the literature on morphological productivity, Frank Anshen and Mark Aronoff gather further experimental evidence from a variety of sources by determining that in English derived forms in *-ity* are stored in the mental lexicon, differently from those in *-ness* which are not, as these are built by rule when needed (1988: 642). They examine the use of word types in *-ness* and *-ity* occurring in the Brown Corpus, by taking account of Kučera and Francis's definition of 'real words'[29]: the analysis reveals the *-ity* words 'are much more likely

[29] The concept 'real words' is not referred to the standard lexemes of English, but to the words in everyday language use occurring in the Brown University Standard Corpus of Present-Day American English (henceforth Brown Corpus). Cf. Nelson W. Francis, & Henry Kučera Computational Analysis of Present-Day American English. (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1967); Nelson W. Francis, & Henry Kučera, *Brown Corpus Manual, Manual of Information to Accompany a Standard Corpus of Present-Day Edited American English for Use with Digital Computers*. (1979). <http://icame.uib.no/brown/bcm.html> [Both Accessed 23/09/2020].

to be real words than are the *-ness* word types'. Moreover, Anshen and Aronoff look at the amount of the word types in proportion to that of word tokens cited in the Corpus, by calculating the various Type/Token Ratios, from which it appears that, considering the variety of the types of words with *-ness* is larger than those with *-ity* (1988: 644). Accordingly, they test the hypothesis by analysing the entries, namely the word-type forms '*X-ibleness*', '*X-ibility*', '*X-iveness*', '*X-ivity*', '*X-ousness*', '*X-osity*', in Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary. These are sorted into 'Headwords' or 'Run-ons' following the criterion that each is 'a rule-derived form' or 'a lexical entry'. As a result, it seems that run-ons are the *-ness* derived forms represented as 'bold-face entries at the bottom of a definition'; whereas headwords are the *-ity* forms having 'separate entries'. Furthermore, the aforementioned forms are classed in relation to their 'Generic vs. Specific meanings' inasmuch as generic meaning stands for 'something like 'the quality or state of...", and specific meaning shows 'some sort of semantic shift from the generic meaning' characterised by change through time (1988: 646-647). In view of this, for the specific meanings Anshen and Aronoff note that, if compared with the several *-ity* forms identified which carry this feature, only 1 out of 622 *-ness* derived forms bears specific meaning. In this regard, they claim that semantic shift plays an essential role: 'For a word not listed in the lexicon to have an unpredictable meaning, individuals would have to recreate this same unpredictable meaning each time they used the word' (1988: 647). Hence, individuals would find derived forms in the lexicon and/or construct new derived forms from extant bases 'by rule' or 'by analogy' (Anshen and Aronoff 1988: 648).

From the assumptions on the productivity of the *-ness* and the *-ity* forms in English, it could be argued that the categorisation of run-on may be attributed to the derived lexeme 'precariousness' in that differing from that of headword, which may be applied to the lexical entry 'precarity'. Namely, 'precariousness' appears to be semantically interpreted in its quality or state reflecting a generic meaning as in fact observed in the aforementioned sources.

Whereas 'precarity', coined by means of a semantic shift resulting from the generic meaning, seems to be mainly utilised in its specific meaning.

Conclusion

An interdisciplinary analysis has endeavoured to show the use of 'precariat', 'precariousness' and 'precarity' in contexts concerning the increasing group of individuals who experience inequality, uncertainty, thus instability in every respect of their lives, with the aim to discuss the linguistic implications of these terms.

As regards the different standpoints considered, the use of the lexeme 'precariat' or the phrase 'the precariat' in economic, legal, philosophical, political, sociological contexts suggests that there is no evident distinction in their meaning: both the terms are interpreted as synonyms, although they bear subtle differences in the sense attributed to them as referring expressions. The various contexts examined mainly indicate they entail 'an emerging class' living in constant insecurity and instability (Standing 2014: §I); or they concern 'a social category' having in common similarities related to their personal and working history of social and economic disparity (Bauman in R/evolution 2013); or even they refer to 'a group of people', gathered in the increasing range of individuals for whom by definition 'labor is considered dispensable', also including the persons being 'targeted by war', and even 'living in regions that have been decimated by development' (Butler in R/evolution, 2013). Similarly, they are interpreted as 'isolated individuals' who are grouped, as to the aforementioned referents, in between, for sharing the condition of temporary and insecure occupations and partaking of a common 'typology' instead of 'ideology' (Johannessen 2019: 6).

At a lexical level of analysis, it appears the noun 'precariat' is defined a blend of two stems, the lexemes 'precarious' and 'proletariat'[30]: observed as a neologism it dates back to

[30] Cf. *Collins Dictionary*.
<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/precariat> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

1980s as a derived form of precarious borrowed from French 'précariat', and mainly utilised in informal register. Futhermore, 'the precariat' is categorised in the BuzzWords[31], insofar as jargon become fashionable and hence used by the media. In performing the function of a semantic field, 'precariat' is linked to 'precariousness' by a hierarchical sense relation, which entails the different aspects of life and working conditions reflecting people's state of 'precarity'. As to 'precariousness', it might be argued the term mainly concerns life's conditions which reflect the persistence of physical and psychological fragility and insecurity, by affecting the individual's identity who mainly experiences an existential weakness due the extended period of instability, often accompanied by the reduction of social rights in his/her working condition. In general, the use of 'precariousness' is associated with individual's social and physical contexts, family, education, work, and the political and economic organisation of society. Either in authoritative dictionaries or large language corpora, 'precariousness' appears to be used with overall meaning especially in cultural and social contexts, and chiefly reflects individual vulnerability.

Considering 'precarity', authoritative dictionaries such as the Collins Dictionary[32] or the OED[33] do not include it: differently, Lexico.com[34] defines the term as a state denoting insecurity or instability, with regard to the living condition, which may be caused or results in employment. A person's life and work are thus involved in a fashion that one condition unavoidably affects the other. The analysis of a selection of occurrences from the mainstream press or from large language corpora suggests the usage of 'precarity' entails a specific meaning in the fields of economy, law, politics and sociology, as linked to the social and financial instability of the labour market or vulnerability of the living conditions.

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[31] Cf. *MacMillan Dictionary*. <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/the-precariat?q=precariat> [Accessed 23/09/2020].
[32] *Collins Dictionary*. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/> [Accessed 23/09/2020].
[33] John Simpson, *Oxford English Dictionary, OED*. (2nd Edition, 2009).
[34] *Lexico.com*. <https://www.lexico.com/en> [Accessed 23/09/2020].

Focusing on affixation processes, it is noteworthy taking account of the *+ity* form, which is 'restricted to *latinate* bases' and is opposite to the suffix *#ness*, insofar as for the latter no discrimination occurs 'between *latinate* and *native words*' (Aronoff 1976: 51). In this respect, on the basis of what Anshen and Aronoff's study has revealed on the productivity of these and other affixes in English, it might be argued that the forms 'precariousness' and 'precarity' confirm in their use the classification generic meaning vs. specific meaning. Namely, the categories have been assigned assuming that generic meaning stands for 'something like 'the quality or state of...", and specific meaning shows 'some sort of semantic shift from the generic meaning' characterised by change through time. In view of this, for the specific meanings Anshen and Aronoff have noted that, if compared with the several *-ity* forms identified carrying this feature, only 1 out of 622 *-ness* derived forms appear to bear specific meaning (Anshen and Aronoff 1988: 646-647). As a result, the study suggests that 'precariousness' is semantically interpreted in its state reflecting a generic meaning as in fact observed in the aforementioned sources; whereas 'precarity', coined by means of a semantic shift resulting from the generic meaning, is mainly utilised in its specific meaning.

In consideration of such outcomes, an accurate and thorough study is needed. Despite this, to conclude this argumentation, it is worth quoting Rabindranath Tagore, 'Bengali poet and Nobel Prize winner'[35] to reflect on the facets of interpretation of meaning:

> The meaning of the living words that come out of the experiences of great hearts can never be exhausted by any one system of logical interpretation. They have to be endlessly explained by the commentaries of individual lives, and they gain an added mystery in each new revelation[36].

[35] The Arts across continents: *Tagore in London*, in Our Migration Story: The Making of Britain, <https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/tagore-in-london> [Accessed 23/09/2020].
[36] Rabindranath Tagore, *SĀDHANĀ, The Realisation of life*. (2013), Author's Preface. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6842/pg6842-images.html< [Accessed 23/09/2020].

Tagore's poetic language conveys the density of the metaphoric sense and the symbolic value that words reflect by resulting in structural constructs. Their compositionality of meaning, characterised by the relation between words aiming to signify and refer, reveal their metonymic nature, which epitomises the representativeness of any linguistic and cultural system used and interpreted by the individuals to communicate and interact.

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Techno-Commercialism and Loss of Humanity: An Apocalyptic Vision of the Cannibalistic Future in Manjula Padmanabhan's Play *Harvest*

Sachin Namdeo Gadekar

Abstract

Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan is a futuristic play, extends the vision of an early decades of the 21st century. This dystopian play dramatically narrates the tragic story of a middle-class family from the Third World. Poverty and unemployment force them to sell their body to a buyer from the First World i.e., the United States. It exposes evils of globalization may likely befall on the people from poor or developing Third world countries. It also focuses on the issue of fear and reservation, which have witnessed an extreme advancement in wealth, technology and fundamentalism and social insecurities. In such a chaotic situation, human beings, their culture or more seriously their existence is in danger. It loses the humanistic approach.

Globalization has changed the socio-political, economic and cultural realities of the world. The use of technology has accelerated this process. Moreover, it has diminished the geographical and cultural boundaries. Globalization has brought people together, simultaneously, brought uneven development around the world along with an inequality. This is not only an economic dominance of the prominent countries but also the subjugation or distortion of the life and culture of the economically weaker nations. The play *Harvest* has rightly caught this exploitation and also marginalization from the major players of the developed countries. This modern colonialism has made the poor or developing world unease. In words of Obidah Yamma Soloman the interplay between nations offers an apparent state of disequilibrium (12). The paper aims to focus on this panoptic vision of the power relation between the two worlds. It also intends to bring out the sadistic truth about the commoditization of human body and life which eventually leads to an eradication or annihilation of human values. It is "a dark, bitter and savagely funny vision of the cannibalistic future that awaits the human race" as described on the cover blurb of the play. The power game is a form of domination or the modern form of colonialism where the power is obtained through control over mind, similar to Michael Foucault's notion of creating ultimate surveillance that renders an invisible power at the centre. In terms of Jeremy Bentham it is "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind" (Prabhakaran 2). This is in tune with Gramsci's notion of 'cultural hegemony' where control is obtained through consensus. Foucault argues in his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of*

Prison (1975) living human being with consciousness can be turned into a tool of power through systematic sophisticated mechanism. The socio-political study reveals various ill effects of globalization on the Third World countries. It has dehumanized and exploited people through trade of everything including human organs. However, the paper will also shed light on globalization and its impact on human lives. It has made the lives of poor more adverse. Commoditization of human life becomes more evident. People have turned into a commodity as the subject of global market. Simultaneously, it has created multiple power centers. The play raises this issue of globalization and focuses on the power structures and more significantly the relationship between the First and the Third worlds.

Keywords: Dystopia, Exploitation, Globalization, Marginalization, Techno-Commercialism

Globalization is a buzz word in modern society; it has not only brought people together but also influenced the socio-economic, cultural, political, psychological, and historical aspects of human life. It has been triggered by technology and its impact is not confined to the field but has covered almost all human arenas including literature. Moreover, it has brought progress and nations into confrontation. The technological development promises positive improvement in health or living standards of people. But the capitalistic approach makes lives of the poor pitiable. The play, *Harvest* by Padmanabhan focuses on this transnational crisis particularly in the areas of biomedical and digital technologies. Helen Gilbert in her article, 'Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*: Global technoscapes and the international trade in human body organs', argues that these technologies are chosen,

> …to reveal some of the corporeal and cognitive dimensions of globalization and to ask questions about the ways in which it affects race and ethnicity as they are currently conceived, and performed, in increasingly transnational spaces.[1]

[1] Helen Gilbert, 'Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*: Global technoscapes and the international trade in human body organs', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Volume 16, Issue 1, August 2006, pp. 123-130, 124.

For the methodological significance it is challenging to conceptualize the meaning of globalization and its repercussions on human life and how it affects to human mind and different values in society. This article attempts to understand how globalization has transformed human lives and mainly affected issues such as health and the human body in the market oriented global society. It focuses on multiple processes of globalization which are encountered and used by the major global players in the social context. It examines the intersections of globalization and its ill effects on marginalized people in the specific location. The study of Om and Jaya is a case study which helps us to understand the commoditization of human body within the process of globalization. Arif Dirlik, the critic of globalization has identified the role of capital in breaking and remaking different cultures in the realm of production and consumption. Padmanabhan's play, *Harvest* dramatizes this exploitative motive and unhealthy relationship between people belonging to the First and the Third World countries. This contact strongly influences the life of people especially from the Third World. It is a modern way of colonialism continuing its dominance over poor or developing nations who are forced to disadvantageous position. Helen Gilbert in her introduction to *Anthology of the Post-colonial Plays* comments on the nature of the play. According to her, the play is not a cautionary tale about the misuse of technology in medical science but pinpoints the legacies of Western imperialism[2]. The paper sheds light on this significant issue of globalization, use of technology for exploitation and its adverse and alarming impacts on poor people. It has influenced everyday life and turned human beings into commodities. This whole process of commoditization of human life is serious and alarming. The changes in the field of communication, technology and commerce, culture and transportation have brought people together and have been trying hard for homogeneity, but the situation of characters and their

[2] Helen Gilbert, 'Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*: Global technoscapes and the international trade in human body organs,' *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Volume 16, Issue 1, August 2006, pp. 123-130, 124.

relation reassures pathetic condition of poor or developing country in the twenty first century. The process of dehumanization and exploitation of poor people by rich especially through trade is evident in today's globalized world. Sadly, the trade of human organs also includes in it. However, the experiences of human beings are similar everywhere, in which the role of media is very significant.

Robertson Roland in his *Globalisation: Social Theory and Global Culture*, defines globalization as 'the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole'[3]. The policies and programmes are de-localized for more space at global level. But the main question is and argues Robertson that 'global consciousness does not imply global consensus'[4]. Though it seems that the world has united, but still differences are found in different areas which challenge the process of integration. The global economy, political and social issues, military interests have made it more complicated. The world has been reshaped by the dominant powers. We also observe the profound radical change in the world view of people where humans are treated as the subject of the global market. Despite having several interconnections, we always feel insecure with differences. And it is argued by many that globalization encourages exploitations of human beings as well as natural resources.

Among many writers, Rabindranath Tagore is one of the popular names who in his short stories and plays reveals an adverse impact of capitalism on human qualities. According to Tagore the capitalistic form of economy has made people money mongers and destroyed their qualities. It has not only affected individuals but also whole society and encourages a new economic system that degrades human qualities and turned them lunatic who are always craving for excessive money. Tagore also cautioned about an impending disaster on human

[3] Obidah Yamma Solomon, 'Globalization in the Eyes of India's Manjula Padmanabhan Through Her Play *Harvest*,' *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Volume 3, Issue 5, May 2014, pp. 12-17, 13.

[4] Obidah Yamma Solomon, 'Globalization in the Eyes of India's Manjula Padmanabhan Through Her Play *Harvest*', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Volume 3, Issue 5, May 2014, pp. 12-17, 13.

beings. Rimi Sarkar and Aritra Ghosh in their article "Rabindranath Tagore: In the Age of Globalization" explain the views of Tagore on exploitation of human beings by capitalism that leads to the 'crisis of civilization'[5]. This kind of crisis can be found in his short stories and play like *Raktakarabi* which has fragmented humans. The revolutionary system fails to solve these problems. Though Tagore did not experience the modern world in a true sense, he imagined the impending disaster with the technological development and advancement of capitalistic ideology. According to Tagore civilization was accompanied by exploitation of poor. And in the present time picture is not different. Modern civilization exploits the poor and creates inequality among people, which is more acute. Technological development has created ample opportunities, but advantage is taken only by the rich people. The nexus of money and marketing has turned the world into a single digital bazaar with a vast and growing inequality, financial instability, urban crisis, social polarization and degradation of human qualities and values.

Harvest, the play by Manjula Padmanabhan, won the Onassis Award for Original Theatrical Drama in 1997. It is about an illegal trade of human organs. It was inspired by the news stories about an illegal business of human organs which Padmanabhan heard from the most impoverished rural district of Tamil Nadu in 1995. It is also based on science and technology. It is set in Bombay (now Mumbai), in which characters are slum dwellers. There are five members in a family who gradually eliminate and only one remains in view. Though it depicts the most sadistic truth, strong comic elements also run parallel in a profoundly uncomfortable way. The play is dark satire on the modern human society through the story of an impoverished family, which signs the Faustian contract with an American lady for wealth in exchange of organs. It is a story of a jobless clerk, Mr. Om Prakash, his wife, old mother,

[5] Rimi Sarkar and Aritra Ghosh, 'Rabindranath Tagore: In the Age of Globalization', *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, Volume 2, Issue 2, February 2013, pp. 48-51, 50.

and younger brother Jeetu. Their life is full of insecurity and frustration. Their loveless relationship confines them to the claustrophobic four walls of their house. The installation of the Contact Module in a dingy room or house of Om, who is hired to donate his organs to a buyer from the US, influences their personal relationship and lives radically. It hijacks lives of the donor-Om and his family. An eye of the Contact Module haunts their life. Ginni tells Jaya: 'I heard every word in the room-even when the module was off'[6]. The play emphasizes on such transactional nature of human relationship and underlines the power of money.

The play was written at a time when Skype or Face Time was not the familiar technology. Most of the scenes take place in a single room home of tenement building, where there is a sound/noise of inner-city traffic and pollution. The tightly confined and claustrophobic space makes watching it tiresome. The snarling of characters at one another provides little time for introspection. According to Manjula Padmanabhan,

> The subject of this play forces its actors to focus acutely upon their own selves- their bodies, their lives, and the choices ahead of them.[7]

It is intensely about the human body and its exploitation through an agency which tries to attain control over the other's body. The play raises serious questions on globalization by focusing upon the relationship between people from different countries and brings forth various evils of globalization. It shows the power structure where rich people always have an advantage over the poor that maintains hierarchy and allegorical relationship between the oppressive and the oppressed. Om as a representative of the Third World has sold his body parts to a person from the First World and has been observed through an InterPlanta services. The American receiver's life depends on Om's sacrifice. This contract appears to be a practical global culture. Moreover, there is a conflict between need and greed. The traditional human values are denied,

[6] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), p. 94.
[7] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Introduction', p. Xiii.

and the carnal and primal drives are at the heart rather than love, compassion, and faith. Though the play is set in India and significantly talks about Indian characters, it does not have any cultural signifier. Most of the characters are Indian except one visible character of Ginni who becomes a caricature of an American glamour queen. But roles may be replaced, and the identity of the characters as well. In an introduction of the play Padmanabhan says:

> I wanted to use the traffic in human organs to make a more universal point about use and abuse between people, cultures, and economies. I believe that oppression and cultural suppression are not race or gender specific.[8]

The characters are broadly divided into the three groups. The first is a group of 'donors' which includes Om, Jaya, Ma, Jeetu, Bidyut-Bai, the crowd etc. The second group consists of 'guards and agents' and the third group is of 'receivers' which includes Ginni and Virgil. The play opens with the disturbing socio-political situation in the Third World country. Virginia or Ginni is presented or idealized as a young sexy American youth goddess which is a computer-generated youth's illusion. It is observed that the First World is presented as aging and helpless which depends on people from the Third World. There is also a possibility of protest through denying the contract. They are free to sell their bodies or withdraw their contract, where they can go for real relationship than the meditated ones. But Om, the donor of organs, is also a breadwinner of his small family who has been expelled from his job. He hides from his family that he is selling his body parts to a person from abroad. He wants to be rich and wishes to change his life. For that he is ready to sacrifice his life. He responds to his wife, 'You think I did it lightly. But at the cost of calling, you my sister… we'll be rich! Very rich! Insanely rich!'[9].

[8] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Introduction', p. Xiv.
[9] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act I, Scene ii', p. 27.

Ma and Jaya also feel that poor people have been exploited by rich people. They are treated as commodities and not living human beings with emotions and basic rights. Jaya is one of the most unfortunate women in the family who realizes that there is no one to take care of her needs and desires. She has been exploited doubly at the international level and by her own family members. Her husband declares her as his sister. She finds physical satisfaction in her brother-in-law named Jeetu who is seventeen years old and younger brother of Om. He is handsome, dashing, easy-going and works as a male prostitute. As a prostitute he is selling his body to others. He reveals his helplessness to Jaya that,

> Because no employer pays his staff to do as they please. At least when I sell my body, I decide which part of me goes into where and whom! But it is the money in the end, isn't it?[10]

Jeetu accepts that it is money which forces people to make such decisions only for survival. It is hunger that makes people blind and forces them to accept everything including their death. Instead, Om and the guards admit Jeetu in a hospital and take out his eyes. Now Jaya and Om want Jeetu to stay at home otherwise they won't get any help from Ginni. But Jeetu hates Ginni and calls her a demon who has plucked his eyes. His condition is worse than death. In addition, the play shows hypocrisy of Ginni who is not physically present on stage, but we could see only her face and hear her voice on T V screen. Her voice is very sweet and looks very beautiful as a white skinned blonde, the epitome of the American style youth goddess. She talks about trust but installs the Contact Module for keeping an eye on Om and his family members. Ironically for Ginni lives of Om and his family members is disgusting and unsanitary. She replies to Jaya,

[10] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act I, Scene iii', p. 45.

> Excuse me; but you'll have to find the space. It's inexcusable not to have your own toilet! Forty families! It's wonders you're all not dead of the plague years ago![11]

Still, she wants body organs of Om. She is selfish and only thinks of her life and shows false concern towards them. Ginni deceives Jeetu and lies that she beams her video image straight into his mind. Moreover, she wants some other parts from his body. Jeetu also readily accepts her proposal despite denial from Jaya who tries to convince him that she is not real, but an illusion generated with the help of technology. Like Ma, he is completely absorbed by the technology.

The watch is kept on Om and his family members with help of the InterPlanta Contact Module. The guards are also appointed for keeping the watch on them. The constant gaze is a sort of control or detention. Om and his family are helpless and could not resist to this domination. It makes their life unbearable and encroaches privacy as well. The presence offers power and simultaneously makes their life powerless. This power game is a way of domination or colonialism where power of mind is obtained through control over mind as claimed by Michael Foucault through creating an ultimate surveillance system or developing a subtle mechanism of surveillance. It renders an invisible power at the centre. The observer treats inmates as an object or commodity at a constant gaze from a distance by the invisible superior. This idea of being watched by someone is quite mind boggling. Jeremy Bentham's concept of 'panopticon' describes this 'new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind'[12]. And in the modern times the technological evolution has made it poignant. Having a watch on people with the help of technology is an imprisonment. The device is a kind of discipline by which the operation or behaviour of people is controlled. This is achieved by scheduling life and providing facilities. Through exercise the control is established either by force or power.

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[11] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act I, Scene ii', p. 35.
[12] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 206.

Bentham's idea of panopticon was from the architect and implemented at the end of the seventeenth century to control plague. Jeremy Bentham, philosopher designed a prison from where all cells were visible from the centre of the building. Strict spatial partitions were made between people. They were inspected ceaselessly and commanded by guards at the gates to ensure prompt obedience and most absolute authority to observe all disorder, extortion and rule their life from outside. It exemplifies this disciplinary power and shows how one can control or supervise the life of an individual efficiently. There is always a feeling that you are being watched which deprives an individual of personal liberty. It is penitentiary where medical facilities are provided. Also, it becomes a workshop where the behaviour is controlled, and the 'self' is always marginalized. The machine is instrumental and a part of the network to control people's life strategically.

There is no need of any physical presence for domination. Foucault in his seminal work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (1975) observes that the living human beings with their consciousness can be turned into a tool for power. They are made to absorb through systematic sophisticated mechanism.[13] Foucault discusses Jeremy Bentham's idea of the panopticon, a central place from where it is possible to keep an eye on everything. Surveillance is a trap in which everyone is seen and becomes a mode to channelize and ensure functioning of the power without direct visibility of its controller or without knowing from where they are observed. The panopticon is a disciplinary programme to mobilize the power. Its systematic operation without any danger of tyranny allows inspection from the outside. This is the most effective use of power that can control people's mind. The panopticon is an effective use of power that not only increases its utility but also subordinates bodies. This disciplinary mechanism of penetration provides a system to control people's life. It forms the central police power and provides flexible methods and techniques and assures ordering of human life with

[13] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 207.

different tactics that can be operated economically, materialistically, and invisibly. It can be operated in diverse regimes which mainly invades individual's liberties as an obvious punishment and transforms individuals. The penetration makes people conscious about themselves and isolates them from other members of society. An imposition of different habits transforms their life and supervises their purpose and morality.

Foucault's notion of prison life can be applied to the play, which focuses on the system of power in controlling individuals. New codes of order and law are developed. Supporting and directing individuals are modern ways of punishment. In the play, this confinement is not intended to correct or improve the lifestyle of people, but it is practiced for getting healthy organs in return. People are imprisoned for getting different parts from their bodies. Though it is not a direct physical torture but keeping an eye on them is a serious mental harassment and powerful technique for ruling people by force. The power is not applied directly to the body but to the mind. The human body is considered as subject of power relations. The operation of power is treated as a strategy evident in relations between the donor and the buyer. Body has been described as the target of power which readily accepts instructions, directions and can be easily transformed. The control can be attained through codification and constant coercion. The physical or moral force compel a person to follow order thereby deprive of free will. The continuous penetration of the family members is a detention through conscious watch over the personal or private lives of people. It is a direct control over their life by establishing authority and obviously power of the dominant group. Though it is a self-proclaimed or invited executions, but we shall not neglect circumstances that compel them to accept their imprisonment and exploitations only because of poverty. In the case of Om, it becomes an open deal. The facilities provided in the house are not motivated by concern for welfare of the family members, but it is like feeding to a goat that is going to be slaughtered for fresh meat. The installation of machine or Contact Module is supposed to provide personal information and

physical data of Om and his family for matching to the body of receiver or buyer from the USA. It has not only controlled operations of the body but also minds of people. Through a systematic penetration power is exercised in which individuals are observed as a part of disciplinary mechanism. It is a form of great confinement for various purposes including pure community or disciplined society. The exercise of power has controlled people's relationships and separated them from others.

The continuous surveillance creates a permanent impact on the minds of people. The permanent visibility in words of Foucault, induces a state of consciousness that assures an automatic functioning of power. Even it is discontinued still renders its influence and sustain the power relation. And for getting these results to use Bentham's words 'power should be visible and unverifiable'[14]. They should be constantly spied from a particular angle without knowing that they have been observed at any one moment. According to Foucault 'it is an important mechanism which automatizes and disindividualizes power'[15]. The machinery, observes Bentham 'assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium and difference'[16] even in the absence of its controller. It is not necessary to use force to constrain the target with the help of panoptic institution but that could be achieved without any physical presence of bars, chairs, or locks. According to Foucault panopticon functions as a laboratory of power 'to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals'[17]. Its impact is so subtle that we need not to exercise power from the outside. The installation of InterPlanta machine helps to exercise power. It becomes possible to intervene at any moment for creating constant pressure whose effect follows from one another. According to Foucault, 'it acts directly on individuals; gives 'power of mind over mind'[18]. As a functional mechanism it should improve the exercise of

[14] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 201.
[15] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 202.
[16] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 202.
[17] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 203.
[18]Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 206.

power. The permanent and exhaustive surveillance 'transform the whole social body into a field of perception'[19]. Moreover, it is a method for administering the accumulation of men without any traditional costly or violent forms of power. Discipline can control bodies by imposing exercises and arranging tactics. By linking different forces together, it trains the human body and mind. And it is achieved through hierarchal observation and examination as in the classical age where 'observatory is created in the house'[20]. It is like a military camp where the mechanism of control is created. Everything including the household activities is seen constantly. It is surveillance or force controlling behaviour as the disciplinary process. And it is achieved by the calculated gaze and in some extent by force. Everything is continuously observed and a slight departure from the norms leads to penalty. Examination helps to qualify, classify, and punish the deviations.

In exchange of the InterPlanta Services, Om and his family have been provided various facilities including food, medicine, money etc. But they are confined to the house and strictly forbidden from shaving, selling and many other routine activities. It seems a commercial exploitation. And for money Om is ready to sacrifice his life and lies that his wife is his sister. After contract, life of Om and his family is completely changed. There are gadgets such as TV set, computer terminal, mini-gym, air–conditioner, dining table, two cubicles containing the bathroom, toilet, and better clothes but their life is ruled by Ginni. Even what and when they shall eat and several other 'dos' and 'nots' are decided by Ginni and her guards. She does not like their habit of eating late. She insists for a strict schedule. She wants Jaya to keep Om always smiling because she thinks:

> You see, it is important to smile all through the day. After all, if you are not smiling, it means you're not happy. And if, you're not happy, you might affect your brother's

[19] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 214.
[20] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 214.

> mood… If his body's smiling, it means his organs are smiling. And that's the kind of organs that'll survive a transplant best.[21]

Partitioning of space, and constant inspection are processes of quarantine and purification that aims to create a pure disciplined group of people. The systematic set of techniques and disciplined efforts are taken for supervising human behaviour that becomes a part of disciplinary mechanism created out of fear. They appear as animals behind the bar with all facilities except freedom. Ironically for prosperous future they ruin their present and willingly confine themselves to a fancy prison. The facility of a hospital is also provided to the family members. But the purpose of hospital is not curing illness but to keep body organs healthy and uninfected. In the play, observation is a matter of surveillance and knowledge. The penitentiary of Om's life is important as the delinquent. The support of financial provocation allows Om and his family to accept penitentiary and mental and physical torture as a delinquent. Seriously this torturing is organized silently and accepted willingly as natural justice or responsibility. The self-imposition also controls gestures through the process. Jeetu, for instance, does not challenge the false allurements of Ginni, who is nothing but a computer animated screen image. He does not resist to an inhuman situation. But Jaya recognizes the hidden motif behind Ginni's care and facilities provided to them so, as she argues that 'She cares- just as much as she cares about the chicken she eats for dinner'[22]. She sarcastically comments that Om is merely a chicken for her. And the care has been taken just 'to ensure that their meat, when it finally gets to Ginni's table, will be the freshest, purest, sanest, happiest'[23].

Surprisingly only Jaya decides to challenge the power structure but at the cost of her life. She gets the formula of winning but by losing her life. For her, death seems to be a victory. Except death she does not have any other option to save her self-esteem. And the play portrays

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[21] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act II, Scene i', p. 54.
[22] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act II, Scene ii', p. 66.
[23] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act II, Scene ii', p. 67.

this shocking callous acquisition. After successful transplantation, Jaya receives a rich, gravelly male voice, which introduces him as Virgil. He openly accepts that he has deceived Om and his family and answers to Jaya that, 'he was willing to sell, and I was willing to buy'[24]. For him it is a business deal and nothing more. Even he discloses that Ginni is not real, but a computer-generated wet dream that has been created with the help of technology and has changed male voice to a woman's Jeetu now no longer bears his own body, but a casing and Virgil reveals that he sees what he wants to see and lives what he wants to live. Moreover, Virgil reveals to Jaya that, 'I heard every word said in the room. Even when the module was off, it recorded'[25] and add that they not only heard but seen too. They also knew that Jeetu is not Om and Om is Jaya's husband. He accepts that he was old and sick until he got into the young body of Jeetu. Further revelation shocks Jaya that they wanted childbearing women like her. Om was only a single player of the game. They look for young couples without children. They also need desperate men, who could do as they order. Furthermore, he reveals that they have lost the art of giving births to children and accepts that:

> We look for young men's bodies to live in and young women's bodies in which to sow their children…. We designed this programme. We support poorer sections of the world, while gaining fresh bodies for ourselves…. I am real and warm and willing. This body which once belonged to Jittoo now contains a red-blooded all-American man! This body is not with life and heavy with desire! This body aches for you and to give you what you yearn for.[26]

However, Jaya realizes that everything has been lost for her. Even her life is not her own. The only thing she has her own is her death and pride. She does not want Virgil to take away her identity. Therefore, she decides to commit suicide by challenging Virgil that he cannot win

[24] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act III, Scene ii', p. 113.
[25] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act III, Scene ii', p. 114.
[26] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act III, Scene ii', pp. 116-117.

against her. She reveals a new definition of winning that is 'winning by losing. I win if I lose'[27]. Now she is no longer poor or naked hence replies that,

> You'll never let me have what you have! You'll only share your electronic dreams with me, your "virtual" touch, your plastic shadows-no! If the only clothes I can afford are these rags of pride, then I'll wear them with my head held high.[28]

She challenges Virgil that she will die happily by knowing that those who only live to win, will lose to a poor, weak, and helpless woman which will be a moral victory of her over him. She commits suicide and dies happily. Sadly, instead of life, death is seen happier and seems an escape for her. Om has also a self-realization and accepts that,

> I went because I lost my job in the company. And why did I lose it? Because I am a clerk, and nobody needs clerks anymore! There are no new jobs now-There is nothing left for people like us! Don't you know that? There are us-and the street gangs.[29]

Thus, the situation of Om is like Dr. Faustus, who signs a contract and then realizes its seriousness. He reveals to Jaya and MA and accepts that, 'how could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I?'[30]. He sees his approaching death. As per the donor's contract after successful transplantation it is promised that henceforth Om and his family will receive every benefit and consideration still the play raises couple of serious questions about donor's life and health. It is unanswered that shall we treat organs as commodity that can be exchanged for money. The main concern is, are we not denying life to the poor? Isn't it an injustice to them? However, this selfishness is accelerated mainly after globalization and seen abundant disparities at various levels. Padmanabhan has shown the darker side of it and differences between the two worlds. The Western World has always had an advantage over the Third World where people are treated as commodity and not living human beings with equal rights.

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[27]Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act III, Scene ii', p. 121.
[28] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act III, Scene ii', p. 121.
[29] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act II, Scene iv', p. 85.
[30] Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), 'Act II, Scene ii', p. 71.

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Boundaries and Belonging: A View from Athens

Vasiliki Gavra

Abstract

The main idea behind precarity's 'rise' is that the broadening of deregulation in (economic and geographic) space has brought transformations that blur the boundaries of established social representations. Here, I suggest broadening our optic towards their invisible aspects is tied to understanding their specific, local contexts. I present a view from Athens that highlights from an 'other' angle the space where the 'blurring of boundaries' and fragility of belonging can be better discussed. Athens' crisis landscape (2014-2018), was a challenging context where I examined precarity and deregulation's dialectic. I used the concepts to articulate hypothesis that focus, between current phenomena and an already complex socio-economic background, into aspects of daily life experience where critical issues co-evolve (housing, youth, immigration). The research advanced with an in-depth examination of empirical evidence and their capacity to highlight precarity as a combined experience of multiple dynamics in specific places. I focused in qualitative data with interpretative rather than statistic power: on self-precarization practices observed among asylum seekers in Athens, and the local conditions that place them around immigrant districts, in and out of endangerment trajectories. This minimum empirical understanding allowed the restructuring of (available) information into a spatial representation: Within the dense nexus of daily relationships precarity's dynamics multiply, combine, reproduce. Into the 'details' where big issues are embedded (place, neighbourhood, time, individual stance) scale, borders, geographies blur and precarity runs deeper. To the degree those spatial qualities are not Athens' idiom, but an idiomatic expression of characteristics that encompass established spatial representations, we may, at place, need to re-examine their validity as a hyper-context within which we research precarity 'everywhere' today.

Keywords: Belonging, Qualitative Analysis, Precarity, Spatial Representations

Introduction

When Bourdieu announced '*precarity is everywhere today*'[1] deregulation was widely accepted as a process of socio-spatial transformation advancing via policymaking that favors free markets and global geo-spatial restructurings. These restructurings had already established the local-global interactions as key for the analysis of spatial and urban phenomena. The main hypothesis made on these interactions was that global phenomena were blurring the boundaries of local realities. Today contemporary thinkers use precarity to discuss the fragility of belonging[2] and interpret people's responses to constantly shifting environments, as aspects of uncertain transitions to *liquid modernity* (Bauman, 2006)[3]. This essay aims to address the blurring of boundaries and the fragility of belonging as themes emerging from precarity-deregulation's dialectic, open to interpretation and indicative of precarity's spatial logic.

Discourses on precarity, have significantly enhanced our views on how individuals (rather than locales) negotiate their position in a boundary-blurring global environment. Yet, our understanding of how they negotiate their lives within 'blurred' localities and '*micro-spaces of everyday life'*[4] (Ettlinger, 2013) is blurrier than ever. Existing research hints this is relevant to precarity's effect on human practice and the ways its dynamics disorganize life strategies[5].

The main idea of the research presented was that exploring the space of everyday life, where activities, interactions and invisible aspects of human practices take shape would broaden our understanding on precarity's connection to space and new themes would emerge. Half the essay evolves around the difficulties of challenging precarity through existing research methods. This is important as these are the lens with which institutions see, define and match

[1] Bourdieu, Pierre. 'La précarité est aujourd'hui partout', Contre-Feux, Liber raison d'agir. December 12-13 1997
[2] In class, profession, place, community.
[3] Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity* (UK: polity press, 2006)
[4] Ettlinger, Nancy. 'Precarity Unbound', Alternatives 32 (2013): pp. 319-340
[5] Ettlinger, 2013, p. 325-327. Ettlinger views boundaries as essentialist strategies towards belonging and against precarity.

problems to solutions. The other half explains how this difficulty grew the research idea into a style of questioning established representations: If precarity suggests a new relation to Space, in what ways should we revise how we think about boundaries, scale, and geography in order to understand the challenges hidden in its long-standing presence?

Challenging Precarity: Limitations Relevant to Geography, Scale and the Local Condition

Athens in 2018 was in a state of generalized deregulation. The Mediterranean immigration crisis was still unraveling within the complex endogenous crisis the global economic recession triggered a decade ago. The situation was openly being referred to as a 'crisis within crisis, a sign that the term was no longer adequate to contain the landscapes unfolding in the city or articulate their ambiguities, contradictions and interdependencies. By 2017, precarious[6] loans were a rising 'new' category in household debt, flexible work had dominated the recovering job market, and speculation was on the rise in the cheap downtown housing market raising questions about the sustainability of the City's response to housing refugees (with short-term rentals). Deregulation was a far more convincing concept with which to grasp Athens' untidy crisis-scapes, but as a process it has been tied to rather specific ideas, contexts, paradigms (pi. global cities) and hypotheses (pi. privatization) that did not resonate with their endogenous character. The small scale and size of the local economy, the absence of global development pressures like high finance in the city, and the numerous ways precarity manifested instead suggested their ambiguities reflected daily activities and peoples' reflexive responses to extreme insecurity: about settlement, maintaining one's belongings and position, the present survival and future perspective.

Athens was a priviledged field of challenging precarity as 'deregulation of everyday life', an idea deeply seated in the contemporary European and international discourses on the rise of

[6] Greek banks began to distinguish precarious from unpayable debt in 2014.

precarity: When we discuss precarity today we are essentially referring to a global restructuring of everyday life that evolves within, despite of and against a generalized deregulation of living conditions. This is a point of departure for researchers tracing 'new' political subjects as well as scoping everyday life as a field of rising transformations. This was an extremely challenging hypothesis in terms of methodological limitations, relevant to the lack of a solid theoretical and empirical background on precarity's processual character[7] and its longstanding presence within an already complex socio-spatial reality in Athens.

Discussing these limitations led to observations on how this theoretical/empirical gap is tackled by global thinkers and how geography, spatiality and locale can arise as a bounding context. This seems to be for example the basis of Munck's (2013) critique to Standing's (2011) planar approach[8]. He argues Standing's attachment to views from the north result in analyses tailored to specific geographical contexts with limited interpretative power in geographies plagued by its longstanding presence[9]. A long history of crises and a legacy in all forms of precariousness[10] place Athens in and out of such geographies. It may belong in the developed world according to socio-economic data but, remains a developed region within a chronically lagging economy. Its development involved intense urbanization and immigration waves that rendered the city particularly 'urban': mixed, dense and ad hoc. The dynamism of human practices has at place (especially in the housing sector[11]) proved a regulatory force equally if not more powerful than normative planning. These remarks warned that institutional representations and socio-economic data were not fully aligned to what is taking place on the ground. This meant an entirely conceptual approach (preferred by global thinkers), was not

[7] I consider precarity's structural or processual quality as a major conceptual definition and a thread of relevance between contemporary researchers some of whom are referenced here.
[8] Standing, Guy. *Precariat. The new dangerous class* (NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011)
[9] Munck, Robert. 'Precariat: a view from the South', *Third World Quarterly*, vol.34, is.5 (2013): pp. 747-762
[10] Stavrianos, L. Stavros. *Greece: An American Dilemma and opportunity* (Chicago: Regnery Publishing, 1952). Greek-Canadian historian L.S. Stavrianos explains throughout his post-war analysis of modern greek history how political instability, economic insecurity and social disruption deeply influenced its trajectory.
[11] Arbitrariness in the construction and housing sector is a longstanding phenomenon.

enough. Observing deviations from norm in a socio-economic surface and interpreting them as transformations in the making, as is the case in Guy Standing's (2011) '*class in the making*'[12], is a strategy that depends on institutional representations' reliability. An entirely empirical approach, relying on fieldwork, required some focus, an area or a paradigm, where precarity, or its rise, was more evident. In a field where precarity was everywhere and established representations on socio-spatial organization were of questionable validity there was no safe way to pre-assume where it run deeper in the urban environment.

Athens as a Paradigm

Observations on methodology put forth Athens as a paradigm, in deviation from the broader discourse, that promised a deeper understanding on precarity's long-term challenges and value as a line of questioning human-space relationship. The study was followed a mixed (conceptual/empirical) approach, articulated on the interdependency between empirical understanding, conceptual definition and interpretative power.

The research's main challenge was how to descend from the global into the local without bounding the latter to pre-constructed boundaries, scale and geographical outlines. The idea was to collect data from various sources that provide information on the contexts of precarious living in Athens and examine what kind of data can highlight the local condition as a joint articulation of precarity's dynamics. The aim was articulations/groups of mixed data providing insight on how everyday life evolves between global phenomena and this complex background, deviate from generic representations and reflect precarity's depth in a specific time and place.

The process of putting objectives into this conceptual sketch allowed further conceptual and empirical definitions regarding the essentials of an empirical investigation: sources, evidence, hypotheses, groups, evaluation criteria. I considered precarity to be deeper when

[12] Standing, 2011

there is evidence it is a combined experience[13], a dynamic affecting important relationships[14] and putting individuals in endangerment. Precarity's inherent association with risk and endangerment highlights a critical distinction: it is a mobilizing not paralyzing force, urging people to be and remain active in more ways than expected. In these fine lines that set it apart from poverty or deprivation lie its uses in political analysis (Standing, 2011)[15] and its links to the '*untidy geographies'* of everyday life (Ettlinger, 2013)[16]. This defined another quality of useful evidence: the power to interpret peoples' responses as a minimum active stance. This style of reasoning was used to design questions on the interdependencies between four phenomena of broad geographical reference at play in Athens (flexible work, housing deregulation, crisis-hit youth, refugee crisis). Questions aimed at three issues considered key to the city's past and future trajectory (immigration, youth, housing) and of direct interest to groups facing risks (in-debt households, asylum seekers, young adults that came of age during the crisis). The sources were local authorities engaged in debt and housing crisis-management, employees in the real-estate, finance and third sector (NGOs)[17] and secondary data from public authorities monitoring employment, demographics, immigration flows. Investigations included in situ observation, interviews and data analysis. Questions focused into 'what, how and where' people do in response to their situation and the contexts of their daily activity.

Evaluating the evidence proved to be the most critical part of the study. The process put forth concerns on the quality of information available in research institutions and public authorities. On more than one occasions quantitative and qualitative data cannot be combined

[13] Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity* (UK: polity press, 2006), Work, human bonds in the fluid world, pg. 160-161. Bauman approaches precarity as a combined experience of dynamics in his analysis on precarious work relations.
[14] Bourdieu, 1997. Bourdieu mentions in his article precarity develops as fear and competition for '*work within work*', between unemployed and precarious workers.
[15] Standing, 2011
[16] Ettlinger, 2013, pg.324-325
[17] Five front-line employees in the third sector and 2 key informants on real-estate and finance.

in useful observations[18]. Official representations were too generic to be of interpretative value and local authorities did not seem to be fully aware of their shared responsibility or overlapping fields of scope[19]. The main observation was (paradoxically) that the overall landscape of available data was just as inarticulate as the city's generalized deregulation. The second was that interviews were far more consistent – compared to statistics - with the dynamic, fast-paced shifts happening on the ground. Interviewees offered more insight on how daily decision making on the little things affects the bigger picture compared to statistics.

An example was the ways NGO employees used hints and nuanced observations to depart from generic representations of immigration/refugee crisis and focus on the migratory experience of asylum seekers. They related self-precarization practices observed among asylum seekers to the local conditions that place them in and out of endangerment trajectories. For example, they reported some use their papers to emigrate illicitly in central Europe because '*the objective is not to leave Syria and stay here and not find a job'* but, *'this of course always entails the danger of getting caught and being sent back in the reception country…what can I say I don't know what happens from then on…but for them danger is always at bay*.[20] (NGO employee.) They said local property owners were more than eager to offer their apartments to Estia accommodation program through which NGOs, the city department and UN organized short-term rentals aimed at housing refugees and vulnerable immigrants, adding that a steady and decent income in a fragile housing market was just as strong a motivation as 'solidarity'. They further hinted on how the accommodation program was improvised due to the emergency situation, leading nevertheless the city's first institutional response to immigrants' housing to

[18] This was often the result of gaps in available information, as was the case of household exposure to debt. Comparing published banking reports suggested monitoring the risks came late. I was not able to find evidence on the debt's incubation period: 2001-2004, 2006-2007.

[19] Housing (market, debt, protection) is a shared field of scope of numerous public services ranging from tax services to courts. Employees when asked on published data and their primary sources kept referencing another as responsible and vice-versa. A court employee drowned in applications for anti-eviction protection schemes gasped: "If they make me do this too (organize a record) I quit!".

[20] Most interviewees preferred to remain anonymous. They are referenced as "NGO employees".

follow an already existing pattern in the real-estate market. In short, what held their narratives together highlighted precarity as an interpretative scheme for peoples' relation with space.

These narratives were considered to provide a minimum empirical understanding of 'how things work here' and were used as the context for restructuring available data. Otherwise disconnected evidence on work, status, age and nationality, were organised in layers in order to discuss how risk, endangerment, precarization affect individuals' relationship with one another, with immigrant communities, locals and urban environment. What follows is a view of Athens 'from the neighbourhoods around Victoria Sq.' that deviates from Athens' illustrations in the Estia campaign and its post-crisis imageries. Discussing asylum seekers' precarious position and fluid living conditions within this context revealed angles and key observations with which to interpreted the local as a condition, open and unbound to scale, district limits or institutional representations. Empirical work concluded having unfolded only a small part of a web of interconnections within which precarity and deregulation reproduce in this city and the study advanced in developing the ideas on risk, endangerment and deregulation into a conceptual framework with which to reflect upon our newfound relationship(s) with(in) human-made environments.

Asylum Seekers: A View from Athens

Asylum seekers' precarious position among immigration illuminates the larger contradiction and protection gap characterizing the phenomenon: They are a minority amidst a wave of immigrants[21] in an economy hit by ten years of recession and a place where information on flows is restricted to 'arrivals'[22]. The conflict between survival and perspective embedded in their migratory experience is colored by the weaknesses of the local context the

[21] Between 2013-2017 records are: 1.170.721 arrivals, 150.503 asylum applications, 62.784 stranded in islands, 21.792 relocations, source: Gavra, Vasiliki. *Aspects of Deregulation of space. The paradigm of Athens under precarity's dynamics*. (Masters' thesis, National Technical University of Athens: 2018).

[22] There is no information on 'departures', meaning that there is no way to know how many of these people managed to transit Greece before the 2016 agreement between EU and Turkey, closed the borders. Information on emigration and the so-called brain drain phenomenon is also vague.

minute they set foot on land. It is further complicated as they map individual trajectories in and out of a humanitarian network granting them access to valuable resources: Money, accommodation, rights, and the opportunity to move from islands to the City, and from peri-urban camps into Athens' neighbourhoods. Estia apartments[23] stood out in this network as a reinforced protection scheme for those meeting asylum and vulnerability criteria and a strategic position in the urban core. Asylum seekers that applied were provided with a monthly income, social support and accommodation in short-term rentals. Rentals were located originally in immigrant districts 'around Victoria Sq.' and in time had spread all around the metropolitan area. As an employee describes they are: '*Everywhere. But mostly around Panteleimonas, Vathi, Patisia, Kipseli. It's cheaper. But there is demand in the suburbs too…'* (NGO employee.) Behind this socio-spatial pattern were factors ranging from already established immigrant-native dynamics, local's economic insecurity, real-estate speculation, and the program's ad hoc design. Originally designed as part of relocation schemes the program was shifting, at the time, towards a fluid and uncertain direction: temporary accommodation for people that '*as it seems will probably stay here*' (NGO employee). In a way, Estia was a solution and a way to mix newcomers with natives indicative of the local way of doing things. As the programs' presentation online puts it into words "*The host population also benefits from embracing diversity through peaceful coexistence as well as the renting of their apartments.*"[24].

Responses to the program as reported from the front-line workers, were at place contradicting such depictions of empowering peoples' active stance towards settling and providing a safe route to belonging. Some were indicative of a tactical use of resources and reflected more boundary-blurring than boundary-setting practices. An effort to '*construct vulnerability'*, get out of camps and access safe living conditions was behind the rise of

[23] Estia is greek for Home. They were/are UN funded accommodation programs, organized and implemented by local Ngo's and the City of Athens. Their present funding is undefined.
[24] http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/home/

pregnancies observed among applicants, while others chose to stay in camps closer to their newfound communities. Isolating those practices employees were actually expressing both concern about was what is to happen when 'the money' stops, and local authorities take over, and about an attachment to immigrants' networking tactics and neighbourhoods observed regardless of where apartments were located. They avoided to label this 'affiliation' as problematic but insinuated it cannot be interpreted as a strategy oriented to establishment to the degree it endangered their future perspective here. Risks were as diverse as human practices. Some, ran the risk of getting '*too comfortable*' with support while those using trafficking networks in the city to emigrate risked an undocumented living elsewhere in Europe.

A closer look on the areas' group dynamics further destabilized depictions of a social stratification or other form or socio-spatial organization emerging from mixing locals and strangers in the long-term. Neighbourhoods around Victoria Sq. had been established as immigrants' districts from previous immigration waves in Athens during the '90s[25] and remained a strong point of reference for immigrants from the MENA Region. The last decade they had come to raise questions on the co-living situation evolving there due to intra-national conflicts, racist incidents and trafficking operations. Demographics[26] indicated that young natives' and second-generation immigrants' populations are shrinking since the 1990s while young newcomers from the MENA region grow in numbers since 2001. Co-living evolves between ageing natives, shrinking local youth (citizens with native and immigrant background) that do not see their future there and growing populations of young, undocumented immigrants whose presence, survival tactics, networking and group dynamics remain mostly off the grid.

[25] Populations from eastern Europe and Albania.

[26] Census data analysis showed that in 30 blocks around Aharnon Str. local young populations saw a 58% decline from 1991-2011, while young immigrants saw a 748% rise in the same period. This number is bound to be larger as many are undocumented and did not appear in the 2011 census. The respective stats for the centre of Athens were significantly lower: 39% decline of young locals and 357% rise in young immigrants. Source: Gavra, 2018

The moment asylum seekers officially become refugees, gaining '*the same rights and obligations to a Greek citizen*' (NGO employee), risk sliding into what seems, at places like Victoria Sq., to evolve into a *terra incognita* for institutional culture: A space where boundaries between citizens, residents, locals, strangers, natives, traffickers, neighbors and friends blur.

As (institutional) certainties and boundaries blur, hints from all over the 'field' on how societal cultures at work, transactions, neighbor and friendly relations are contested by the lack of trust, reliable information, peer-to peer understanding and the specter of economic drought start making sense as deregulation of human practice, rendering visible larger patterns of endangerment. For as long as the reasons crisis-hit youth cannot enter the job market[27] remain unexplained the know-how to re-orient programs like Estia towards 'integration' and inform newcomers on their next steps remains undefined. Why households with available income do not pay their 'precarious' debts remains equally enigmatic. The finance specialist hinted it is part of a broader (structural) cultural shift in household and individual behavior fueled by the lack of trust – in institutions as well as the future in general. The emerging role of NGO's as mediators between owners, neighbors, public services and newcomers is an alarming indication of how daily interactions like rentals have been disrupted and peer-to peer culture is at place in need of 'technical support'. Owners around Aharnon Str. rent to organizations, not refugees themselves, knowing "*they won't easily find someone to rent*" (NGO employee*)* while in other areas, as the real-estate agent reported, they "*throw locals out*" to profit from tourist demand.

As far as Estia is concerned, this 'inbound' deregulation reflected the exhaustion of a local 'know-how', engaging placemaking and the relevant socio-spatial processes (housing, receiving immigrants, growing children) with tactics on how to remain resilient (and invisible)

[27] Youth unemployment in Greece reached 58.3% (15-24yrs) and 43.3% (25-29 yrs) in 2013, percentage only compared to Spain's (55.5%, 15-24 yrs). In 2017 when we finally had a rise in employment the so-called crisis generation (people aged 25-35 by 2017) seem to have been left out of the new job placements. From my data analysis new jobs were allocated as such: 11.19% (19-24 yrs), 9.59% (25-34 yrs), 31.94% (35-44 yrs), 45.82% (45-64 yrs), source: Gavra, 2018

against chronic gaps in institutional protection. This exhaustion warns there are limits to that kind of (housing & crisis-management) solutions relying on societal cultures to fill in the gaps of institutional protection as well as delineates the broader context where asylum seekers step into. The fragility of belonging is an idiomatic expression successfully articulating the qualities of this boundary-blurring context as well as the risks embedded in their future in it. In Victoria Sq. it comes to be part of an almost embodied experience. It is impossible to understand their deeply precarious position as separate from the challenges hidden in precarity's longstanding presence among the local population or the city's uncertain trajectory. It is an open question whether their ambiguous practices deviate from natives' practices or rather enhance their deviations from life strategies traditionally established as local: oriented towards making bonds out of networking, homes out of accommodation, places out of resources.

Combined, the above qualities delineate Athens as a place in a self-precarizing trajectory: struggling with its future in an open globalizing world while precarity's dynamics reproduce through a very detailed and elaborate combination of gaps: in protection, information, understanding, visibility and vice-versa, that is founded, learned and incubated within the local population. Their joint articulation in Victoria Sq. is a way to interpret how the multiscalar (global/local) transformations evolve in Athens' and reflect on the traps precarity entails for those more vulnerable.

The Fragility of Belonging: A New Relation to Space?

Precarity's interpretative power in contemporary societies is better understood if one approaches it, not as a theory 'in the making', but as a style of reasoning unbound from its weight: the more is dynamics articulate around human relations and human-space interactions, the less social or spatial classifications (resident, immigrant, local, native etc.) make sense. Its effect on the social is more extensively explored in existing research than on the spatial. It is also a concept discussed in relevance to 'new' forms of exercising power: by destabilizing

someone's capacity to form, envision and design the future. As Bauman (2006) puts it, '*to design the future, a hold on the present is needed*'[28]. Destabilizing, or deregulating, space, is part of the process. Being essentially a fluid combination of goods, resources, opportunities space takes form and recognizable qualities through the ways people use, combine and reproduce them. As Bourdieu (1980) has already suggested, these actions do not lack logic and intention[29]. They consist of boundary-setting (or blurring) practices and combine sets of actions into strategies aiming to secure present survival and its continuity in the future. I here argue As long as they grow, in time, into norms, routines or generally accepted rules, they also have a regulatory force. They, become part of placemaking and what we call 'local know-how'.

There is an ongoing debate on if and how precarity is new and what historical contexts it can be bound to. We have come to associate it with pre- and post- conditions, economic crises and mega events like a pandemic. The above framework suggests that while precarity as a condition is not new in the history of mankind, deregulation has altered significantly the space where its reproduction was historically regulated. Deregulations' core idea was that there is a 'natural' endogenous situation of (economic) activity that develops (better) without external rules (Rubin, 1988)[30]. If we reflect on what was considered external to 'free development' (law, state, norms, borders) and was eventually deregulated, the only 'rule' standing is the logic of what people do, consider, value and stand up to at a specific place and time. In a way deregulation points at challenges rising from cultures ever-evolving within everyday life's 'details' and webs of interactions as well as 'new' forms of control (and regulation) exercised from above[31] and within diverse geographies in different momentums.

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[28] Bauman, 2006, pg. 135
[29] Bourdieu, Pierre. *The logic of practice* (California, Stanford: Stanford university Press, 1980)
[30] See Rubin, L. Edward. 'Deregulation, Reregulation and the Myth of the Market', *Washington and Lee Law Review*, vol.45, is.4 (1988): pp.1249-1274.
[31] Bauman says procrastination is such a strategy. Bauman, 2006, pg. 156.

In my original research I had addressed this newfound importance of place and time observing that the contemporary geographies of precarity should come as a warning to Athens. If academics with their eyes set on central Europe and the US are worried it is reaching unsustainable heights, places like Athens cannot afford to ignore the challenges hidden in their longstanding struggle with uncertainty. In reverse, Athens' fragile trajectory and current exhaustion should come as a warning that people, societies, and cultures, anywhere, may be resilient, flexible and resourceful but that does not necessarily guarantee just societies[32] (Roy, 2011) or future-proof them from precarity's dismantling effect in the long-term. Nevertheless, considering the spatial qualities associated with precarity's reproduction (density, ambiguity, interconnectedness) in contemporary Athens are not idioms of its geographic, historical, or national background but characteristics shared with cities across such contexts, this view from Athens illuminates another angle with which to reflect upon its depth: Cities, are historically designed to protect from nature's uncertainty and that feature of theirs encompasses borders, boundaries, geographies and scales.

I believe this newfound fragility of 'place', 'time', 'neighbourhood' and 'bonds' within urban environments to be a point of departure for more enhanced views from below and towards more constructive reflections on the emergency of the current socio-political situation. The difficulty of addressing contemporary cities' complexity with available methods and information systems is also a hint on how precarity's contemporary rise and boundary-blurring quality challenges our relation with 'space' as a set of established rules, theoretical ideas and static representations that 'wire' our paradigms, views and styles of reasoning in ways that may not be useful in that direction.

[32] Roy, Ananya. 'Why India cannot plan its cities. Informality, insurgence and the idiom of urbanization', *Planning Theory, Strangely Familiar* (2009): pp. 76-87 Roy argues human mobilization can be regulatory but can turn into a 'claustrophobic game'.

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http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/home/

Ecological Crises and Sociological Gesellschaft/Gemeinschaft in the Literary Representations of Migrant Pastoralist Community of the Indian Western Frontier

Yamini Anish Shah

Abstract

Community is maintained by the sociological notions of cohesion and embeddedness. Ecological communities rejecting utilitarian contractual foundations and thriving on the Gesellschaft of having social relations based on impersonal ties as duty to a society or organisation. Socially, economically, linguistically backward Rabaris and Maaldharis occupational castes from Kachchh in Gujarat, India are pastoral migrant communities that continually relocate for their cattle so that the grazed land gets enough time to regrow. The lands assigned to them by royal decree are under threat owing to the usurpation by forest and tax department. At a time of climate crisis, depleting natural reserves, species going rapidly extinct, dying dialects, ethnicities and sub-castes, need for collective will to be proactive is essential. A socio-literary and ecocritical analysis of willingly migrant communities based on selected regional and anglophone literary works, folklore, local activism, political and legal issues faced that map the constantly shifting social reality shall be attempted.

Keywords: Climate Crisis, Ecological Communities, Literary Representations, Socio-Literary Analysis

There is a popular Jat Maldhari saying that tries to preserve the essence of their lifestyle and its values– "*dudhmenu makhan kadnu nahi; gagheke vaknu nahi; ne pakheke chadnu nahi. Jade he thindo, kayamat aanje najeek aahe*!" [Translated as, never remove the butter from your milk as selling the fat from your milk that is your primary nutrition, will affect your health; never sell the intricately embroidered cloak the women wear, as this is a gift that one family shares with another and is the symbol of your social relationships in the community; and never stop living in temporary homes you build in the grassland, as that ensures that you are always on the move allowing the grassland to recuperate behind you. The day this happens, remember

the doomsday is close.] These verses briefly sketch the overarching picture of the subject under consideration.

In a world of depopulation, suburbanization, decentralization, regional restructuring, counterurbanization, deconcentration, rural turnaround, rural migrations and demographic changes, Banni has its unique ways of ecological migrations. Located at the coordinates of 23°19'N to 23°52'N latitude and 68°56'E to 70°32'E longitude, a miniscule plot of 2500 sq. km., in the largest district of India, Kachchh called the Banni grasslands. Forests with its revenue-generating trees and resources, urbanscapes with the commercial ventures, grasslands come somewhere before deserts in the hierarchy of productive lands. It is this grassland of banni that was gifted by the Jadeja King for grazing to the Maaldhari community. It had a *Grasdhars* system of administration for each of the 23 sub-eco regions of Kachchh. They essentially reared cattle that would graze in a specific piece of land in a particular season and before the limits of overgrazing, they would internally migrate to another location to allow Nature/grass to recuperate/regrow. There are customary rules for grazing and management of the common grazing areas that are based on the interdependence between communities and a deep understanding of the ecosystem. Owing to the high spatial variability in rainfall, villages that receive rain do not restrict entry of pastoralists from other villages into their grazing areas since sharing of resources is an indispensable value among the people of Banni. Receipts of *pancheri* (grazing tax) was given in exchange for the right to graze. A sustainable arrangement as this was well suited for the land, the King and the community until regressive and appropriatory laws set in.

Historically, forests in India during the pre-British period were managed by communities living in and around the forests and by the people dependant on them for their sustenance and livelihood. The word 'managed' has been specifically ployed here to hint at the system that was then free-for-all. Social institutions like caste and cultural traditions regulated the

extraction of produce from the forest and refrained from an open-access system. The need and greed of the Empire dictated the management of the forests. The Forest Charter of 1855 was the first attempt by the British Indian government in the direction of forest governance. There were a series of Acts and amendments in 1865, 1878 and 1927 which were increasingly 'annexationist'. Imperatively, forests became a forest department that needed organising, a systematic inventory of trees was carried out, customary rights of people over forests were curtailed and dolled out as mere concessions to be enjoyed by the will of forest officials. The conception of wilderness '*aranya'* had an etymological and paradigmatic shift. A place that was worshipped or to wander became a mere yet major source of revenue generation as strategically culled by Akeel Bilgrami in *Nature and Value*[1] (2019).

Until the seventeenth century in Europe, these value properties in nature and the world around us were often taken to have a sacred source in the widely held pantheisms of popular Christianity which is often described by intellectual historians as 'neo-platonism' and it is the loss of this source of value in nature that Weber describes with his term 'disenchantment of the world'. Though Descartes and Bacon were early figures in shaping this metaphysical outlook it was not until Newton and his influence that this transformation began to have real political consequences. This enforced migration of God to an external, Archimedean place (*Deus Absconditus*) was central to the motives of various worldly forces that emerged in this time, first in England and the Netherlands and spreading elsewhere in Europe. The consequence that Nature, now evacuated of a sacred presence was brutely material, and one could take from its bounty without constraint or qualm coming from a sacralized presence. This generated a political economy of systematic extraction.

The possible way of making forest sacrosanct is by negating Descartes, Weber, Plato through a utopic collective amnesia and giving back to Nature its Godly attributes. In the age

[1] Akeel Bilgrami (Ed.), *Nature and Value* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

of Greta Thunberg, post Art for Arts' sake, it should be pitted as Nature for Nature's sake. In the backdrop of this line of argument stands the legal conflicts at Banni. In the year 1827, Banni was given the status of a reserved forest which was a law made only on paper and not implemented. 1855 began a law suit between the bifurcation of the land under the forest department. Thereafter it was considered as revenue-generating and its jurisdiction came under the revenue department. The local self-governing bodies like the local panchayats fell apart in their view of the land use. In order to pacify the increasing differences, the central government set up a National Green Tribunal which would have the last word in matters of these grasslands apart from other forests and their issues. After years of trials, the amendments made in 2006 mentioned the fundamental rights of the local people, the Vanvasis (forest dwellers), the Adivasis, the Maaldharis and so on. The sequence of events in the aforementioned situation were yet not so orderly. The Zilla officers including the Zilla Commerce Committee intervened to make them comply with the 2006 amendments but to no avail. Intense pressurising by the Banni Maaldhari Sanghatan and the government officials to the minority groups led to the case being redirected to the National Green Tribunal. This resulted in a stay order that put an end to illegal pressurising. In a bid to go scott-free, the legal proceedings of the forest and revenue department along with the local bodies gathered momentum. There has been a constant back and forth, the denial of farming rights, the allocation of land to forest or revenue department, the individual and community rights, permanent and temporary settlements are some of the issues plaguing the communities of Banni and its landmass.

The condition of world's grasslands is varied but, in many cases, it is far from satisfactory. Long-term historical data on pastures is scarce, so the degree of change or degradation has to be inferred from the present condition. Large areas of the better land get allocated or cleared for crops, leaving the poorer pasture to extensive stock rearing. In traditional areas of subsistence farming this is due to increasing human population among agricultural

groups. Elsewhere expansion of crops into marginal lands has been in the hope of profit, which has often not been realised. Most of the world's grasslands are on poor quality land with 1/6th on high or medium category land and remaining on low to zero. Cultivation of grasslands leads to problems of access of water for stock and wildlife, loss of lean season grazing, obstruction of migration routes and fragmentation of wildlife habitat. Grasslands are increasingly being integrated into farming systems. National land tenure legislation (East Africa) is not related to traditional grazing rights and puts pastoralism at a disadvantage compared to crops. The pastoral vegetation however is resilient and recovers well after drought. In Central Asia, the usefulness of seasonal movement was recognized. The reforms led to a massive shift from collective to household herds; often household stock numbers are too few to warrant independent herding and communal or family herding has not yet developed; this often leads to stock remaining, unsupervised, close to homesteads: nearby pastures are overgrazed while distant ones are hardly used. Water is the major determining factor in stock management, since Banni is an area dependant on seasonal surface water, stock must move out once resources have dried. Traditional systems, while selling livestock and its produce provide subsistence and security to herders. They often keep several species, which may be herded separately, this assists in providing a wider range of products.

These grasslands are home to various communities that struggle for existence. When the community as ecclesia, *sangha*, congregation or *jamaat* fails the individual, a debilitating loss of self-worth seeps into the consciousness. Excerpts from '*The Geography of Rural Change'*[2] show that many of the studies of rural communities by geographers in the 1950s and 60s were characterised by an 'abstracted empiricism'. It includes theoretical arguments made by German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies and he distinguishes between Gemeinschaft and Gesselschaft

[2] Brian Ilbery (Ed.), *The Geography of Rural Change* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 32, 33, 44.

(32). With gemeinschaft community relations being based on 'close human relationships developed through kinship…common habitat and…co-operation and co-ordinated action for social good and gesselschaft society relations created through 'impersonal ties and relationships based on formal exchange and contract' in which 'no actions…manifest the will or spirit of…unity'(33). Rural areas were frequently described as places of community or gemeinschaft and urban linked places of impersonal society or gesselschaft. The line of bifurcation could also be blurred by a rural–urban continuum. Rural middle class show elements of gemeinschaft in that they value emotional attachments to place and to an imagined and socialised community. They show emphasis on the symbolic over the material, the ritualization of living and a clear differentiation in behaviour between members and outsiders. The issue of ambiguous identities and values has become of heightened significance in rural geography in relation to the rise of post-structuralist ideas. As Pratt notes (44), post-structuralism both draws on and extends structuralist ideas as they relate to language and the subject or person. Ecocriticism with a special focus on the Pastoral has shown itself to be infinitely malleable for differing political ends. Literary pastoral traditions according to Terry Gifford[3] involve a retreat from the city to the countryside, pejoratively an idealisation of rural life that obscures the realities of labour and hardship. In the *Order of Things*[4], Foucault states that the printed text, in its variables of form, arrangement, and quantity, should have a vegetable structure, 'The book becomes the herbarium of living structures' (147). Further explicated by:

> 'Natural history is a science, that is, a language, but a securely based and well-constructed one: its propositional unfolding is indisputably an articulation; the arrangement of its elements into a linear series patterns representation according to an evident and universal mode… the theory of *structure,* which runs right through natural history in the Classical

[3] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999)
[4] Michel Foucault, *Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 147, 148, 149.

> age, superimposes the roles played in language by the *proposition* and *articulation* in such a way that they perform one and the same function' (148).

As Adanson opines that botany could possibly become a meticulous mathematical science. By virtue of structure, rapid multiplication of beings on Earth is able to enter both into the 'sequence of a descriptive language and into the field of a mathesis that would be a general science of order' (149). This particular constituent and complex relation, is established within the apparent simplicity of a description of the visible

Kneading this down to the literary aspects as highlighted by Dulerai Karani, who was one of the first few known writers to pen his poetry and short stories on the ecology of Kachchh. Poet Tej is an ardent voice for its environment with him having poms on almost each and every resident or migratory birds of Kachchh. Ecologists write petitions or offer resistance through columns in local newspapers, or handing out pamphlets, conduct meetings and awareness drives against harmful development impact. In the more recent times, some socio-political poetry and young-adult fiction on protests from this site on these issues is emerging. It hopes to bring lighter and clarity to the underlying and latent issues. There are non-governmental organisations like Sahajeevan, ATREE (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment) and RAMBLE working tirelessly for Banni.

Stengers (in *Green Utopias*[5]) suggests that only when we accept that we have entered a new postnatural epoch will we be able to find 'new powers of acting, feeling, imagining and thinking in a threatening but invigorating hybrid world' (159). The very idea of the Anthropocene according to Trexler is the moment at which climate change shifts from being a matter of 'prediction, science, evidence, representation and belief' (159) to a topic of cultural

[5] Lisa Garforth, *Green Utopias: Environmental Hope Before and After Nature* (UK: Polity Press, 2018) p. 159, 160.

change. Loss and fear are an ineradicable part of our new environmental contexts and are already reshaping the kind of hope that is possible. Yearning for better days is diluted up in 'messy hyperrealities'. We are subject to a 'nostalgia' for nature that is nonetheless built on centuries of effective mastery over it (quote from Proctor in *Green Utopias*, 160)[6].

Drawing from Robert Putnam "*E Pluribus Unum*: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century"[7] and his concept of social capital that is derived from ethnic and social heterogeneity of immigration and consequent social networking. Internal ecological migrations, the researcher coins, leads to an 'ecological capital' that is generated by 'human isolation' of grasslands (here) as opposed to the flip side of ethnic heterogeneity suggested by Putnam of social isolation. Leading to another positive effect of 'ecocentrism' rather than 'ethnocentrism'. Their migratory patterns are also geo-coded (meaning to say exact location of settlement as per Putnam) and eco-coded (as per the researcher as to exactly which patch of land to be left for recuperation and for how long and where to move). At this point it becomes a critique of Putnam's research to redirect human attention to the Age of the Anthropocene and the need to think green. A direct correspondence of human sociological behaviour can be attributed to ecological 'behaviour/ biocommunication' deducing from experiments by Gustav Fechner and Jagdish Chandra Bose. It would be appropriate to recall Gregory Bateson's[8] recursive epistemology to justify Putnam's critique as it involved a continual process of 'looping' back to earlier patterns of thinking. Bateson's phrase 'ecological intelligence' that is described as the intelligence that takes account of the ecological nature of cultural and natural systems and the way they are interdependent sums up importance of the internal ecological migrations. A poem penned by researcher evokes the pertinent emotions:

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[6] J. Proctor, "Saving Nature in the Anthropocene". *Journal of Environmental Studies and Science*, 2013. Vol 3 Issue 1, p. 83-92.
[7] Robert Putnam, '*E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century*' Nordic Political Science Association. ISSN 0080-6757, 2007.
[8] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972) pp. 19, 454-456.

Being Left Behind[9]

Marked in coordinates,

23°19'N to 23°52'N and

68°56'E to 70°32'E

wetland-dryland-wasteland-- Banni.

In its jaded mellowness,

flashed with banners:

'Annual *Pashu*[10] *Mela'*.

Cattle make no note of time;

nor do its possessors

and those o'er them-

in a loop of continuum.

So it is that lawsuits have been

unsuitably overtime.

Like the omnipresent Saraswati,

menfolk arrive in all her absence;

trading in *Bakhmallakhado*[11]

[Meanwhile a plinth reads:

Geography participates everyday

[9] Published in: Vinita Agrawal, *Open your Eyes* (Calcutta: Hawakal Publishers, 2020) p. 95, 96.
[10] *Pashu*: Animals
[11] *Bakhmallakhado*: Traditional wrestling between men during Banni Pashu Mela (cattle fair) that establishes a market for animal trade at local level.

and linguistics flattens into cartography;

degenerating eco-capital.]

Although womenfolk built the *bhungas*[12]

each time they migrated internally,

they were not its matriarchs.

In the vastness and its emptiness,

Seated away, by dammed rivulets[13]

staring at blurred briny waters

focusing on the excrescence on the blade of a grass

she anthropocentrically catechized:

Why can't I be a *Gando Bavar*[14],

meandering seamlessly in the *Seemada*[15]?

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Bateson, Gregory. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972). pp. 454-456 and 19.

[12] *Bhungas*: Circular houses

[13] Damming of rivulets on the upstream of Banni grasslands is responsible for an increase in salinity in Banni region.

[14] *Gando Bavar*: Prosopis Juliflora, the crazy Acacia, a foreign alien species promoted initially by state agencies.

[15] *Seemada*: Open grazing lands.

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