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Re-Imagining the Ideal Female Image in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract: Race and gender are significant spheres for dialogue about black woman's cultural alienation in postcolonial feminist discourse. The paper explores what constitutes an ideal female beauty image regarding body shape, hair texture, and skin colour in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). The examination is done through the framework of Bakhtin's carnivalesque. The paper argues that through inserted genres and other features of the carnivalesque, Adichie interrogates the racial and social alienation of the black Nigerian Igbo woman outside her cultural environment. It concludes that the carnivalesque construction in *Americanah* enables Adichie to combine feminism with parody in order to collapse the binary between the black and white female beauty ideal.

Key Words: Alienation, the carnivalesque, beauty, gender, race.

Introduction

The re-reading of derision of the black woman's skin colour, hair texture, and body shape is an issue that the Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, addresses in *Americanah* (2013). In an interview, Adichie reveals that she wrote *Americanah* because the books and novels she has read about race didn't satisfy her. She claims that *Americanah* 'says something about the way no one is honest about race' (Mistry). It is different from the other books she read because it presents the issue of race through the integration of postcolonial theory, feminism, and parody. She parodies the White Caucasian woman's beauty ideal through Menippean Satire, inserted genres and other features of the carnivalesque. These are literary critical tools espoused by the Russian theorist and philosopher, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975).



According to Bakhtin, the carnivalesque is the manifestation, in literary space, of these elements and features of carnival identified in the ancient, medieval, and Renaissance periods. This is especially found in folk humour, where there is a *'free and familiar contact among people'* and where the 'laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is non-carnival life, are suspended' (Bakhtin 122-123 *Italics from the original text*). In Americanah, Ifemelu, the Nigerian leading female character, holds a romanticised view of the white Caucasian hair texture, skin colour, and body size as she immigrates to the US. As she comes into contact with these ideas, her worldview on them changes and she gradually 'decrowns' them. 'Decrown' or the process of 'decrowning' or 'the façade of the king', according to Bakhtin, is a process of the carnival in which there is a mimic and parody of the high by the low (Bakhtin, "Dialogic Imagination", 425). During the carnival festivals, such as the Festival of Fools performed during the Middle Ages, 'priests, bishops or popes, depending on the rank of the church, were chosen in place of a king' and mocked by making a slave, a jester or a common man assume their roles and enjoy their authority for a while, before being ridiculed, beaten and eventually 'decrowned' (Bakhtin, "Problems", 124). Bakhtin reveals that 'the primary carnivalistic act' during these carnival festivals was *'mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king'* (Bakhtin, "Problems", 124 *emphasis in the original text*). This carnival is rendered in a literary space of the novel as "carnivalisation", which according to Michael Holquist, is a term Bakhtin derived from the noun 'carnival' and used it as 'a verb that has modishly become transitive due to his own work on Rabelais' (Bakhtin, "Dialogic Imagination", xvii).

The paper examines the manner in which Adichie places the issue of alienation of the black woman due to her hair texture, skin colour, and body shape as a cultural dialogue between Ifemelu and other black and white women characters in Americanah, and carnivalises the ideal white female beauty within the different carnival spaces in the novel.

Ideal Hair and Black Woman Alienation

Adichie reveals in an interview that she is a 'fundamentalist when it comes to black women's hair' because although 'hair is hair' it is also about 'larger questions: self-acceptance, insecurity and what the world tells you is beautiful' (Kellaway np). In another interview, Adichie confirms the significance of hair texture when she says Americanah is 'for women who want to see natural black hair in a novel' (Mistry np). She employs



Menippean Satire with the use of ‘inserted genres’ (Bakhtin, “Problems”, 118) as a carnivalesque feature to interrogate race relations regarding black woman’s hair texture. According to Bakhtin, two important features of Serio-comic literature that influenced the carnivalisation of literature through the novel genre are Socratic dialogue and the Menippean Satire. Both are ‘presented at various distances from the ultimate authorial position, that is, with varying degrees of parodying and objectification’ (“Problems” 118). As Robert Rowdon Wilson asserts, ‘the power of very physical images to satirize, or otherwise comment upon ideas, lies at the heart of Menippean satire’ (308).

Ifemelu’s blog, “Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non—American Black” is an important feature of the inserted genre that Adichie also adopts to discuss hair texture, politically, socially, and professionally. Inserted genre is a feature of the carnivalesque that Bakhtin identifies as being a ‘multi-styled and multi-toned’ (“Problems”.118) framework. One of the characteristics of the Menippean satire is the ‘wide use of inserted genres [which are] presented at various distances from the ultimate authorial position’ (Bakhtin, “Problems”, 118). The blog provides the “carnival space” that is concerned with “current and topical issues”, which Bakhtin may call ‘acutely echoing the ideological issues of the day’ (“Problems”, 118-9). It becomes one of the carnivalesque Menippean elements that ‘answer a single urgent but overwhelming question’ (Petronius. xviii) on racism, which could not have been taken seriously in a more direct narrative discourse within Adichie’s novel. The stylization of the blog goes beyond the structural codes of a language to a new form of social media,-a channel through which the voiceless that are racially excluded from all spheres can be heard. Through a distanced authorial position in the blog, Adichie presents different views and attitudes towards freedom of speech, prejudices, stereotypes, and all forms of racial exclusion of the black woman in the United States.

The blog posts also go beyond social commentary about race to commentary about hair and politics in the United States. In a post titled “A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor”, for instance, Ifemelu discusses the relevance of hair texture to a socio-political acceptance of the black woman into American mainstream politics. As Adichie puts it in an interview, for ‘many black women, the idea of wearing their hair naturally is unbearable’ (Kellaway np). Ifemelu questions the possibility of Michelle Obama’s influence on the election of Barack Obama if she had worn her hair natural in the blog:



Imagine if Michelle Obama got tired of all the heat and decided to go natural and appeared on TV with lots of woolly hair, or tight spirally curls [...] she would totally rock, but poor Obama would certainly lose the Independent vote, even the undecided Democrat vote'. (297)

Ifemelu suggests that Barack Obama's chance of winning the presidential election would be slim if Michelle Obama has not relaxed her hair. It would not have gone down well with the American electorates, particularly the White electorates, if she had kept her afro-textured hair natural.

Hair is also employed by Adichie to make a professional statement in Americanah. As Clive Thomson suggests, professional hair is the one that is straightened or relaxed while the black woman's hair with a natural texture is not considered so. Russell and Hart claimed that straightened or relaxed hair in the US was associated with employment opportunity, and the status of the black woman as a middle class and employed person. A dialogue between Ifemelu and Auntie Uju in Americanah captures this reality in the US:

Later, she said, "I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn't wear braids to the interview. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional."

"So there are no doctors with braided hair in America?" Ifemelu asked.

"I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed. (119)

So, a black woman's hair may determine the kind of job she can get and whether she is able to meet the requirements of the job. After Ifemelu attends an interview with relaxed hair in Americanah, the white woman who interviewed her 'shook her hand and said she would be a "wonderful fit" in the company (204). Ifemelu wonders 'if the woman would have felt the same way had she walked into that office wearing her 'thick, kinky, God-given halo of hair, the Afro' (204). This suggests that it is difficult in the United States for a black woman with afro-natural hair to get a job. Most organisations request conformity to 'corporate grooming policies', which consider thick Afro-hair, dreadlocks, and braids as not only unprofessional but revealing the personality of the female as subversive, radical, not straight, or masculine (Patton). In



Americanah, Margaret, the “bosomy African American woman” at the cafeteria counter in Ifemelu’s workplace considers Ifemelu a “lesbian” for cutting her hair (211).

A white male voice, however, dismisses these political and professional views on hair texture, which Ifemelu raises in the blog. The ‘dreadlocked white man who sat next to her on the train,’ with the appearance of a “social warrior” tells her that ‘race is totally overhyped these days’ and ‘black people need to get over themselves; it’s all about class now, the haves and the have-nots’ (4). This voice ‘deposes’ the voice that pushes forward Ifemelu’s and other black people’s experiences of racial exclusion in political, social, economic, and professional spaces. Instead, the voice views the USA within a post-race period. Americanah is set when the US electorates, both white and black, voted for the first black president. The election of Barack Obama as the president is a pointer that ‘it will be an overstatement to assume all African diasporic subjects feel a sense of cultural alienation’ (Fongard. 6). But, as A. Lentin argues, the election of Barack Obama does not signify the end of racism and socio-economic inequality in the United States (1265). The same view is shared by M. Dawkins who argues that the assumption of a post-racial American society after Barack Obama’s election is a myth that is created by a single act of an election process (10). Adichie places these various opposing voices on race through the Festival of the Fools carnival of ‘coronation’ and deposing of American ideals’ on her texture by the characters.-

Wow, Girl, You’ve Got the White-Girl Swing!

The greater part of Americanah is told through flashbacks while Ifemelu waits in the salon at Trenton to braid her hair. Salons are carnival spaces through which Adichie carnivalises the white Caucasian hair beauty ideal. In both Shan’s and Mariama’s salons, black Afro-hair makes a social statement about ideal hair beauty and black women’s alienation. An Afro-hair style often makes a social statement in the mainstream white American conception of beauty. A black African-American girl grows up in this consciousness that her Afro natural hair is ‘bad’ while straightened white girl hair is ‘good’ (Banks, Thompson). In the documentary film *Good Hair*, Chris Rock examines how black women define bad and good hair. He interviewed black celebrities and hair treatment chemical manufacturers and travelled as far as India from the US to interview the donors and merchants of human hair. These hairs are mainly-consumed by black women in the United States and other parts of the world (Kit np). The film reveals black women’s obsession with ‘good hair’ and



how this sustains a multibillion-dollar black hair care industry - up from manufacturers of chemicals, importers of wigs, and down to the salons that give the black Afro hair the final touch. Chris Rock reveals that the making of this documentary was inspired by his three-year-old daughter, Lola, asking him why she does not have good hair. Lola's hair was tightly curled, according to Chris, the type many people of African descent naturally wear. Lola's question is the general question many black girls of African-American descent ask about their hair.

To many of these girls, the straighter and more swiny the hair, the more beautiful and more attractive it is (Badillo; Hunter). According to S.B White, the desire to make their daughters fit into the mainstream white female beauty image makes black women get their daughters' afro hair straightened through chemicals and hot combs, especially when they go to church or for holidays. So, getting black hair straightened is largely caused by the pressure on black women to conform to the white woman's beauty standard (Patton; Thompson). But, hair does not always make political, professional, and social statements. Women can choose to style their or daughters' hair in an easier-to-manage or desired manner.

Studies have revealed there're lots of other motivations for black women's hair choices. Hair was used by slave owners during slavery to segregate slaves. The slave owners privileged black women slaves with Caucasian-like hair textures to be house slaves while those with afro hair texture were sent to the fields to work with the men (Robinson; Lester; Lara). The house slaves close to their white masters were aware that their hair texture and lighter skin were the features that made them the favourites. They made extra effort to make their hair as presentable and as close as possible to their white masters (Thompson). So, straightened hair became the ideal form of beauty that alienated black women's natural Afro-hair. The desire for "good hair" that pressed the African-American slave to appear as white as possible persists among black women even after slavery. The preference for a Caucasian beauty paradigm created by the white slave masters stuck in the mindsets of black people even in the generation of Ifemelu. In Kiri Davis's short documentary, *A Girl Like Me*, this White beauty standard is experimented with black children, who identify black identity as nonconforming to their definition of beauty. The children are given white and black dolls, and each black child is called to pick one. Each of them chooses a white doll and ignores the black doll. They see the white standard as the form of ideal beauty, not the black image.



That motive for ‘good’ hair during slavery, however, changed to a political motive for some black women after the American civil war and emancipation of slaves. The motivation for a straightened hair became a show of identity of a black person as a free individual and no longer a slave (Arogundade, Taylor, Gaskins). As S.B White reveals, self-discovery and desire for change are what mostly motivate black women to keep their hair natural. Black women who keep their hair natural are often considered activists who adopt a strategy to resist white beauty standards and to connect to their African ancestral roots (Banks). They are also viewed as being of low class, Afrocentric or radical (Thompson; Bellinger; Etemesi).

A significant motivation for black women’s straightening or relaxing their hair is viewed from the aesthetic and stylization point of view by Shirley Anne Tate in Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics (2009). She opposes the assumption that black women fashion themselves in the image of white beauty by straightening their hair or in order to make a social, professional or political statement. She argues that what black women are doing with their hair is a stylization that is ‘expanding the boundaries of what counts as black beauty’ but not ‘inscribing a white aesthetic onto their bodies’ (15). Tate argues that relaxed hair is not ‘approximations of whiteness but [...] “versionings” of Black beauty’ (28). It is a ‘beauty “race” work’ (Tate 26), just as the white Caucasian women paint their brunette hair to golden blonde hair or wear wigs and hair extensions as part of their stylisations. Black women, according to Tate ‘seek difference from “beauty comes from within” to beauty comes “through artifice” ’ (28). The artificial beauty that the black woman creates with her hair is because of its afro texture that allows different forms of styles, and relaxing is one of them (Robinson). A black woman demonstrates her ingenuity in creating beauty standards via a unique form of hair texture that R. E Spellers notes can be ‘twisted, locked, braided, weaved, curled, dyed, fried, and laid to the side’ (235). These views on aesthetics of hair beauty counter the social view of the white female ideal and its historical antecedents during slavery or civil rights, and instead suggest freedom of expression through hair. This line of argument suggests that black hair is not a motif for cultural alienation. However, that being convincingly so, the process of this ‘aesthetic’ practice of relaxing the afro-hair remains excruciatingly painful and oppressive to the black woman and, therefore, alienating (Etemesi).

In Americanah, for Ifemelu to keep her hair ‘natural’, all she must do is braid it. But, even this choice to braid rather than relax her hair is alienating. The fact that she must travel long distances and wait for hours to get the hair braided is itself an act of alienation (3). She must travel to Trenton just for a hair braid because



in Philadelphia there are no salons to do that for her. An apparent case of alienation is demonstrated in the small spa near Curt's 'childhood home' where he 'dropped [Ifemelu] 'to get her eyebrows shaped' (291). Ifemelu is treated as 'the other of the same gender' (Henderson) by the 'Asian woman' (291) she meets there. Despite smiling and saying 'Hi' to the lady and then requesting to get her 'eyebrows waxed', the lady tells her 'We don't do curly' (292). The Asian lady's statement is an act of explicit exclusion. It is only after Curt threatens to 'shut down this fucking place' if they refuse to 'fucking do my girlfriend's eyebrows' that the Asian lady 'transformed into a smiling solicitous coquette' and says, 'it was a misunderstanding' (292). After it is done, Ifemelu tells Curt, 'maybe they've never done a black woman's eyebrows and so they think it's different, because our hair is different, after all, but I guess now she knows the eyebrows are not that different' (292).

By making Ifemelu realise that the Spa has 'never done a black woman's eyebrow', Adichie suggests that the black woman is excluded in both racist and gendered female social salon spaces in Philadelphia. Ifemelu's silence in response to the Asian lady's disparaging statement is also a conflation of her background as a black woman, and a migrant Nigerian Igbo girl. The latter circumstantial background has effects on her voice because the Igbo female's voice is not expected to be raised. This may sound an understatement, but as a child in Nigeria, Ifemelu is constantly reminded that she is a female and must value keeping quiet. When she asks Sister Ibinabo why she should be involved in decorating the church for an occasion slated for the fraudster, Chief Omenka, a '419' scam 'thief' (51), her mother retorts, 'Why must this girl be a trouble maker? I have been saying it since, that it would be better if she was a boy, behaving like this' (52). Aunty Uju agrees that Ifemelu's problem is that she does not 'always know when to keep her mouth shut' (52). Her mother tells Aunty Uju later that Ifemelu's talking back to the Reverend Sister is an insult. She advises Ifemelu: 'You don't have to say everything. You have to learn that. You don't have to say everything' (53). In Igbo culture then, silence is a virtue that a female should guard. J.N. Ifechelobi studied patriarchy and the manner in which Igbo culture exposes the suffering of women in Adichie's work. The study concludes that the patriarchal culture renders women voiceless and makes them lose their identity, and forces them into solitude (Ifechelobi). It's this conditioning that makes Ifemelu to absorb an insult by Cristina Tomas during the course of registration in her college based on her language. She again accepts the Asian woman's insults based on her hair. She dismisses all these humiliations as unimportant and commonplace. It is Curt, with a



different cultural orientation, who speaks up on her behalf. Curt's authoritative voice illustrates the kind of white male voice that a white feminist challenges, but which a black Nigerian Igbo girl is taught to accept as a virtue.

For Ifemelu to get her hair straightened, she must undergo 'relaxer burn' (203). She undergoes this hair relaxing ritual before in Philadelphia and suffers the burn that results in a 'keloid behind her ear, a small enraged swelling of skin', some 'scabs on her scalp' that 'oozed pus' (204). She describes the feeling as a 'slight burning' while the relaxer is being rinsed and then 'needles of stinging pain shot up from different parts of her scalp, down to different parts of her body, back up to her head' (204). The hairdresser mollifies her with the suggestion it is 'just a little burn [...] But look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you've got the white-girl swing!' (204). The idea of having a 'white girl swing' has ambivalent connotations in relation to Ifemelu's condition. It refers to the happy, free way of going about in swinging mood by living 'the American way'. At the same time, it refers to the literal swinging of the head that white girls do to clear hair on their faces, the hanging down of the hair on the shoulders and the hair blown by the wind. Ironically, what can only provide this 'swing' on or because of her Afro-hair is a 'relaxer burn', itself a crafty oxymoron revealing a paradox of 'relaxing' and 'burning'.

As Ifemelu leaves the salon after her hair relaxing ritual, her feeling is described as a 'sense of loss' because the 'verve was gone' (203). She admits that she is unable to recognise herself because 'her hair was hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek, parted at the side and curving to a slight bob at her chin' leaving the 'smell of burning, of something organic dying, which should not have died' (203). The careful selection of cognate synonyms related to pain and torture creates an overall sense of oppression for Ifemelu in her attempt to get a new hair identity.

As N.A Lester explains, the process of chemically relaxing the hair is ostensibly hazardous because it causes scalp burns, hair loss and is harmful to the eyes. Having hair relaxed in such a potentially dangerous situation is more than an expression of black aesthetic artificial beauty, as Shirley Tate may argue, but a form of exclusion and oppression of the black woman. Hair is an important 'beauty work' tool for all females of all races in the United states (Gottschall, Weitz) but the beauty-work of the black woman reveals both pain and alienation just because her short, thick, afro-hair is not included in the beauty continuum in the United States (Badillo, Patton, White). The black woman must kill part of herself in order to resurrect a new



image, which is an act of ‘death and rebirth’ (Bakhtin, “Problems”, 24), a carnival ‘façade of the king’, which Bakhtin highlights as the feature of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, “Dialogic Imagination”, 425). The ‘death’ of Ifemelu’s Afro-hair and her African identity, and the ‘rebirth’ of a new Americanah or white image is ambivalent and contradictory because she is unable to get that ‘white girl swing’ despite the burn and the new hair image, and she has lost her old identity of being the black girl with afro hair.

As a process of carnivalisation in Americanah, Ifemelu discards the desire to get a new image with relaxed hair and instead chooses to braid her hair. It is in this state of desire to return to her old self that she feels a ‘cement in her soul’ that ‘had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness’ (6). Her resistance to relaxing her hair begins with a discovery of an online race site, *HappilyKinkyNappy.com*, which reveals to her that there are lots of black women embracing their natural hair (209). Notice the ‘gay and triumphant’ atmosphere of carnival that Bakhtin identifies in Rabelais’s works (Bakhtin, “Rabelaise”, 11) in the name of the site – happily, kinky, nappy. The postings on this online site eventually convince Ifemelu to keep her natural afro-textured hair and inspire her to create her blog. She further understands the significance of keeping her afro hair natural during her conversation with Wambui:

“I don’t want dreads,” she said.

“It doesn’t have to be dreads. You can wear an Afro, or braids like you used to. There’s a lot you can do with natural hair.”

“I can’t just cut my hair,” she said.

“Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You’re caged in. Your hair rules you. You didn’t go running with Curt today because you don’t want to sweat out this straightness. You’re always battling to make your hair do what it wasn’t meant to do. If you go natural and take good care of your hair, it won’t fall off like it’s doing now. I can help you cut it right now. No need to think about it too much.” (p. 208)

Again, the choice of cognate synonyms such as ‘prison’, ‘caged’, ‘rules’, ‘running’ and ‘sweat’ all relate to oppression for Ifemelu as a black woman who ‘battles’ to do something against her wish. This symbolic reference to imprisonment makes Ifemelu opt for freedom. Her choice of keeping her hair natural reveals



both the process of change, self-discovery, and the carnivalisation of the white female beauty image as the ideal.

Body Shape, Skin Colour, and the Ideal Beauty Image

Black woman's body is a motif for racial alienation in Americanah. Adichie interrogates this form of alienation in relation to skin colour and body shape. Through various vignettes in Americanah, Adichie presents instances skin colour and body shape become instruments for the alienation of the black woman, and the manner their images as ideal are carnivalised. First, Adichie demonstrates that the exclusion of the female due to skin colour is not exclusively confined to the African-American or any black woman in the US. In Nigeria many dark Igbo women bleach their skins in order to have a lighter skin. Ifemelu reveals that it's easy to tell that Auntie Onenu 'had not been born with her light complexion' because her skin's 'sheen was so waxy, and her knuckles were dark, as though those folds of skin had valiantly resisted her bleaching cream' (391). But, as Carolyn Cooper opines, skin bleaching is a form of adornment 'along the same lines as wearing green or pink wigs or wearing latex batty riders' (Cooper 139). Among the Igbos in Nigeria, it is an artifice that defines a woman's beauty. Obinze's daughter, Buchi, who is light-skinned, is always considered by many people around her as being beautiful. All other features of her body are secondary to her skin colour in defining her femininity and attractiveness.

Adichie presents another form of ideal female body image through body shape. This time she carnivalises body size and shape at Trenton train station:

There were people thrice [Ifemelu's] size on the Trenton platform and she looked admiringly at one of them, a woman in a very short skirt. She thought nothing of slender legs shown off in miniskirts - it was safe and easy, after all, to display legs of which the world approved - but the fat woman's act was about the quiet conviction that one shared one with oneself, a sense of rightness that others failed to see. (8)

The black woman chooses to wear a dress designed for slim-figured women, and her body shape does not fit into that classification of ideal female beauty image. Her courage and determination to resist this social construction of what is beautiful begin the process of carnivalising the ideal body shape. As the taxi driver elsewhere admits, Ifemelu does not 'look African at all' because of her 'too tight blouse' (206); skirts and



tight blouses are only worn by the 'slim' White-American female not by a fat black African woman with a 'grotesque' body image.

The fact that the black woman's body is often viewed as freakish in comparison with the European or Western ideal body is widely acknowledged in relation to the critical works on Sara Baartman, a South African khoikhoi tribe woman brought to England in the nineteenth century. Sara was first exhibited under the name Hottentot Venus in the Egyptian Hall of Piccadilly Circus on 24th November 1810 due to her large buttocks (Muriel and Bartsch). People paid two shillings to watch her and did not consider her as a person but as one of the natural wonders of the world (Crais and Scully 351). As Sadiya Qureshi says, Sara was described by naturalists as having ears similar to those of an orang-utan and her agile movement was compared to a monkey's. After she died in France, her body was dissected to further reveal that her genitalia and buttocks confirmed her sexual primitivism and her brain was similar to an orang-utan's.

In the present-day United States, the well-known photograph of Kim Kardashian balancing a glass of champagne on her buttocks in *Paper Magazine* of November 2014 represents what Jolie Lee terms as the exploitation and fetishism of the black woman's body. The body shape of Sara can be viewed as a black woman's body imagery while Kardashian's act may be termed as stylization, artifice and aesthetic, in Shirley Tate's terms. Jolie Lee claims that a columnist with *The Gri.com*, Blue Telusma 'likens the photos to images of Saartjie "Sarah" Baartman' (Lee np). Kardashian is not black but her body shape and carnival acts reflect the controversy about black body imagery that is gaining ground culturally in the West. Women of all races are trying surgery and implants on all parts of their female bodies in order to create a figure that would have been considered grotesque as Sara's in the nineteenth century.

A conversation between having a slim body and a fuller-figured one in relation to the definition of female beauty is presented between Ginika and Ifemelu in *Americanah*. When the latter first arrive United States, she attempts to fit into the idealised white slim body image. She loses so much weight that when Ifemelu first meets her in Philadelphia she notices it. Ginika tells Ifemelu that she 'started losing weight almost as soon as' she came to the US, and that she is now 'even close to anorexia' (124). She says being slim is not Ifemelu's worry because she naturally has 'the kind of body they like here [...] thin with big breasts' (124). Clare Barker studied the idea of anorexia and starving to get a slim figure across cultures in relation to Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988).



In this semi-autobiographical novel, Dangarembga quoted, as prologue, the statement by Jean-Paul Sartre in the preface to Frantz Fanon's seminal work, The Wretched of the Earth: "The condition of the native is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among the colonized people *with their consent*" (17). Dangarembga does not attribute the quote to Sartre but chooses to state that it comes from the introduction to The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fannon. She derived the title of the novel from the epigraph aimed to highlight the psychological effect of colonialism on the native Africans. Barker, however, sees the title of the novel, 'Nervous Conditions', echoing the medical condition of 'Anorexia Nervosa', a Western woman's disease. In a way, it's a very rare disease in Dangarembga's Zimbabwe, Adichie's Nigeria, and other African cultural spaces that may favour a female 'fat' body as the ideal. Barker also sees Nyasha's condition in the novel as metaphorically revealing an ambivalent way she is unable to digest Western cultural norms and her cultural environment's struggle with hunger and disease (116).

The critical work of Susan Bordo, Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body offers commentary on the oppression of Western women based on this norm and a demand for a slim-figured female body. Bordo reveals that what leads to Western woman's anorexia is the male-dominated capitalist world that makes western women starve themselves. Drawing on Michael Foucault's theory of power, Bordo argues that the male-dominated capitalist society decides on what women wear, their cosmetics, and what to eat and lose weight in the form that the men want. This understanding conditions women to focus on having a slender body, and accept that 'being thin' (147) is the ideal body beauty. Those that don't have slim or slender bodies feel they are 'never good enough' and so out of tune. This reality is revealed through fashion, beauty pageants, and other media outlets that make women believe being thin is beautiful.

Having a slim western woman's body is part of the 'crowned' ideal beauty that Ginika and other female immigrants aspire to for their proper Americanisation in Americanah. Ginika orients Ifemelu that in the American culture "thin" is a good word' but 'you know at home when somebody tells you that you lost weight it means something bad. But here somebody tells you that you lost weight and you say thank you. It is just different here' (124). Being plump, something the kids in Ginika's high school call 'Pork' (124), is a sign of beauty among the Igbo in Nigeria. Slim or thin women are not often considered attractive in the Nigerian Igbo cultural context as Adichie suggests. Part of Ifemelu's Americanisation is also learning that the word 'fat' has a negative connotation in the United State although in Nigeria it is a common term that



denotes neutrality and even carries a positive compliment. While being 'thin' is an insult in Nigeria, it is a compliment in the United States. Ginika and many other girls like her get consumed by this trend of an ideal slim body image of the West. They are also consumed by the attending fashion trend that goes with such a body. The carnivalisation of this American ideal female body image is apparently revealed through the fat woman at Trenton station, who shows self-confidence about her size and appreciates her fat appearance by dressing the way she feels comfortable.

Conclusion

As a broader objective, the paper set to examine the manner in which Adichie presents, through carnival spaces and vignettes, what constitutes ideal hair texture, skin colour, and body shape. The paper discussed the manner in which she interrogates and carnivalises the ideal white female beauty image, which alienates black women based on body imagery. This was done through the Menippean satire and façade of the king, inserted genre, carnival acts, and other features of the carnivalesque. It paper concludes that Adichie has succeeded in presenting a carnival world in Americanah, in which the high is presented with the low, beautiful with ugly, sacred with profane in relation to the alienation of the black Nigerian Igbo woman outside her Igbo and Nigerian cultural environment.

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Analysing Comics and Graphic Novels as a Medium of Visual-verbal Literacy for Children

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Abstract: With the evolution of time, the teaching and learning process has changed drastically, especially for children. Children's love for textbooks with many pictures has got a new dimension with the emergence of comics and graphic novels. Now, children are no longer dependent on traditional textbooks only to understand a concept; there is a graphic version for easy understanding. Comics and graphic novels, with their text and illustration side by side, provide children with a unique and entertaining way of learning. As a result, these formats are slowly being included in the curriculum of many schools worldwide. However, it should be kept in mind that replacing textbooks with graphic versions completely is never a percipient idea. This paper analyzes how graphic novels help children to develop many skills and consequently act as a medium of visual-verbal literacy. This paper also analyses how graphic novels provide precious life or moral lessons to children, evaluating a few popular children's graphic novels.

Keywords: Comics, graphic novels, children, visual-verbal literacy, moral teaching.

The fundamental aspect of visual-verbal literacy is imagining the situation while going through the written narrative. While reading a fictional work, we often visualize and form mental images regarding events and characters. This propensity helps us comprehend a literary work and its story more conveniently. However, whereas such visualization is easy for mature readers, children often face difficulty regarding this, preventing them from understanding a text naturally and spontaneously. This is why children's books of any genre include side-by-side pictures to provide visualization and aesthetic pictures. With the rise of comics and graphic novels in the present era, reading has become more pleasing and fun for children. Comics and graphic novels simultaneously include words and images while narrating a story, providing the much-needed hindsight to children in understanding a text critically. In his famous book *Understanding Comics*, Scott



McCloud defines comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an in the viewer” (9). On the other hand, a graphic novel, as observed by Randy Duncan and Matthew Smith, is similar to comics but with the difference that it is “longer than the typical comic book and most often contain self-contained, rather than continuing stories” (4). Keeping aside the difference between these rising genres, it can be perceived that both comics and graphic novels act as a medium of visual-verbal literacy for children, which Marianne Hirsch, the famous theorist of trauma cultures, believes is the need of the hour (1212).

However, questions have often been raised about whether comics and graphic novels can be considered real literature and, consequently, their reading as real or not. Both Rocco Versaci and Hillary Chute consider the graphic novel as real literature in the most pertinent way. Versaci wrote, “If one characteristic of good literature is that it challenges our way of thinking, then comics’ cultural position is such that they are able to mount these challenges in unique ways....” He further wrote, “Like Literature comics contain written narrative and dialogue, and they employ devices such as characterisation, conflict, plot, and all of those components of well-written fiction...” (12-13). On the other hand, Hillary Chute believes comics and graphic novels are a re-working and innovation of traditional literature (462). Comics and graphic novels entail equal cognitive and intellectual activity from the readers. The spaces between the panels (gutter) give the readers enough time to ponder the events and characters of a graphic novel. Besides, children’s graphic novels can also pose a challenge at the syntactical level. Such novels sometimes prepare children for higher education and career using complex vocabulary. For example, Book I of Ben Hatke’s famous children’s graphic novel *Zita the Spacegirl* (2011) constantly includes challenging sentence structure and vocabulary. So we notice Zita defines a Screed in the novel in these words, “The dangerous, agile, and enigmatic...tend to wander the universe working as bounty hunters and mercenaries” (57). However, such a complex description is easily perceivable when a child associates it with the illustrations in the novel.

Initially, comics and graphic novels were not received cordially; rather, there have been campaigns against the use of comics and graphic novels in the classroom. Such dissent began with burning many popular comics and graphic novels in the United States in the early 1950s. Popular comic superheroes like Batman, Wonder Woman, and Superman were reviled as either homosexual or unrealistic. Many critics even



complained against these formats for explicitly depicting and illustrating sexual scenes and violence. In the present era, many arguments have been raised regarding using comics and graphic novels in the classroom. Many scholars point out that excessive use of illustration in comics and graphic novels often leads to the demise of children's imagination. Many also complain that using these formats instead of traditional textbooks would lead to the overall decline of literacy. Even teachers face many problems in using graphic novels in the classroom as this is just an emerging genre; they often struggle to adopt a perfect strategy for teaching this genre. It often remains a challenge for curriculum developers to include pertinent graphic novels for children that will be pedagogically appropriate. Many teachers also find it very difficult to arrange a group reading in the classroom while teaching a graphic novel.

However, while teaching in the classroom, graphic novels offer many benefits and opportunities to different kinds of readers. One of the major problems teachers face in a classroom is choosing the right teaching method according to students' cognitive level. There are students of various cognitive and intelligence levels in a classroom, making it onerous for teachers to adopt a general method. In this context, Askin Yildirim pointed out how graphic novels provide the opportunity for learning for three types of students in a single classroom (124). First, for students capable of visualizing a scenario or event, their imagination is spurred by the illustration in a graphic novel. It gives them a new way to imagine and understand the context and events of work, prompting them to active reading. Secondly, many students rely on a work's linguistic aspect and focus on developing linguistic intelligence. Comics and graphic novels are dear to such readers with their witty vocabulary and short sentences. The third type of readers in a classroom is those who prefer to discuss a textbook with their friends and classmates. It is the general tendency of most students to discuss a topic with their friends. Graphic novels, with their dynamic events and dialogue, are perfect for building up such communication among students, which is the trait of a perfect classroom.

Nowadays, teachers and parents often remain confused about whether they should allow their children to read a graphic novel or not. It is a common misconception that reading graphic novels or comics is nothing but a pastime without any genuine learning. However, a study reveals that such formats render immense scope for children to develop their various skills passionately. For example, graphic novels are the main tools for children's visual literacy. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)



emphasized that reading graphic novels proffers skills like understanding the sequence of events and interpreting characters' gestures and a plot. For example, in Book I of Luke Pearson's children's graphic novel *Hilda and the Troll* (2010), several panels on page 47 depict Hilda is stuck in a tent while it is raining outside. From her facial expression, one can interpret that she is pleased with the sound of the rain outside and the overall atmosphere. For dyslexic readers, graphic novels, with its illustration, act as a blessing. So Meryl Jaffe points out that graphic novels, with their "incredible art and text that unfolds in a multimedia story experience," attract strong language learners and weak or second-language learners (10).

Besides dyslexic readers, graphic novels are beneficial for young reluctant readers also. As children are easily attracted to pictures, graphic novels attract them more than any other format. With easy visualization of action, children feel they are in the novel's action. It helps them understand the story deeply. Meryl Jaffe praised such engaged reading and wrote, "This creative and interactive process makes reading engaging and often more fun" (3). Some important graphic novels for reluctant readers include *Captain Underpants* (1997) novel series by Dav Pilkey, which narrates most hilariously the journey of a superhero. James Patterson's *Middle School, the Worst Years of My Life* (2011) is about Rafe Khatchadorian, whose aim is to sustain school life by breaking every law of school. The Australian author Aaron Blabey's famous children's graphic novel series *The Bad Guys* (2015) humorously describes the four characters' attempt to become heroes, denying their social status as criminals. Finally, Max Brallier's *The Last Kids on Earth* (2015) series surely can engage children in reading by depicting an apocalyptic scenario.

Graphic novels also help to develop critical thinking among children. It often becomes difficult for children, especially those with weak cognitive skills, to interpret a traditional text's abstract concepts, images, and metaphors. However, graphic novels with visualization and sequence of events make such critical interpretation easy for children. While writing about the benefits of reading the graphic novel for children, Kami Garcia, one of the bestselling graphic novelists from America, emphasized how this format develops empathy among children. She wrote, "The art in graphic novels make it easier for readers to relate to the characters and imagine how it would feel to be in a similar (heart-breaking) situation, which builds empathy" (web). For example, Dav Pilkey's *Dog Man: Mothering Heights* series (2021) focuses on themes like empathy, persistence, and kindness through its characters.



The prospect of comics and graphic novels replacing the traditional textbooks, especially for children, is very high. This will make learning easy, entertaining, and unique for children without missing the core knowledge. Such a giant step is possible because these formats cover children's essential fields of knowledge. From science to history, classics, or even Mathematics, graphic novels are available in all such fields of education. To cite examples, graphic novels like Jay Hoster's *Evolution: The Story of Life on Earth* (2011) and *Charles Darwin's on the Origin of Species: A Graphic Adaptation* (2009) by Michael Keller offer scientific knowledge in a revolutionary way. Even a popular and complex theory like Quantum theory is now made easy with its graphic version, *Quantum Theory: A Graphic Guide* (1992), by J.P. McEvoy and Oscar Zarate. Numerous graphic novels also provide information on History and Social Studies entertainingly. In this regard, Marcia William's *Greek Myths* (2011), Bentley Boyd's *The World War I Web* (2014), and *Slavery's Storm* (2003), which provides a detailed account of slavery worldwide, are worth mentioning. It is perhaps in the field of English literature that most popular books are adapted into graphic versions. Children do not need to read the authentic text of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or *King Lear* to get a basic idea about these classical English literature texts; their graphic adaptation is enough to provide the basic knowledge. The New Delhi-based publishing house, Campfire Graphic Novels, has substantially adapted popular texts like *Wuthering Heights*, *The Time Machine*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Moby Dick*, *Oliver Twist*, *Frankenstein*, and many more in graphic versions. One can learn basic grammar from graphic adaptations like *Super Grammar* (2012) by Tony Preciado. Now, Mathematics is no longer boring and difficult for kids; they can learn it for fun with many Manga versions like Iroha Inoue and Shin Takahashi's *The Manga Guide to Linear Algebra* (2012), Shin Takahashi's *The Manga Guide to Statistics* (2008) and many novels like these.

The best part about comics and graphic novels is that these formats proffer not only bookish knowledge to children but also life lessons that will guide them in their diurnal lives. One book which stands out in this regard is *Menstrupedia Comic: The Friendly Guide to Periods for Girls*, written by Indian Aditi Gupta and illustrated by her husband, Tuhin Paul. Published in 2014, *Menstrupedia Comic* is a detailed guide for grown-up girls about the menstruation cycles and their associated physical changes. The book is a neoteric change in Indian society, where talking about menstruation is often considered taboo, and a girl,



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while going through such a natural process, is judged as impure. Gupta faced such discrimination as she was barred from entering a religious place once during her period. Considering such experience, she wrote the comic to challenge stigmas regarding menstruation in India and normalize this physical process. Regarding the book's composition, Gupta also acknowledged the influence of Gloria Steinem's essay "If Men Could Menstruate." In the essay, Steinem humorously depicts men going through the menstrual process, and the process is celebrated rather than stigmatized. *Menstrupedia Comic* is written for girls ages nine or above. It is divided into four chapters, titled "Growing Up," "What Are Periods," "When is My Next Period," and "Taking Care during Periods."

In the first chapter of the book ("Growing Up"), the novelist details the stages of puberty and how girls witness physical and emotional change during this time through Priya, a doctor in the novel. In the second chapter ("What Are Periods"), Priya explains the process of the menstruation cycle and its relation to pregnancy to other girls in the novel like Pinki, Jiya, and Mira. In "When is My Next Period," Priya teaches the girls how to calculate their next period based on their last one. The last chapter ("Taking Care during Periods") delineates how one should take care of herself and maintain hygiene during this time. The book is unflinching in the Indian context not only for its content but for its illustration also. While most sanitary pad manufacturers use blue color for blood in their advertisements, the book has illustrated blood using red color. It was originally written in English but later translated into ten other Indian languages. Its popularity forced the writer to publish it in some foreign languages like Nepali, Spanish, Russian and Bulgarian. It is also noticeable that more than 250 schools in India and a few schools in Nepal, Nigeria, and many other countries have been using the book as a guide for girls. Inspired by the popularity of *Menstrupedia Comic*, Aditi Gupta composed *Gulu: The Essential Guide to Growing Up for Boys* (2021). This book guides boys during puberty and explicitly discusses topics like masturbation, addiction, or physical attraction towards others during this stage.

Another graphic novel for children which imparts some necessary life lessons is *When Stars Are Scattered* (2020) by Omar Mohamed and Victoria Jamieson. The book is a graphic memoir of Omar Mohamed and largely focuses on his life with his brother Hassan in the refugee camp in Kenya during the Civil War in Somalia. Omar's father was killed in the war, and the brothers separated from their mother and



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sisters. They eventually took shelter in a refugee camp where Fatuma, a foster mother, took care of them. Life in the refugee camp in Dadaab is difficult and traumatic, especially for a boy of only four years of age. Omar had to stand in queue for hours for food, water, or medical treatment. The arduous responsibility of his brother, who could not speak, was on Omar's shoulder. He often used to play with Hassan and entertained him in every possible way. Taking admission to a school for Omar might pave his future, but that meant he had to leave his brother alone at the camp. With such a poignant story and equally eye-catching illustration by Victoria Jamieson, the book teaches children the value of love, brotherhood, and a never-give-up attitude. The book won Walter Dean Myers Award for Young Readers and was a finalist for the 2020 National Book Award for Young People's Literature.

One of the most important things children should learn while in school is friendship – how to make a friend and perpetuate that friendship. Upon this friendship, Jen Wang has based her amazing children's graphic novel *Stargazing* (2019). The book follows the life of Christine and Moon, two contrastive characters, and how they finally become a best friend. Growing up in the same Chinese-American suburb, the two characters were unknown to each other until Christine's father helped Moon's family by giving them shelter in his house. Christine grew up under strict rules and regulations and is always ruminative about her study. On the other hand, Moon is a braver character with free will and fond of dancing. With time, they soon become a best friend, helping each other in their daily affairs. Middle-grade students can easily find familiarity in Christine and Moon's friendship, especially in how Christine becomes jealous when Moon makes new friends in the school. Although jealous, Christine defends Moon when Christine's father scolds the latter. This shows that friendship has made Christine a mature girl who no longer fears her father's strictness. In this way, the novel teaches something to both the adult and the children: for adults, the book instructs not to be strict with children all the time, and for children, it preaches to always stand beside a true friend. The novel also presents before children the diversity of culture and its importance in the present time. In the context of the novel, we notice two neighboring families are going through different experiences, which brings the essential societal and cultural diversity of which children must be aware. So in the Afterword, Jen Wang describes the novel's aim as to show "the diversity of experiences even within a very specific community."



Like *When Stars Are Scattered*, another children's graphic novel based on the intimate relationship between siblings is *Ghosts* (2016) by Raina Telgemeier. Like her earlier three novels – *Smile* (2010), *Drama* (2012), and *Sisters* (2014) – *Ghosts* also became a favorite of middle-grade schoolchildren. At the novel's beginning, Catrina and Maya move to Bahia de la Luna, a new town in Northern California, from Southern California along with her parents. The move is mainly for Maya, who has been suffering from cystic fibrosis, and the family believes the fresh sea air might improve her condition. However, from Carlos, a boy in the town, the two sisters come to know that the town is full of real ghosts. The idea of ghosts creates a sense of fear in Catrina, and she worries for Maya also. On the other hand, Maya is ready for a daring adventure like meeting the ghosts, which she believes is a preparation for her journey into the next world. Maya's meeting with real ghosts in the novel leads to her hospitalization, for which Catrina blames herself. In Catrina and Maya's relationship, Telgemeier includes all the ingredients required for a perfect sibling relationship: love, adoration, and protectiveness. One of the main aims of the novel, as Telgemeier described, was to make children fearless of the idea of death and ghosts, and she is certainly triumphant in her aim. So in an interview with Barrie Hardyman, Telgemeier described this aim in these words, "I think most kids – most people probably – have some sort of fear of death, including myself. And the idea of making it not scary but something jovial has always appealed to me. And so in depicting the ghosts in this book... I wanted them to be friendly."

We learn important life lessons, like accepting everyone as they are, during our childhood. Upon such a lesson, Cece Bell has based her graphic memoir *El Deafo* (2014). The novel narrates Cece's life as a deaf child and her struggle to make friends during her school days. When she was only four years old, Cece became completely deaf. Although she could listen to everything with Phonic Ear's help, she became different in the eyes of everyone. Throughout her school days, Cece struggled to make friends with other students, which affected her mental health to a great extent. Soon she realized that she had to make friends with herself, and with the help of Phonic Ear, she gained the superpower of listening to teachers' private conversations. Ultimately she got her desired friend, a friend who would never consider her as different. The novel teaches that we should accept our weakness and ourselves no matter how different it is from others; such embracing will eventually make us stronger like Cece. The novel also preaches that children must be



taught to be sensitive towards such different people; they should show empathy to such special people. For the novelist, being different is an opportunity to become something amazing. So she wrote in the novel, “And being different? That turned out to be the best part of all. I found that with a little creativity, a lot of education, any difference can be turned into something amazing. Our differences are our superpowers” (241).

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Growth of Audiobooks and Podcasts at Pandemic and Post Pandemic Era: A Comprehensive Study

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Abstract: Technological developments have made it possible to design and recreate educational content in various forms such as audio, video and texts. With the help of emerging technology, when the text of a book is converted into audio recording, it produces audiobooks. Podcasts are digital versions of audio files in a sequence that elicits curiosity and interest among listeners of all age groups. The post-personal computer (PC) generation uses audio content and tends to request audiobooks and podcasts as a form of educational means. With the advent of Covid-19 pandemic, this tendency got an upsurge where people being confined at home and getting bored of conventional means of education and entertainment. It gave them a scope to explore and look for innovative means that would entertain and educate them at the same time. The Covid-19 pandemic serves as an ideal platform when people tried and experimented with online innovations and that paved the way for audiobooks and podcasts. The flexibility and versatility of audiobooks and podcasts make this medium as a potent mechanism for passive learning. With this understanding and popularity of audiobooks and podcasts, it was incorporated and effectively launched by educational institutions. Accordingly, various subjects and representation methods have been explored in both audiobooks and podcasts. Audiobooks and podcasts - their inception, genres, methods of narration, usage and popularity have been reflected in this paper.

Key words: Audiobooks, podcasts, education, entertainment, Covid-19.

Introduction

Technology has significantly impacted almost every phase of our lives, and education is no exception. Digital technologies have created educational content in various forms, namely, videos, audios, and texts. With the universal usage of the internet, a massive amount of information is available at one's fingertip, specifically through audios, videos and images. Besides, learning opportunities are available worldwide through online degree programs, blogs, audiobooks, podcasts, and many more. Thus, access to



learning opportunities is unlimited in scope, thanks to technology that has given birth to the smart education system. The smart education process aims to answer questions about the usage of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational systems, the impact of digital technologies on the perception and the discernment of reality, social interactions, and educational practices. One of the elements of the smart education system is a new format of electronic libraries, which consists of e-books and multimedia sources, including audiobooks, podcasts, audio and, video materials. The post-personal computer (PC) generation prefers and uses audio content; subsequently, a tendency has been developing in terms of liking audiobooks and podcasts. The evolution of audiobooks and podcasts and their increasing popularity have been explored in this study.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. Evolution of audiobooks and podcasts
2. Usage of audiobooks and podcasts as books
3. Growing popularity of audiobooks and podcasts

History of Audiobooks and Podcasts

It is an amazing fact to note that things move cyclically. Oral transmission of knowledge dates back to the time of Vedas when the Gurus used to impart oral lessons to their students without written information. Over the years, the spoken word was written down, and everyone began to learn by reading. Recently, with the advent of audiobooks and podcasts, users have gone back to learning by listening.

Audiobooks originated over a century ago and have been remediated in several iterations. First, it was introduced as phonographic books, remediated into books on tape, which allowed mobility. However, carrying a phonograph player on a car or train was cumbersome and the portable cassette players replaced it. Second, the cassette play was frequently used in cars during 1970's and 1980's. Third, books on tape became remediated into digital books on compact discs (CD) at the beginning of the 1980's (Colbjornsen, T., 2015b), allowing for effortless mobility. The CD accommodated many discs or tapes to make a single unabridged audiobook (Rubery, 2016). The introduction of MP3 in the late 1990's, offered an opportunity for an audiobook to be continued on a single high-capacity CD discs (Whitten, 2002). The multi-disc CD book has been the dominant audiobook format in libraries and bookshops for more than 20 years (Whitten, 2002; Colbjornsen, 2015). Fourth, digital audiobooks were further remediated when it was



available to download it on a computer or a mobile phone. The emergence of subscription services for digital audiobooks initiated the fifth remediation. With the changing times, various audiobook remediations follow technical advancements. Like MP3 players, the iPod was invented in the early 2000s and it became possible to download and carry a full digital audiobook on a small device. Today's ubiquitous smart phone has replaced the need for a special device as streaming or downloading subscription-based audiobooks is done through a mobile app. The innovation of on-ear, in-ear speakers, blue tooth-enabled headphones and ear buds has made reading by listening wireless possible.

The term Podcasts originated in 2004 when a BBC journalist coined this term by combining 'iPod' and 'broadcast' in one of his articles. It was meant to upload content in the public domain and it can be listened to on an iPod. The iPod was developed in India around 2005 when Apple updated iTunes to support podcasts. There has been significant growth in the number of listeners over the years, and as .per the 'Pricewaterhouse Coopers' Media and Entertainment Outlook 2020' report, India has claimed as the third largest podcast listening market after China and the US.

Audiobooks as Books

Books are characterized by their physical properties, such as being bound or containing several pages, whereas audio books are counted in minutes or hours instead of pages. The duration of minutes or hours denotes nothing about the content of the audiobook. The content is the spoken word –recorded with the help of one or more narrators. Have and Pedersen defined audiobook as "a sound recording of a book read aloud by a performing narrator" (Have and Pedersen 2016, p.154). Similarly, Rubery defined audiobook as "a single speaker's word-for-word recording of a book originally published in print." (Rubery,2016). Conventionally, audiobooks have comprised recordings of already published books. However, with its increasing popularity, such a trend is changing. They are becoming increasingly popular due to their flexible and versatile nature, and the content is easily accessible on electronic devices, irrespective of time and place. Thus, reading is enjoyable as known stories can be perceived as new. Nowadays, several narrators are incorporated in audiobook recordings. A book with different chapters having different characters is portrayed by multiple actors with distinct voices for each character, making the reader captivated by the content. Including music or sound effects in some audiobooks adds ingredients beyond the book's scope; it remediates. Moreover, readers do not have to strain their eyes and maintain attention for a long time. Experts



believe that listening to an audiobook is a passive activity compared to reading which requires active behaviours such as interpretation and decryption. The factors affecting the concentration of attention in the sapience of an audiobook are highly debatable, and opposite opinions are expressed. A comparative analysis of book sapience practices is presented in the study by Rogowsky, it traced no distinct changes on any part of a popular science book that was presented in an audio book, electronic text or dual mode. Also, a comparable understanding of the text is presented irrespective of its content. S.Barinova remarks that an audiobook can seek attention for a longer period.

Audiobooks in India appeared later than the rest of the world. India's first audio novel, titled 'Ouija Board' was released by Kathacate (2018) in Malayalam. They are released now in various Indian languages and are most preferred by the urban Indian population of youngsters and middle- aged individuals. Listening to audiobooks can take place at any time of the day, being at home or outside, and even while being engaged in other activities. Some popular audiobook platforms that deserve special mention are as follows: Spotify, LibriVox, Audible, Lit2Go, Audiobooks.com, BBC Sounds, Rakuten Kobo, Open Culture etc. City dwellers prefer business and self-help books over fiction or non-fiction. Audiobooks are seen as a source of self-improvement and education rather than entertainment.

The table (**Table 1**) represented below reflects its usage(%) in different locations:

Narrative Styles of Audiobooks

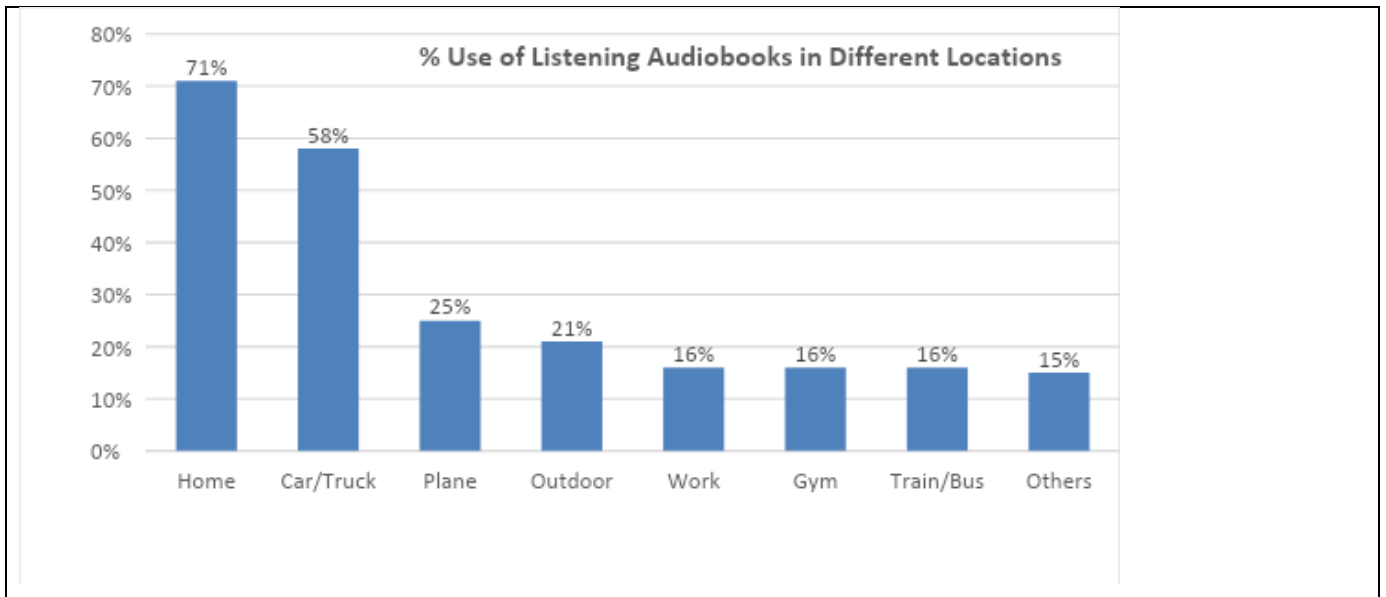
Different genres of audiobooks are represented in various styles of narration. They are classified into 4 distinct categories. They are as follows: Solo narration, Dual narration, Duet narration and Full cast narration.

Solo Narration

It is the entire voice over of a book by a single narrator. This is the most common type of audiobooks narration where the narrator speaks for all the characters. All the multiple points of view are expressed by the single narrator. The Alchemist narrated by Jeremy Irons, The Psychology of Money by Morgan Housel, A Promise Land by Barack Obama, The Greatest Secret by Rhonda Bryne are few of the best solo narration audiobooks of varying durations.

Table 1

Percentage Use of Listening Audiobooks in Different Locations (as of June 2018)



Developed by the author from the source: Sockel, Adam, “The statistics behind audiobooks’ continued growth”, <https://perspectivesonreading.com/the-statistics-behind-audiobooks-continued-growth/>, June 2018

Dual Narration

Dual narration is when an audiobook is read by two or more narrators, each from a different point of view. Despite the shifts in point of view, each narrator stays focused on the character they are given. For instance if a book alternates between two points of view in each chapter, it can employ two narrators who switch off throughout each chapter. Heartwood, From Shadow and Silence, Boink, You Spin Me, I’ve Got You are some of the popular dual narration audiobooks of varied time span.

Narration in Pair

Another form of storytelling that employs two or more narrators is duet narration. Each narrator in this kind of narration is in charge of expressing a particular character rather than a point of view. This could imply that in a duet narrative, the narrators switch voices more frequently and more frequently during a chapter or



page. Ruthless creatures, My Soul to Keep, Willow of Ashes, Tempting Fate, Princess Ballot are few that deserves a special mention.

Full cast Narration

An audiobook's full cast narration, also known as cinematic narration, employs a large number of narrators. In this type of narration, an actor is assigned to perform the voice of each character that appears, often with a single narrator reading the descriptions and non-dialogue writing. This type of audiobooks continue to attract more listeners as they have sound effects which include animal and weather noises outside, or sounds of people doing vital things like banging on doors [<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/narrating-audiobooks-jobs>]. The Golden Compass, Sour Heart, Six of Crows, Sandry's Book, Sleeping Giants etc are some of the well-known audiobooks.

The Advent of Covid-19 and Subsequent Growth in Audiobooks

With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, parents were working from home, taking care of their children simultaneously and purchasing more audiobooks for children than printed books. The audiobooks had varied genres narrated in innovative styles that appealed to children and adults.["Audiobooks market size, share and trends analysis report by genre, by the preferred device (smartphones, laptops and tablets, personal digital assistants), by distribution channel, by the target audience, by region, and segment forecasts, 2020–2027."] The year 2021 witnessed 73% of parents purchasing audiobooks, a 4% rise from the previous year. The increase in the listening habits was partly due to the consistent efforts made by the parents to reduce screen time. Children's listening habits were inculcated partly by the teachers and the librarians. During the pandemic, children were not in the classroom and had to concentrate on a computer screen for eight hours a day taxing their eyes and developing minds. In response to this crisis, some schools attempted to assimilate more audiobooks to keep in touch with lessons. By listening to audiobooks students can learn more complex vocabulary, gain better pronunciation and listening skills, promote story structure based on the reader's tone, and more by listening to audiobooks alone. Some students are better auditory learners than visual learners and find it difficult to focus on a written content. Thus, listening to audiobooks is more appealing to them than reading books. In addition to auditory learning, the APA studied the usage of audiobooks and listening speed; they described 40% of all audiobooks followers claimed listening aided them to be faster with more titles. Due to convenience and pace, 56% of people who read print books and



listened digitally preferred to listen to their audiobooks. Especially during the pandemic, when people suffered from stress, isolation, and anxiety, listeners found human voices fulfilling their needs rather than reading a physical book. In fact, audiobooks are brain stimulating and relaxing; thus they have helped students of all ages learn and have been an effective tool to comfort and cheer. Thus the audiobooks industry gained more popularity in the first year of the pandemic than other retail industries because of their online business. Audio publishers could digitally send advanced listening copies (ALC) to their listeners even when the shipments were delayed during the pandemic. [Mary Beth Roche (President and Publisher, Macmillan Audio) in discussion with the author, Maria Snelling.] Thus, technological advancements greatly aided the audio industry and could prosper in mid-2020, whereas other businesses suffered a major setback.

Podcasts as Books

A podcast is digital audio content consisting of interviews, conversations, documentaries or narrative content similar to television series, which the audience can listen to at their freedom and pace. Just like books, podcasts are also published regularly. They follow radio and television broadcasting practices, consisting of seasons and episodes and they are released following a predictable schedule. (Bottomley, A. J., 2015). Podcasts can avoid the editing headaches associated with publishing houses, the expense of infrastructure, the programming restrictions, and the requirement for a broadcasting time slot. Since the content of the podcast is unrestricted, perceived as honest, and stands in stark contrast to its tightly controlled radio relative. Podcasts have started producing short audio stories and are released regularly in installments. Berry (2016) has argued that an active listener of podcasts listens to the content from the beginning to the end rather than tuning in and out of radio airwaves. These features are helpful when podcasts are used for education, at a point of time when distance and online learning have become the need of the hour. A large number of educational institutions have introduced podcasts in their learning curriculum. Teachers can also use podcasts as a medium, to enhance learning beyond the periphery of the classroom. (Hasan, 2013) The activity of students sharing book reviews in the form of podcasts is a fascinating way for students acquainted with the technology. The creation of podcasts after reading a book can increase speaking, listening and communication skills that can't be learned inside the classroom. (Panday, P. P., 2009). Apart from education, diverse disciplines are covered in podcasts: politics, sports, entertainment, finance etc. Popular platforms of podcasts are as follows: Apple Podcasts, Castbox, Google Podcasts, Stitcher, iHeartRadio, etc



Narrative Styles of Podcasts

Interview Podcasts

Interview podcasts involve one or two hosts who speak to one or two guests in each episode. It is a great way to elicit various opinions and viewpoints. Fresh Air with Terry Gross, The Joe Rogan Experience, WTF with Marc Maron, Armchair Expert with Dax Shepard are some of the best interview podcasts of recent times.

Conversational Podcasts

Conversational Podcasts have entertaining conversations between two podcast hosts discussing specific themes and topics, similar to a radio show. Anna Faris is Unqualified, Song Exploder, The Lady Genius and Beautiful Anonymous are some of the podcasts that attracted considerable number of listeners.

Monologue Podcasts

Monologue Podcasts have a single host who speaks alone all throughout the episode. The host should have considerable knowledge of topics to fill in many episodes. Kyle's Internal Monologue, The Attic Monologues, The Psych Monologues, The Hannity Monologues are few of the many that deserve special mention.

Roundtable Podcasts

Roundtable Podcasts have a group of hosts who voice their opinions on specific topics. They split the workload among a number of people, thus it is convenient for each speaker who do not have the entire responsibility upon his own shoulder. Some of the eminent ones are: The Reason Roundtable, Missionary Roundtable, Patriot Roundtable.

Theatrical Podcasts

Theatrical podcasts can have a single host or an entire group of performers and sound engineers. They exhibit a high level of creativity and can keep the listeners engaged. Take Me to Coffee, The Theatre History Podcast, What If, What Now, What Next are some of the top theatrical podcasts.

Hybrid Podcasts

Hybrid podcasts are mix and match of basic podcast formats and it helps to create the own style of the narrator. Hybrid teaching, Hybrid Unlimited, Hybrid Identity Protection Podcasts, Grow Glow and Inspire are liked because of their creativity and innovativeness.



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Rise of Podcasts During Pandemic

Podcasts offered screen-free entertainment amidst the restricted lifestyles of the pandemic. The increase in the usage of podcasts (particularly the local ones) was due to the strong appetite for self-driven and motivating content. The content based on entertainment, self-development, and awareness motivated the younger generations and they also developed a deep connection with the hosts of the podcasts, which is not the case with visual content. The podcast's content is available in varied languages and covers a wide area, and it has become one of the most diverse content-driven industries in the world. The year 2020 has witnessed a growth of 200 times in the content of Spotify (World's largest music and podcast streaming platform) along with local creators. The popularity of podcasts is also attributed to the listener's intense liking for self-help and motivating content. According to a survey conducted by Spotify in 2022, it was detected that 50% of Indians listen to one episode of a podcast once a week and it gives them the opportunity to explore wide variety of content. Thus, the content of podcast has evolved significantly since its inception and is one of the most diversified content-driven industries in the country.

Conclusion

Audiobooks and podcasts have been explored in this paper, and attempts have been made to point them out as a versatile tool offering a wide range of subjects with multipurpose utilities. In recent times, they have taken the role of books. They not only have a special appeal to students but also to the teachers. Its wide variety of content provides recreation and entertainment to people of all ages. Both audiobooks and podcasts can be accessed at any time simply by having an internet connection and an android phone. Thus, both are used as cognitive tools as they assist the learners in extending their knowledge. Here, then lies the justification of audiobooks and podcasts and their growing popularity. Feeding forward, this paper tries to inform future thinking regarding what is possible for audiobooks and podcasts to assist learning inside and outside of educational institutions.

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Attitudes to Prostitution: A Study of Manik Bandopadhyay's "The Final Solution"

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Abstract: Manik Bandopadhyay's "The Final Solution" is a notable short story where he represents woman as the subject and active agent not as passive recipient, keeping aside the popular tendency of androcentrism in the history of partition. Providing an alternative history, this short story presents its female protagonist Mallika as an active participant of the post-partition changes. The story narrates the agony of the young mother Mallika who chooses prostitution to sustain her family and especially her little son. The family's prolonged starvation and her husband's inability to earn their livelihood make her so desperate that she accepts the job of prostitution. In this article we would like to focus her choice of prostitution from different feminist positions. There are varying opinions regarding feminist positions on prostitutions. This paper is an attempt to read Mallika's attitude to prostitution from her outlook of the liberal and radical feminist. This article details an analysis of Mallika's sentiments and thoughts regarding prostitution from these two primary feminist positions on prostitution.

Keywords: Partition, Prostitution, Liberal feminist, Radical feminist.

Introduction

Manik Bandopadhyay is a renowned Indian writer and one of the major novelists in the development of the 20th century Bengali literature. His literary career is enriched with famous novels and short stories. His notable fictional works are Padma Nadir Majhi (The Boatman on the River Padma), Putul Nacher Itikatha (The Puppet's Tale) and Chautoshkone (The Quadrilateral). He deals with the different problems in which the human beings become the worst victims. Sometimes he is interested in exploring the psychological condition of the protagonists of his fictions. He is a remarkable novelist with his representation of some characters who endure some extraordinary socio-political situations. Instead of making a subjective analysis of such socio-political crisis, he wants to depict the characters with their crisis and resolution.



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His literary career is enriched mainly with famous novels and short stories. His famous stories include “Sailaja Shila” (“Rocky Rocks”), “Pragoitihask” (“Primeval”), “Namuna” (“A Sample”). His short stories are marked with the same characteristics. Some of these specifics are the portrayal of poverty-stricken people in rural Bengal and the strong will power of the protagonists for survival amidst precarious condition.

Manik Bandopadhyay’s short story “The Final Solution” is a depiction of a female protagonist’s struggle against the hegemony of patriarchal Indian society. The story is more interesting as it is based on the background of the Partition. As we know that partition narratives always bear some memories of violence, this story is also not an exception to this. “The Final Solution” revolves around an impoverished family who migrated to West Bengal in the aftermath of the Partition of Bengal. Many Hindu migrants are forced to leave their homeland and from the villages of East Pakistan they came to a big city like Kolkata. This story explores the effect of the partition on a refugee family that was forced to abandon their homes for a more uncertain future.

Bandopadhyay highlights gender violence in the aftermath of the partition throughout his narration of a refugee woman, Mallika, the female protagonist of this story. The story exposes a tale of suffering, rape and sexual violence quite familiar in the aftermath of partition. The story depicts the gender megalomania that is exercised upon refugee women who were then in a state of precarious condition without their home and identity. A sense of non-belongingness always prevails in their mind. They are muted, excluded and marginalised from the history of mainstream people. They are exploited and suppressed doubly- first by the male members of their homeland and secondly by the male members of the strange land. After the migration, they are not familiar with the land where they arrive. They face some problems to adopt the new practices of this land. Anuparna Mukherjee in an article observes that they face extreme difficulties “in their new country as they realized that the natural surroundings, social customs and the daily rituals of the people were sometimes starkly different from their own”(97). Here partition adds more pain in their life by making them the innocent victims of gender violence. Their sense of detachment and the state of fluidity undergone by these refugee women are a major factor during partition. Their sudden and overnight transformation into refugees adds to their suffering and anxiety. Indeed, partition is a “grave misfortune”(Chakrabarty, 121) for such refugee women. Mallika, the refugee woman of this story, endeavours to sustain her livelihood and



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attempts to survive during such a crisis. So it is the story about Mallika's suffering and her struggle for survival during such socio-political turmoil.

This story is an interesting topic for research in the partition literature. Anuparna Mukherjee in an article espounded the "life-in-death" situation of the refugee woman Mallika (98). Sukannya Choudhury in "Transcending the Gendering of Partition: An Analysis of Manik Bandopadhyay's Short Story 'The Final Solution'" attempted to read this short story as an attempt to refashion the woman's role as "breadwinners to sustain their family changes their gender existence in the family and social politics" (128). After this brief overview, we would like to discuss Mallika's struggle from different feminist positions. Especially the story reveals the helpless state of Mallika as a young mother who tries to sustain her family particularly her little son. In such a difficult time, she agrees with the proposal of being involved in prostitution. In this article we would like to highlight Mallika's calm acceptance of prostitution from varying perspectives of feminism.

Theoretical Approach

In this section we would like to discuss very briefly about two different views on feminism, i.e. liberal and radical feminism. Feminism broadly refers to a political, social, cultural or economic movement for establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Liberal feminism, the oldest school of feminist thought, has emerged from the 19th century First-Wave feminism and liberal politics in the late 19th and early 20th century in the United States and Europe. Liberal feminism is based on two closely related elements. Firstly, women are rational individuals entitled to inseparable and universal human rights. Secondly, liberal feminism has the aim to encourage a unique life style amongst women. They promote this different lifestyle by focusing on individuality, subjective feelings and free choice of the women. Seminal texts emphasizing equal rights and privileges for women and men include: John Locke's "Two Treatises of Government" (1690), Mary Wollstonecraft's "Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792) and John Stuart Mill's "The Subjection of Women" (1869).

Liberal feminists attempt to dismantle the patriarchal domination over social institutions that compel women to suppress their natural femininity. They consider that women should be treated equally rejecting the sexual differences. Liberal feminists highlight that the governance of society would be better noticeable by a more broad-ranging outlook on women. According to them, this liberal attitude towards women would also be helpful in the socio-economic realm of the world. The significant achievements of liberal feminists



are: a new political identity for women, public emancipation, and struggle for vote, contraception and abortion.

Now we would try to refer to another important school of thought of feminism, i.e. radical feminism. Where liberal feminism hesitates to go forward, radical feminism marched. Radical feminism has its root in Second Wave feminism which was initially concentrated in the United States of America and then spread to other Western countries. While the First Wave was largely concerned with the suffragette struggle for the vote, the Second Wave focused more on both public and private injustices. They raise their raging voices against rape, and domestic violence. The workplace safety was brought to the forefront of the movement. There was widespread effort to reform the negative and inferior image of women in popular culture to a more positive and realistic one. The radical feminists show their rage against the patriarchal hegemony. It is actually the “rage of women against the shackles of male power, a rage which became channelled into numerous acts of militancy and direct action against patriarchy” (Whelehan, 67). Their rage is against the patriarchy and they believe that gender is a socio-culturally constructed notion which permeates all forms of oppression on women.

These two accepted social and political philosophy on feminism express their different views regarding a woman’s acceptance of the job of a prostitute. Liberal feminists have a liberal view of prostitution, arguing that women should have the legal right of independence to choose prostitution as a permissible occupation. Their argument "implies that there is nothing wrong with prostitution that is not also wrong with other forms of work" (Pateman, 129). They defend this choice by citing privacy and also by emphasizing the importance of independent choice. They support the liberty of one’s decision about sexual orientation and choice of partners.

The renowned radical feminist Evelina Giobbe thinks that "[d]ismantling the institution of prostitution is the most formidable task facing contemporary feminism (126)". The radical feminists attempt to dismantle this profession of prostitution as it suggests women’s subordination to male needs. This subordination is one of the fundamental forms of oppression. This oppression has its root in the notion of gender discrimination. The feminists attempt to differentiate the notion of gender and sex. According to



Simon De Beauvoir “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (295). So gender is a socio-culturally constructed notion that promotes the oppression of women in patriarchal society. The radical feminists argue that the job of prostitution asserts the subordination and exploitation of women’s bodies on the basis of male needs. According to them, women are dehumanized and merely treated as objects in this profession. The radical feminists criticise the stance of the liberal feminists regarding prostitution. They call them as only "reluctantly feminist" because it does not think about the sexual subordination of women as a class (Freeman, 239).

Textual Analysis

Displacement and dispossession are the key points of discussion in the prose narrative as Bandopadhyay writes, “Even a few days back, one could see the forlorn dispossessed people, spending their days and nights, huddled together like herds of cattle, and goats in the shelter of a railway platform (p.19)”. So it is the story about the refugee problem in Kolkata which was a direct aftermath of the 1947 partition. Many of the Hindu families who left their homes in East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) and came to West Bengal in India, could not find refuge in the over-crowded camps. They were forced to settle in any place they could find including public places like the Sealdah Railway Station. The protagonist of the story resides on this railway platform. The very precariousness and transitoriness of such a location foregrounds the family’s rootless existence. When Pramatha comes to Mallika with the offer of ‘some jobs still available for women’ (21), she understands the risk in this job. As a mother, she feels helpless by looking at her little son who is ‘now reduced to a skeleton’. She feels the evil mind of Pramatha as he says “there are no jobs for men. Men are out of work everywhere” (21). Mallika’s husband Bhushan who is suffering from high fever is thus being denied of as an active male member without having the ability of earning their livelihood. As Mallika finds no other way out of their survivals she asks her husband, “there’s no other way out for us, is there? What do you say?” (21). Though Bhushan does not utter a word, he is angry with Pramatha’s proposal as well as Mallika’s acceptance of the job of a prostitute. Mallika desperately cries out “oh God, why has fate brought me to this pass” (21). This voice does never show that she is making a plea to God, rather she



is attempting to dismiss God's existence in this world. It is her maternal feeling which compels her to be bold enough for continuing her life struggle. With the hope of getting a room and some milk for her child she is ready to serve as a prostitute.

Mallika's choice for this job is her independent choice and this is the view of the liberal feminists. The liberal feminists argue that the choice to be involved in prostitution is like the decision of being engaged in any other employment. In order to choose the most advantageous profession a woman may weigh her option and if she chooses prostitution as her profession she deserves the same rights and privileges like other women engaged in other occupations. This argument suggests the liberal ideals of "individualism, equality of opportunity, and the free market to sexual life" (Pateman, 217). These feminist theorists advocate for the legalization of prostitution. If we analyse Mallika's job of prostitution from the standpoint of liberal feminists, we realize that everything in the life of such refugee mother centres on her little son. She is in the midst of extreme difficulties and in this moment she shows her disgust and anger towards the child: "Mallika pushed the child away from her lap on to the ground, her eyes glittering: Her fury and disgust seemed to centre on the child" (23). Though Mallika can understand the villainy and the treacherous intension of Pramatha's job offering, she is so helpless that she agrees with Pramatha's plan. It is also her agony as a mother, which forces her to compromise her body and self-respect and she says to her sister-in-law Asha, "I would be ready to die if that could keep my children alive" (23). She knows that the child can't survive without her mother and therefore she does not hesitate to give in to Pramatha's villainy. Bhushan has been presented as a passive and diseased male member of the family who does not have any role for the family's survival. Bandopadhyay here dismantles the patriarchal superiority and breaks all the social boundaries by referring to Mallika as the only bread earner of her family. Bhushan is muted here and the world, even his own existence does not have any meaning for him. "But for Mallika, a roof above their heads was the primary need" (24). Mallika's decision of being employed as a prostitute reminds us the story of Sunny Carter in her article "A Most Useful Tool". Carter uses prostitution as a tool to make her life better. She writes: "Prostitution, in itself, is neither good nor bad. Each woman brings to it what she will. How else can a woman without the years of education necessary to become a doctor or lawyer still earn the kind of money a lawyer or doctor earns? In fewer hours? How else could I have had so much time to spend with my son, when time



was so precious” (116)? This observation is obviously reflected through Mallika’s acceptance of prostitution as a means of her survival.

When Pramatha sends a car for Mallika, her sister-in-law wants to go to do the job and Mallika also tells by grasping her hand, “I’ll be grateful to you, Thakurjhi, if you go ... that’ll make us the abandoned people, come alive again. We will be indebted to you, dear” (27). But Pramatha’s assistant Ramlochan objects to this and declares Pramatha’s wish is for Mallika, not for Asha. Therefore Mallika has to follow Ramlochan for whatever path is destined for her. Mallika is strong enough to be involved in prostitution to sustain her family and specially her little son. Yet she is repulsed when Pramatha makes sexual advances to her. Whereas prostitution is humiliating yet depersonalized and necessary, she must engage in it in the hope of a better present for her son. Pramatha's violation of her body is like a personal betrayal of her trust in him. The act of betrayal breaks the boundaries of her patience and she strangles him to death: “She loosened the knot unrolled sari and slipped her hand into his vest-pocket and took out wads of bank notes” (29). The money she takes from the dead man’s pocket represents ‘The Final Solution’ to her. The act of murdering Pramatha empowers her and she decides henceforth to carry a knife when engaging with men because violence has become the very consequence of human negotiation during partition, as Mallika says, “But this time I’ll carry a sharp knife with me, you understand, Thakurjhi. I’ll hide it so that no one finds out ...” (30). From a victim she becomes an agent of her own and her family’s destiny. Any moral guilt that she might have felt is erased by the fierce mother-love that propels her. The ending of the story as well as Mallika’s boldness defies her anger against this patriarchal society which forces her to be involved in prostitution. “The. . . patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection, and sexual mastery is the major means through which men affirm their manhood” (Pateman, 131). Prostitution literally means the male domination over the female bodies and radical feminists therefore cannot accept this as legitimate profession. Mallika’s anger actually exposes her struggle against the male domination and according to Freeman Mallika as a strong lady murders the male agency of prostitution as she believes “that prostitution is not a harmless, 'private' transaction but a powerful means of creating, reinforcing, and perpetuating the objectification of women through sexuality (242).”



Conclusion

Thus Mallika's life struggle can be interpreted from two perspectives of feminism: liberal feminism and radical feminism. There is no uniformity regarding feminist attitudes on prostitution. However, many surveys conducted over the last few decades reveals two different views on feminism which are contrary to each other regarding their opinions about prostitution. Some feminists, known as liberal feminists, argue that the choice to be involved in prostitution is like the decision of being engaged in any other employment. These feminist theorists advocate for the legalization of prostitution. Another group of feminists, familiar as radical feminists consider that prostitution implies a system of gender inequality and oppression, and therefore they proclaim that women can never choose this profession willingly. They also argue that women are forced to engage in this profession by the hegemony of the patriarchal society. These radical feminists generally advocate for the eradication of prostitution as a profession. Mallika's attitudes towards prostitution are both liberal and radical.

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‘Memory’ and ‘Conflict’: Narratives of Violence and Identity in Nadifa Mohamed’s *The Orchard of Lost Souls*

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Abstract:

Memory and conflict both includes History in different ways as such memory recalls History but conflict reproduces new events in future. Memory and Conflict works simultaneously and thus it becomes two sides of a same coin. Memory certainly involves long-term conflict. Memory has its deep roots in narrative, identity, commemoration and emotions that are primarily connected with long-term conflict. Nadifa Mohamed’s *The Orchard of Lost Souls* discusses the political, economical and historical events of Somalia in 1987. Deqo, nine year old girl, Kawsar, a widow and Filsan, female soldier are the protagonists of the novel. These women protagonists go through violence yet they survive with strong notions. Being women they never fear about death and violence. This research article seeks to analyse the intersections between conflict and memory by examining the violence between the rebels and the dictator of the country.

Keywords: Violence, memory, conflict, identity, History.

In the study of memory, the term ‘collective memory’ links with the study of conflict like war,



genocide and partition. At the outset collective memory are the shared conversations and discussions about the past events without any sort of personal experiences. Through institutional and interpersonal communications, the social representation of the past helps to develop the study of memory. Liu and Hilton states that collective memory symbolically legitimizes the political schema by looking at the past to develop the present and the future.

Nadifa Mohamed, Somali British writer expresses the revolutionary state of Hargesia during 1990s. She explicitly narrates the fall of the country through three women protagonists namely Deqo, a nine year old girl, Kawar, an old and widow and Filsan, an active and young soldier. Nadifa Mohamed explains the dictatorship of the country and the poverty of the people. In Hargesia common people are treated as slaves. Hunger and uncleanliness are the predominant danger that threatens the country. These are also the reasons which cause civil war of the county. Thus the concept of memory, conflict, violence and identity arises in this research.

Identity and Cultural Memory is the interlinking implications on the remembrance of conflict and war. Countries and Nations memorialize conflict and war to connect narratives of the present with the past. Thus this connection provides collective national identity narrations that show temporal and geographical diversions among the nations. Danielle Drozdewski in his research article explains the link between memory, war and identity. He explains that:

Nation-based memories of war have long been linked to articulations of national identity, to patriotism and to efforts to sustain the importance of the past, both in a nation's present and in future oriented notions of cultural and collective identity. (Drozdewski)

Despite of defeat or victory, both conflict and war repeatedly interrupt the stability of the country's memory time zone and also leaves the memories of the suffering, trauma and the wounding. In order to empathize towards the people who lost their lives, the wounds are felt in the geographical structure of a nation like buildings, monuments, cityscapes and artifacts. These are the material structure of a nation to exhibit memory and through its psyche or with the intellect of identity it helps to recover from trauma of the past. The aspect of social and collective memory encompasses cultural memory of the nation. To explain the concept of Astrid Erll, Drozdewski says that, "cultural serves to embed memory in the practices, stories, myths, monuments, events, rituals and other configurations of cultural knowledge that weave together past



and present amid their socio-cultural contexts” (Drozdzewski).

In the aspect of Memory and War whether collective or individual memory both experiences the narrations of armed conflicts which impacts the lives of the affected persons and thus it raises the question of identity. Memory plays the role of shaping the future though it is not visible. Kwok Kian- Woon in the article “Southeast Asia and the Politics of Contested Memories” explains the various dimensions on memory, as he says:

Memory can be thought of in its several dimensions as trace (as a form of historical evidence, whether existing in a person’s head or inscribed in material form in the landscape, in objects, rituals or in media such as film), as event (the re-telling of the past... which is capable of generating its own meanings) and as trajectory (the potential for endurance through time of any particular memory)... place to trajectory, events and acts plays a crucial role. (Kwok Kian- Woon 331)

As Kwok’s statement on dimensions of memory such as events, trace and trajectories are not only the context on memory; it also combines conflict, violence and identity. Descriptions of events in regard with memory carry painful experiences due to the result of violence and thus it gives birth to another conflict. This kind of conflict and memory is expressed in Nadifa Mohamed’s *The Orchard of Lost Souls*.

Nadifa Mohamed uses two types of narrative methodology that is the public and the private. The public narrative captures the historical incident civil war that takes place in Somalia which results in the devastation of the country and the private narration contains the story of trauma, loss and isolation of the three female protagonists, thus they choose the right path and decide to migrate from Somalia due to the violence.

Filsan as a security agent describes as a brave woman at the outset but inside her office she faces gender based violence this results in another type of conflict. Due to her sufferings in regard with gender based treatment she treats the prisoners with same violent force and thus she wounds Kawsar. According to the concept of “gendered grammar of violence” Sharon Marcus depicts violence based on female gender as:

Predicates men as the object of violence and the operators of its tools, and predicates women as the objects of violence and the subjects of fear. This grammar induces men who follow the rules set out for them to recognize their gendered selves in images and narratives of



aggression in which they are agents of violence who either initiate violence or respond violently when threatened. (Marcus 393)

In connection with gendered grammar of violence, Filsan is treated badly among her colleagues and particularly by her higher official. Filsan's chief officer Haarun treats her as an object of sex and does not value her talents. He omits her identity as an ambitious soldier and with his violent behaviour he mistreats her due to her gender. Haarun and the American's judgment towards Filsan depict the 'female body objectification'. Filsan obeys him meekly but when he tries to rape her she rejects him, thus Haarun says, "Abu Kintiro, you cunt make your own way home" (Mohamed 34). He proves him as misogyny and he does not give respect to her profession. Due to this Filsan beats Kawsar to show her power towards the innocent common woman. The hostility inflicted against Filsan by Haarun, makes her to the "subject of fear" described by Marcus. This makes her to behave violently and creates blind rage and thus she beats Kawsar.

Women are raised to be ideal and to be feminine. There are many factors which influences gender role and the behaviour built by stereotyped societies in both internal and external ways during the period of a woman's life. These identity status created by society compiles women to follow these standards. In the novel, Nadifa Mohamed explains how a woman soldier is treated among their male peers. This shows the identity as a woman with her career. As the writer narrates:

Filsan walks down the convoy, and here the soldiers don't stare at her or smile like the barely trained police; they show her respect due another soldier. Her life has always revolved around these men, from her father down to her political science teachers; it is their judgement that carries weight with her and she still feels small in their estimation (Mohamed 10).

This above statement on Filsan and her surroundings clearly explains that how people treat women in developing countries like Somalia. For the society women are mere sex objects and their identity is explicitly stolen by their surroundings. Here in Filsan's life her own family member and her teachers treat her small. Thus she tries to prove her ability among her male peers through her career as a soldier. As a woman soldier Filsan tries to exhibit her own identity through her achievements in a war zone country. This also creates trauma especially in women due to society's pressure. Thus it results in another type of violence and conflict, for example how badly Filsan treats Kawsar and the public with her power.

In the text, *The Orchard of Lost Souls* Nadifa Mohamed portrays Deqo as an innocent child and how



innocent Somalis are caught in the web of violence, but for them politics appear to be hollow. Deqo is addressed as an orphan and the birth of war and she is often called as, “the bastard of a loose woman” (Mohamed 67). Deqo’s mother arrives at Saba’ad refugee camp and gives birth to Deqo and leaves the camp without any notice and abandons Deqo for the rest of her life. As an abandoned child without any information about her father or mother Deqo imagines that, “she belongs to the wind and the tracks in the dirt rather than to any other person... no watchful mother would come after her shouting her name in every direction” (Mohamed 67). The usage of wind and tracks expresses that Deqo wanders around Hargesia and the expression mother shouting her name explains that isolation of a girl child. Deqo firmly hides her identity and she never reveals to others that she is from a refugee camp because she “knows the way smiles fade when she tells people she is from the refugee camp” (Mohamed 80). But she reveals her identity to the four prostitutes owing to the fact that people address them in the same way as they calls Deqo and the public treats them as, “lechers and dirty women” (74). This makes Deqo to feel comfortable and thus gives her sense of belongingness while living with them.

To explain the dictatorship and violence in Somalia, the text starts with Kawsar’s description on her country. She pointedly describes the day of Independence Day celebration as, “she knows that the day will be long and that she should force a little breakfast inside her” (5). This narration explains that people of Somalia are not satisfied about their independence. Mohamed shows people’s thinking with the help of Kawsar. People are under stress and trauma due to the orders passed by the Guddi and left the public with fear, as Mohamed narrates, “The men and women of the *Guddi*, the neighbourhood watch of the regime, have spent the night shouting orders through megaphones of what to wear and where to meet” (6). This explains how the government system or rule is not welcomed by the people of Hargesia and the phrase shouting orders expresses that Somalia people are treated as slaves.

During the Independence Day celebration people are forced to attend it and they should stand like a smiling statue as Mohamed narrates, “That is the way the government seems to want them- simple, smiling cartoons with no demands or no needs of their own” (7). Government plucks the identity and originality of the common public and they are treated has mere puppets. Another character in the novel named Maryam English vehemently says that, “see how early they drag us out of bed. Nothing is too much for them, the swines. Maryam English tightens the strap holding her baby to her back; she has had to leave the two older



children locked in at home” (6). Maryam’s expression and the use of terms like swine and early from bed shows her hatred towards dictatorship. Mohamed’s narration points out that people of Somali are caught in a power struggle thus this paves the root for civil war in the nation. Though the nation celebrates the Independence Day but people are forced even to attend the celebration and they are traumatized. Here Maryam is holding her younger baby and she locks up two other children in her home. Maryam’s situation explains Somali Government’s rigid norms and their violent attitude towards common public. George Kent analyses violence in four ways. The second and the fourth concept on violence aptly match with the Somali’s political and economical situation; in regard with political circumstances he explains that, “there is the political violence that violates by repression, depriving people of their freedom and their human rights in general. Thus political violence is based on deprivation of nonmaterial goods” (Kent 381). In the text, Mohamed also explains that in other days people of Hargesia suffers from poverty and works like animals for their food as she says, “Now those cartoons have come to life – not tilting, weaving or working in a factory like on the shilling notes, but they are trudging to a celebration that they are forced to attend” (Mohamed 7). Economic and political dominance collides here. In one aspect they are forced to attend the celebration as a slaves but the government calls it freedom in another aspect people has to work day and night like cartoons. Kent in his article “Analyzing Conflict and Violence” explains conflict due to economical condition as, “There is economic violence of the sort that leads to deprivation, malnutrition and disease (as in exploitation). Economic violence is based on the use of material incentives usually money, but sometimes other sorts of goods, such as good” (Kent 7). To prove this notion in the novel *The Orchard of Lost Souls* Mohamed describes Deqo as a child affected by malnutrition. The physical description like yellow nails, bony structure, and curved backbone clearly states that hunger is a predominant situation of Somalia. Deqo’s life shows hunger and people without food, in one circumstance, “Deqo checks the ground for the morsel to eat but there are only scattered peanut shells and trampled vegetables” (Mohamed 282). This shows the pathetic situation of the people. Food, water and shelter are three basic needs of the human society but the people of Somali are deprived from getting basic necessities. This led to the Civil war, both economic and political violence and thus it causes death and also gives birth to another conflict.

In view to the concept and intersection of memory and conflict Mohamed narrates the complex history of Somalia by examining the wars and the reason hidden in it. Both conflict and peace arises due to



memory. In memory of violence and humiliation conflict rises in a country. Whereas in memory of the death, sacrifice and humanity result in peace and memory help to develop a future nation in a right path. Mohamed explains Somali memory and conflict as:

Our first Somali textbooks, our first airline, everything a wonder. It was a star that caused all the grief: that five pointed- star on the flag, with each point signifying a part of the Somali motherland, had led the country into war with Kenya and then Ethiopia, had fed a ruinous desire to reclaim territory that was long gone. The last defeat changed everything (Mohamed 14).

Kawsar's memory on the past brings back the history of Somali and it also shows that how memory and cultural humiliation gives rise to violence and political conflict in a nation. Kwsar's memory yearns for freedom and she wishes to live in the past rather than the present situation. Due to Somali war she loses her only child. This makes her to hate the current political government. To explain Kawsar's personal memory in connection with the social memory Mohamed explicates that, "Kawsar rubs the sleeping baby's back and wishes it was Hodan's instead, her child returned as an infant with the chance of a second life ahead of her" (Mohamed 6). During Independence Day celebration, kawsar rubs the back of Maryam English's child and yearns for her death child. On seeing other kids Kawsar wishes it for her own baby. This brings back her personal memories and also how Somali is in the past. Here the writer intersects both personal and social memory and also how social conflicts affect the personal lives of the innocent common public.

Mohamed also explains social and collective memory in connection with dictatorship, conflict and violence. The writer narrates the memory of eighteen years of Somali as she depicts that as, "It is now eighteen years exactly since the President's rise to power after a military coup, and the celebrations in Mogadishu show the system at its best, everyone working together to create something beautiful" (Mohamed 9). This narration explains the cultural viewpoint of Somalia and also explains the unity and identity of the nation with the use of terms like celebrations and system. With the help of Filsan's career the writer narrates the political memory of African region as the writer says, "She is part of the third largest army in Africa, a force that would have conquered all of Ethiopia, not just the Ogaden, in 1978 if the Russians and the Cubans hadn't switched sides" (Mohamed 10). Here in this statement Mohamed connects spatial and temporal concepts along with memory and conflict. She moves back to the year 1978 and explains the international



conflict by mentioning the country names such as Ethiopia, Ogaden, Russia and Cuba. This proves that Somalia is always in the web of war and there is no peace in the country. In order to attain power and to enlarge the geographical space, the country is always occupied with war and thus the people are surrounded traumatic atmosphere.

Because of war Somalia suffers from famine and the people are highly affected by nutrition deficiency. The bones of the people are visible even to the naked eyes. On the day of celebration the children from the orphanage are treated badly as Mohamed explains it as, “Now the day of the parade has finally arrived. Before dawn the troupe of five girls and five boys, all from the orphanage, are herded into the yard behind the camp’s clinic and scrubbed half to death” (Mohamed 11). This shows how unhealthy these children are and also they are treated like non-living beings. Hence they are forced and scrubbed to half death. There is no one to take care of them and they are not served with proper meals. But they are forced to whatever the Government orders them to do. This creates trauma and negative impact on children and these are the reasons among civilians to fight back against their nation and their leader.

The intersections of memory, conflict, identity and violence explains Somali, its people and the dictatorship which affects the country in various levels such as political, economical and cultural. In the name of independence the dictators with their power forbids the freedom of the common public. Though Filsan as a good position and power, due to her gender identity she suffers from humiliation. Kawsar as a working class woman picturizes the situation and slave treatment towards the common public. Finally Deqo, she is the most vulnerable character as she is deprived from the basic necessities to live. To avoid this violence all the three women migrates to Ethiopia and forms a family to live in peace.

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“...the word silence is still a sound”: Reading the Voices and the Silences in Ryusuke Hamaguchi’s *Drive My Car*

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Abstract: The present study would like to examine in detail the crucial aspect of silence poignant in Ryusuke Hamaguchi’s adaptation of the Murakami short story *Drive My Car*. The present work would discuss in detail the stylistic devices employed by Haruki Murakami in his fictions and argue on the metalinguistic strategy of Hamaguchi in the adaptation. It would comment how Hamaguchi’s contextualization of silence builds a communication possible, justifying the redemptive powers of art in life

Keywords: *Drive My Car*, Ryusuke Hamaguchi, Haruki Murakami, *Men Without Women*.

Modernism in literature elaborates the breakdown of Romanticism’s effort to maintain a transcendental perspective. It is in this aspect that modernism takes into play the role of man to explore the very conditions of sense-making in a world that has lost all sources of symbolic authority. It would be crucial to note Irving Howe’s comments on modernism:

For the modernist writer the universe is a speechless presence, neither hospitable nor hostile; and after a time he does not agonize ...over the dispossession of man in the cosmic scheme. He takes that dispossession for granted and turns his anxieties inward, toward the dispossession of meaning from inner life. Whatever spiritual signs he hears come from within his own imaginative resources and are accepted pragmatically as psychic events. (Howe, 1967)

The modern condition thus a time of alienation, thereby portrays the protagonist in literary works with an autonomy of inwardness, where the differences between men have grown to an unbreachable gap, where God’s silence has left humanity with no capability of a mode of prayer possible, thus leaving Man empty and powerless, unable to grasp the real meaning of his deeds. It is this inwardness and the fragmentary discourse of modernist literature which invites a great deal of study on humanity’s breakdown of language and the abysmal emptiness of silence. Over the years, scholarship has attained to focus their streak on the



rhetoric of silence. Much modernist literary discourse have depended heavily on the linkages between speech and silence, as Thomas Gould rightfully notes that silence is broached (and, simultaneously, breached) through the work of negation, negations which almost always affirm the limits of language. For Bakhtin, the relationship between silence and the word together constitute a special logosphere, a unified and continuous structure of significance. Bakhtin's further claim that active responsive understanding can simultaneously be a silent responsive understanding of action postponed only reinforces his viewpoint that certain silences can assume the function and status of the utterance. For Bakhtin, then silence and words do not exist apart from one another, nor do the significances that we ascribe to each.

Silence and its ethics have been tremendously used by a list of great auteurs in world cinema such as Bergman, Tarkovsky, Ozu, Kiarostami, and the likes. The present study would like to examine in detail the crucial aspect of silence poignant in Ryusuke Hamaguchi's adaptation of the Murakami short story *Drive My Car*. The present work would discuss in detail the stylistic devices employed by Haruki Murakami in his fiction and argue on the metalinguistic strategy of Hamaguchi in the adaptation. Adapted from the short story in the anthology entitled *Men Without Women*, the film revolves around the protagonist, Yusuke Kafuku, a theatre actor and director who travels to Hiroshima to stage Chekhov's play, *Uncle Vanya*. In the film, Kafuku has made a name for himself through the multilingual productions of many plays, where the actors speak in their native tongues and the audience follows their dialogues through subtitles screened in real-time. The actors themselves do not understand the parts of another language, but deeply feel the presence of gaps after each dialogue which lays the foundation for a leveling of the multiplicity of languages on stage. These gaps are a recurrent object of study in Hamaguchi's films, whereby the occasional gaps between the dialogues of every character on stage shouldn't be read as silence due to an absence, not a blank presence of silence but a vivid indefinite, self-affirming, aleatory and indeterminate presence of a plenitude of sounds. It would be crucial to note John Cage's articulation of the mutual requirement between silence and speech in his 'Lecture on Nothing': "what we require is silence; but what silence requires is that I go on talking" (Cage 1968). Cage insists that language cannot make imperatives against silence without silence rebounding and making its imperatives against language. We require silence, as the absent foundation for speech, to assert the presence of language; yet, silence requires back, imposing and exposing itself with a radically impersonal agency that performs a kind of leveling.



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A sprawling road-trip *Drive My Car* unfolds for large chunks inside Kafuku's crimson Saab 900, which the man seems to regardless as a vehicle than a protective chrysalis. It is here that he practices his lines while listening to the recordings of his late wife Oto reading out parts in *Uncle Vanya* - leaving him to fill the gaps in the title role. Thereby the evocative power of silence moulds the film to an utmost significant position whereby its presence acts as a method of communication between the characters of the film. From the very beginning, the metalinguistic strategy becomes evident through the portrayal of the stage production of Beckett's "Waiting for Godot". Didi played by Kafuku speaks his dialogue in Japanese but in the very minute, the replies from Gogo come from a different vein altogether. As Nina Li Coomes comments, "Drive My Car builds a nonverbal vocabulary for its audience, deftly using sounds and soundlessness to convey a great deal of tension, emotion, and plot." The language occupies so pivotal a role in the film that one might be struck by the ease and flow of dialogue - when in the stage production of *Uncle Vanya* we find that the metalinguistic strategy evolves a new level altogether with a cast composed of actors speaking English, Chinese, Mandarin, Japanese and Korean Sign Language. The actors don't seem to understand each other's language in the conventional sense of the term but what we find interesting is the gaps and it is this frequent notion of multiple silences where they seem to form a unity over the incoherence of language.

Lee Yoon-A, an actor cast for the role of Sonya in Chekhov's play uses Korean Sign Language as a method to convey her dialogue, where her language is translated by her own husband, Yoon-Su throughout the film to the audience. The character of Lee Yoon A is crucial in our discussion to understand the polemics of silence evident in Hamaguchi's *Drive My Car*. Lee Yoon-A, a mute woman in Hamaguchi's film is selected for the crucial role of Sonya in Kafuku's staging of Chekhov's play *Uncle Vanya*. Her apparent usage of the sign language is interpreted and translated by the dramaturge in charge Yoon-Su, who is also the husband of Lee Yoon-A. Yoon-Su being a Korean is a man of multiple letters and has gained enough knowledge in English, Korean and Japanese. However, his effort to learn sign language was embedded with the greater transcendence of love. It was to learn, to speak and to listen to the many silences of her that Yoon-Su learnt it. The couple share a relationship quiet delicate and their moments of intimacy are woven with the long threads of silence. The presence of language within them bears with it a deep level of understanding and love and their relation is somehow a kind of an ideal which is not contained within the shallow breaths



of language as it is at once an ease and lightness of communicability which they both share, an ideal of relation that language somehow lacks.

The present study would like to point out Hamaguchi's suggestion as at one point, Yusuke admits he finds Chekhov terrifying for the very same effect he hopes the text will elicit in his actors: "when you say his lines, he drags out the real you." The lines bear with it a strange exhilaration the characters succumb to while dealing with Uncle Vanya to account for art's redemptive powers emotionally riveting enough, which also brings to mind Kafka's notion of art as an axe that smashes the "frozen sea" within us. To parallel the character of Sonya with Lee Yoon-A completely wouldn't do justice as it might be stated that the drama for Sonya involved her hopeless love for doctor Astroff and thereby her tragedy. Meanwhile, Lee Yoon-A got an ideal of love that, as pointed out earlier, language is unable to contain. However, it must be noted that the character of Lee Yoon-A is also marked by the inescapable bonds of pain and suffering when she addresses her miscarriage and the subsequent loss of her child. With this theme comes the most poignant note in her character as it is seen that after such a tragic event Lee Yoon-A never gave up her faith in love and life. It is hereby that she bears a strong resemblance to Sonya as in multiple stages of Chekhov's play; it is Sonya who comments on the multiple facets of hardship and suffering that fate has chosen for them. It is only through acceptance that Sonya consoles her uncle, Vanya testifying to the subtlety of Chekhovian realism (Geoffrey Borny, 2006). Interestingly enough Chekhov's text supplements her life as well as that of Kafuku who also lost her four-year-old daughter. These linkages of loss and grief and Lee Yoon-A's comments during the dinner scene not only parallel her to Sonya but also wholly enlivens the very ending of Chekhov's play as Sonya suggests to the uncle Voinitsky (Vanya) the possibility of salvation only through working and helping others. Lee Yoon-A's comments on Chekhov's text would be crucial in such a context as she says: "Chekhov's text comes inside me and moves my body that was stuck before". This accounts for perhaps the most cardinal idea that art can act as a universal idiom to unearth and process one's trauma. It is interesting to note that the portrayal of Sonya as a mute girl in Kafuku's play bears with itself the very possibility that she is the only one who can commit to a future possibility of hope and reconciliation within the troubled situation called life. The sign language and the immaculate presence of silence in the final stages of the play with Lee Yoon-A's last speech as Sonya rather complements or fixes the audience's attention to the immanent silence of an immeasurable or eminent beyond, finally arriving at the moment of truth carrying



within it the great emptiness of salvation, carrying a gentle hope of faith as it is faith and faith only that helps Sonya endure her sufferings, advocating a need for understanding more than words, a need to understand feelings, a need to understand the communicative of silence.

Matthew C. Strecher writes, 'From the start, Murakami has shown contemporary readers their own anonymous faces in the mirror. (Strecher, 1999)' To achieve this, Murakami habitually uses a nondescript and nameless narrator in his works. It would be quite intrinsic to the work's argument that Murakami in using such a narrator tries to gain an access to what would be called the 'black-box', the core identity of the narrator. Strecher describes the model of the Murakamiesque human mind as "a uniformly coded division between the world of the light and that of the dark, the latter corresponding to the unconscious realm" (Strecher, 1999). In his *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, a scientist describes the subconscious mind of an individual as a 'black box' which is used to record all the necessary information of flight data in the aircraft. Hence, the very subconscious mind of the individual as articulated in the fictional discourse of Murakami necessarily contains all the intricate details and information which help to form the individual identity.

"What is identity? A unique system of thought based on the collected memories of our experiences from the past. A simpler term for it is the mind. No two people have the same mind. Of course, most people have no real grasp of their own cognitive systems (Murakami, 2011)."

From its very beginning, Hamaguchi's film follows a streak of narration by Oto, a TV screenwriter and the wife of Kafuku, who routinely falls into a writing trance after sex. "She'd grasp a thread of a story from the edge of orgasm", Yusuke remembers. Oto in her writing trance narrated the story to Yusuke whose role was to remember the tale and narrate it to her the next morning as Oto would note it down to use in her various screenplays. This 'creative-carnal relationship' as pointed out by Leonardo Goi is further complicated when Yusuke finds Oto in bed with Takatsuki, a younger actor whom Kafuku will later cast in the lead role of Chekhov's Vanya. However, it is seen that Yusuke remains silent over his wife's act of physical involvement with other men due to his love and also a fear of losing her. The study would like to examine one such chief narrative of Oto composed in her 'writing trance' which would further comment on Hamaguchi's subtle use of silence in the very narrative of the film. In what would be apparently Oto's last writing before her haemorrhage, she narrates a mysterious tale of a high school girl who sneaks into



the house of the boy she likes. She sneaks in multiple times and leaves a token of herself each time in the boy's room to give him the strength of escaping his mother's control. On one such day, the girl in the story remembers her previous life and finds out that she was a lamprey. However, her existence as a lamprey was a bit different, as Oto points out that the lamprey didn't leech off the fish, but actually fastened her suction-cup-like mouth to a rock on the riverbed and did nothing but sway there until it finally got washed away. Interestingly enough Oto points out that the girl finds the silence in Yamaga's room very similar to underwater and with this feeling the girl falls into a trance thinking of herself as a lamprey again. Eventually, in her trance-like condition, the girl starts masturbating in Yamaga's bed whereby her act is seen by a burglar. The intruder then attempts to rape the girl and in an act of resistance, she stabs him multiple times until he finally dies. The girl goes to school the next day to confess her act to Yamaga, but she notices nothing strange in him. Something terrible had happened and she was to blame but the world seemed serene. It became prominent to the girl that the world had changed into something sinister and thus the girl taking responsibility for her act went over to Yamaga's house and confessed in front of the new surveillance cameras installed: 'I've killed him. I've killed him. I've killed him.'

Matthew C. Strecher adds, "It is the means by which Murakami Haruki shows his readers two "worlds"-one conscious, the other unconscious-and permits seamless crossover between them by characters who have become only memories, and by memories that re-emerge from the mind to become new characters again. (Strecher, 1999)" Silence acts as a kind of chink in language's armour; elementarily the signifier of silence exposes a larger and more essential non-coincidence. The silence of Yusuke over Oto's physical involvement with other men and his masking of the self tremendously brought forward pain to Oto and their relationship. In comparison to the relationship of the Korean couple, Lee Yoon-A and Joon-Su, where a relationship's foundation lay within the silent language, Oto and Yusuke's silence instead made them apart. Oto's pain in not being able to confess and Yusuke's hesitance to confront with fear of losing their relationship altogether brought tragedy to his life as he lost Oto forever due to her haemorrhage. It must be stressed that Hamaguchi's hermeneutics of silence evident in *Drive My Car* speaks of a tale of making peace with the past, enduring grief, and finding rest.



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