

THE SOAS JOURNAL  
OF  
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH

DECOLONISATION IN PRAXIS

VOLUME 11

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## A NOTE FROM THE DECOLONISING SOAS WORKING GROUP

It is an enormous pleasure to be invited to write an introductory note for this special issue 'Decolonisation in Praxis'—which is, as one would expect from SOAS's Research Students, full of original, theoretically sophisticated, empirically rich and reflexive contributions to scholarship in a number of subject areas. Learning about new research projects such as these is one of the many joys of an academic role, and it is crucial that venues such as the RSA Journal exist to disseminate and debate this scholarship.

This issue is of course particularly timely, as efforts to decolonise the academy and other structures globally are gathering momentum and attention from the mainstream media. As the Editors' Introductions note, however, the term 'decolonisation' can begin to appear merely cosmetic when not accompanied by a more fundamental transformation in attitudes and being. I appreciate this understanding of 'decolonising' for us as being about a disposition, a way of being that emphasises epistemic humility and the need to de-centre from one's own intellectual authority.

However, it is important to be aware that this way of thinking about it is asymmetric; it assumes that one approaches the project of decolonisation from a position of relative authority (as many within the Western academy will). There is of course another side to the dialectic; the peoples, ideas and ways of being that have had epistemic humility and polyglotism forced upon them precisely through colonial encounters. Decolonisation for such groups may not mean the same thing at all; indeed it may mean its presumptive reversal. This does not mean that in either case the 'decolonisation' in question is *inauthentic* or incomplete, but it means that one's relationship to power structures will profoundly shape what 'decolonisation' means for different people—theoretically, practically and ethically.

The issue's emphasis on 'praxis' is thus critical for cultivating an appreciation of these differences and diversities *within* decolonisation, which emerge both within the individual projects and reading across them as a whole. I congratulate the Editors—Romina Istratii, Monika Hirmer and Iris Lim—for their thoughtful curation and editing of this issue, and the contributors for their fascinating contributions.

As the Decolonising SOAS Working Group looks forward into the next year, we are keen to ensure that our own work is never just 'cosmetic' but concretely focused on transforming praxis within our teaching and learning, our research, our collaborations, our institutional culture and our external partnerships. We are very happy to have supported the RSA's work this year and look forward to further engaging with SOAS's Research Student community in the next phases of the project.



Dr Meera Sabaratnam

Chair, Decolonising SOAS Working Group

## A NOTE FROM THE SOAS RESEARCH STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION (RSA)

As this year's elected Academic Officer for the RSA, and a PhD candidate at the Centre for Global Media and Communications, I was delighted to be the key organiser of 'Decolonisation in Praxis', the first joint conference of the SOAS Research Students' Association (RSA) and The SOAS Journal for Postgraduate Research (SJPR).

The SOAS Research Students' Association is the organisation that represents all Doctoral Researchers at SOAS. Its Committee consists of several Officers that are elected within the SOAS Students' Union elections. The organisation sends two members to the Doctoral School Management Group to ensure that students' voices are heard on all issues that concern them, and that students remain aware of any initiative that is taken by SOAS in regards to the doctoral experience. The RSA also represents Doctoral Researchers to the SOAS Student Union.

We are looking back to a very active and successful academic year. During 2017-2018 the RSA President Robyn Waite and fellow RSA Officers have been actively involved in negotiations about issues such as critical changes in visa requirements and work spaces at the Doctoral School

We deeply care about making students' voices heard and our academic voices are part thereof. As such, we wanted to provide a forum for our postgraduate students not only to practise academic skills but also—and particularly—to share and discuss topics that lie at the heart of the vibrant and critically-minded SOAS student body.

This is how the idea of an annual RSA conference was born during the first RSA meeting of the 2017-2018 academic year. With The SOAS Journal for Postgraduate Research aiming to showcase the talent and diverse research interests of SOAS research students, it was only natural to seek their cooperation on this endeavour.

On behalf of the RSA, I would like to thank all the attendants and participants of this year's 'Decolonisation in Praxis' conference, and to highlight the wide array of truly fruitful and stimulating papers and discussions. We hope that the conference will continue to be organised annually in all coming years.

Katharina Schmoll, Academic Officer for the RSA 2017-2018

## INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 11

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Volume 11 of the SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research (SJPR). We have had an exciting year at the Journal, filled with meaningful explorations, productive collaborations and hard work that builds upon the progress made in previous years.

This year's theme *Decolonisation in Praxis* has been a formidable one and has provided us with rewarding contributions and fruitful collaborations. Through the exploration of decolonisation, the Journal has extended its outreach among the student body and faculty and has built a stronger presence at SOAS. This has resulted in a collaboration with the Decolonising SOAS Group, which has generously covered part of the Journal's publication expenses this year. It has also fostered the conditions for organising an unprecedented conference jointly with the Research Students' Association (RSA), which has deepened the outlook of this volume regarding the conceptual ramifications of a discourse of decolonisation in western academia. We are honoured to be able to issue this volume at a time when SOAS is taking concrete steps toward promoting a more critical attitude and pedagogy vis-à-vis the decolonisation debates that are on-going in the British academic scene and elsewhere. We strongly feel that the contributions by SOAS students on this topic can inform these internal initiatives and strengthen them in relevance and effectiveness.

For the past academic year the Journal continued its commitment to the double-blind peer-review process to best showcase the critical and independent research ethos of the SOAS postgraduate student body. One of the innovations of this year was the establishment of an Editorial Board with the objective to advise the Editorial Team and to contribute technical pieces toward the professionalisation of the student body. A call was sent out early in the year to recruit post-graduate students with publication or teaching experience, the only requirements for the post. The Editorial Board also provides a platform to previous Editors-in-Chief to remain involved as Advisors for the years after their retirement from the role. This can ensure that the know-how is not lost with each change of team and is passed on to future Editors transparently.

Additionally, we are excited to announce that the Journal now has an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN). This is an internationally recognised number for identifying serial publications and we hope that this will support the growing professionalisation and visibility of the Journal.

The upgraded current volume would not have been possible without the hard work and support of our team of Assistant Editors (AEs), who coordinated all the stages of the review process. We were lucky to receive expressions of interest for the role from many enthusiastic candidates. This has allowed us to recruit a larger and more diverse team which worked tirelessly and responded eagerly to our unrelenting commitment for improving the Journal's editorial process and the quality of our annual publication. Federica Gamberini, Florence Shahabi, Natalia Matveeva and Atsushi Ikeda have been invaluable to this Volume and we thank them for their commitment, teamwork and dedication.

Likewise, we would like to thank our reviewers for upholding the quality of the manuscripts published through their informed and meticulous feedback. Their consideration of our tight deadlines and their openness and critical attitude toward the innovative and daring manuscripts have contributed to give this volume more depth and nuance.

In the same breath we need to thank our layout designer, who is supporting us for the third consecutive volume. While, the general presentation of the volume follows a consistent format, some referencing and stylistic choices were left to the individual authors to decide in order to respect the specific needs of their various disciplines.

Looking ahead, Romina and Monika would like to bid farewell to the readers as they embark on new projects. After having worked with passion and dedication on the Journal since 2016, bringing about its professionalisation and expansion, both Editors-in-Chief are now completing their work at the Journal. Monika and Romina are leaving the guidance of SJPR in the hands of their Co-Editor-in-Chief, Iris Lim, whose expert direction it is hoped will continue to benefit the Journal's growth and contribution to knowledge. Romina and Monika will become members of the Journal's newly founded Editorial Advisory Board as part of new measures put in place to ensure the transfer of know-how within the Journal.

Last but not least, we would like to take a moment to remember our wonderful friend and Journal team-member Juliana Cordeiro de Farias Bosslet who passed away in the previous year. Her dedication, humour, and intelligence were greatly missed during the preparation of this volume. We want to express our deepest condolences to her family and friends.

We thank you for taking the time to peruse Volume 11. We hope that you will find the broad-ranging contributions as instructive, engaging and refreshing as we did. For any inquiries or comments please do not hesitate to reach us at: [rsa\\_journal@soas.ac.uk](mailto:rsa_journal@soas.ac.uk).

Your Editors,

Iris Lim, Romina Istratii, Monika Hirmer

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The Journal would like to acknowledge the help of those who contributed in making this volume a reality. Many thanks are extended to the President of the Research Student Association (RSA), Robyn Waite, and board members Jenn Durrett, Rudder Jenkins, Frances Grahl, Simon Leese and Matthew Gordon who clarified and supported Journal processes at all stages. A special thanks also goes out to Katharina Schmoll, who spearheaded the 1<sup>st</sup> Joint PhD Symposium of the SOAS Research Students' Association & The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research. The Journal also benefitted immensely from the help of Peter Baran who assisted with financial matters, Steve Redding for his multimedia and print services, Lisa Migo for facilitating Journal online publication and dissemination and Helen Porter who acted as a point of reference for all matters concerning copyright and introducing articles into SOAS Research Online. We thank Daniel Desta (d2dproduct@gmail.com) for creating our logo, which impeccably captures our mission to decentre knowledge at its very roots. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the Decolonising SOAS Working Group for extending their support and especially Dr. Meera Sabaratnam and Professor Deborah Johnston for their willingness to engage with the Journal initiatives and to provide financial support.

## EDITORIAL I: CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS ‘DECOLONISATION IN PRAXIS’, SOAS 2018

On 7 June 2018 the Research Students’ Association (RSA) and The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research (SJPR) organised their first joint conference dedicated to the theme of Volume 11: *Decolonisation in Praxis*. The initiative was funded through the SOAS Early Career Development fund and aimed to bring together students, faculty and staff from SOAS and other universities to discuss issues of decolonisation. The term ‘praxis’ (from the Greek ‘πρᾶξις’) etymologically pertains to ‘action’ or ‘doing’<sup>1</sup> and reflects the objective of both the conference and the current volume to explore practical and embodied ways for overcoming west-centric attitudes and perspectives in the realm of knowledge-making.

These objectives attune to other decolonisation discourses within SOAS, other UK universities and elsewhere in the world. SOAS, which started as a colonial project in 1916, is today one of the institutions at the forefront of discussions on decolonisation. As such, it has been affected by current critiques denouncing the dominance of a single knowledge-centre, which revolves around a supposedly normative (western) epistemology. In the past year, the *Decolonising SOAS Working Group*, comprised of administrative staff, faculty and students, was set up to promote a more diversified and critical teaching along with reflexive university policies to counter “the wide, complex and varied impacts of colonialism, imperialism and racism...shaping our university.”<sup>2</sup>

At the Journal, we emphasise diversifying the epistemological landscape while critically engaging with the one currently mainstreamed. We insist that colonialism today is perpetuated by a lack of transparency and awareness among some researchers and scholars of their own “epistemological situatedness”,<sup>3</sup> which result in transposing personal beliefs or experiences to the study of other societies and contexts. There is more need to recognise that knowledge is always situated, and that it has been situated historically within a western epistemological system. We argue that as long as the sciences remain embedded within the mainstream, knowledge will continue to be disproportionately informed by western metaphysics.

Coming from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds, the Editors of this volume acknowledge that people have very different criteria of analysing and making sense of the world. When promoting the decentring of knowledge-making, it is important to leave behind the perception that there should be a standard epistemology for the sciences to progress. The aim is not to replace mainstream standards of knowledge production with another normative system, but to enable a dialogue of different cosmologies and ideas from

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<sup>1</sup> Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, PERSEUS Digital Library, accessed 7 August 2018, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dpra%3Dcis>

<sup>2</sup> “Decolonising SOAS Vision”, SOAS University, accessed 30 June 2018, <https://www.soas.ac.uk/decolonising-soas/>.

<sup>3</sup> Romina Istratii, “Mainstream Gender and Development Concepts and Theories at the Interface with Local Knowledge Systems: Some Theoretical Reflections”, *The Journal of Development Practice* 3 (Annual 2017): 4, <http://journals.dbuniversity.ac.in/ojs/index.php/jdp/article/view/305/301>.

which everyone can benefit in some way. Only then can we actively start learning from each other and building a multidimensional understanding of the world, especially urgent in this era of cultural misunderstanding, extremism, fanaticism, and isolation.

Thus, instead of discussing colonisation theoretically or producing post-colonial theory, our hopes for this conference were to consolidate a decolonisation of attitudes by humbly and respectfully sharing our diverse worldviews and listening to perspectives that emanate from cosmologies different from our own. The other aim of the conference was highlighted by Katharina Schmoll, a key organiser of the event and current Academic Officer of the RSA. Katharina made the important point that it was imperative to create a forum for postgraduate students to build academic skills and to discuss topics at the heart of the vibrant and critical SOAS student body.

We can gratefully affirm that the conference met and surpassed these ambitions. The keynote contributions, student presentations and concluding panel discussion not only concretised for us what decolonising the mainstream academia might mean, but also indicated the challenges, dangers and potential advantages of our limited positionalities. It is not possible to do honour to the complex discussions that the presentations raised among the audience, but an attempt will be made to highlight the key points of each presentation and to conclude with a brief note on the very concept of ‘decolonisation.’

The first keynote speech was given by Dr. Amina Yaqin, Senior Lecturer in Urdu and Postcolonial Studies at SOAS and active member of the *Decolonising SOAS Working Group*. In her presentation Amina took issue with a piece written by Kenan Malik for *The Guardian* motivated by the recent discourses of decolonisation happening at SOAS.<sup>4</sup> Amina argued that his analysis omitted to draw attention to deeper institutional structures and informal power dynamics that have conventionally determined academic curricula in British universities and influenced also who is hired and who is offered opportunities for career advancement. Amina urged the need for exploring how “Enlightenment ideology” has influenced administrations and policies and warned that administrative acquiescence to an amendment of curricula can end up just a “cosmetic exercise” when deeper structural norms remain in place.

The second keynote speaker was as insightful as the first. Dr. Alena Rettová is a Reader in Swahili Literature and African Philosophy at SOAS. Alena found the theme of ‘Decolonisation in Praxis’ to align with her vision of epistemological decolonisation through linguistics. She made the evocative comment that one’s epistemological situatedness is analogous to a hard disk that has been partitioned. She asked: can we overcome this partitioning and where might we start? Alena then drew attention to the importance of studying languages as a way to approximating foreign cosmologies. This is premised on the observation that languages are not mere semantics, but shape conceptual repertoires and rationalisations and can grant a deeper look into people’s worldviews. This is why translation is inherently limited, what Alena described as “imperfect bridges.” The presentation concluded on the concerned note that language learning has not received the

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<sup>4</sup>Kenan Malik, “Are SOAS Students Right to ‘Decolonise’ their Minds from Western Philosophers?”, *The Guardian*, February 19, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/feb/19/soas-philosophy-decolonise-our-minds-enlightenment-white-european-kenan-malik>

desirable support at SOAS and has declined significantly with many African languages, so unique to SOAS expertise, being at the border of extinction.

Our student presenters raised additional important points and stood out for their reflexive affirmations regarding the challenges and limitations they have faced in their own research and scholarship. By eschewing the certitude that one finds in much solipsistic colonial (and we may add some post-colonial) scholarship and espousing an attitude of humble self-awareness, they embodied the decolonial attitude we have envisioned for ourselves and this conference overall.

Our first presenter, Tiara Roxanne, is a PhD Candidate at the The European Graduate School. She examined if decolonisation is possible for the indigenous figure who has been defined by colonial practices, and what the possibilities of overcoming the trauma of colonialism could mean in this case. Using evocative symbolic and medical language she argued for a return to materiality as a means to reclaiming oneself and indigeneity.

The second speaker, Dhruv Rahmnath, is a Master's student of social anthropology at SOAS. He discussed the guru movement of Sharavana Baba in India, arguing that studying the spiritual and material politics of this charismatic guru provides an insight into what might be called a making of postcolonial Indian identity. His enlightening paper is one of the contributions to this volume.

The third speaker, Jonathan Galton, is a second-year PhD student of Anthropology at SOAS. His presentation of a British victory over an Indian force in the Battle of Koregaon raised the important observation that while we should continue to remember and analyse the colonial pasts and postcolonial presents, we should not overlook that oppression, has come in various shapes and has been caused by various (local and global) actors. His captivating piece has also been included in this volume.

Next, Marianna Zegianini, a first-year PhD student in the History of Art and Archaeology Department at SOAS, provided a fascinating juxtaposition of European and Chinese portraiture art embedded within a discourse of decolonisation. Her presentation revealed that while within western epistemology the individual was made historically the centre of portraiture art, in the Chinese context in the period she examined subjectivities were constructed in reference to historical figures of the past.

The final presenter, Monika Hirmer, is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Religions and Philosophies at SOAS and one of the editors of the current volume. Her equally enriching presentation traced western dialectics of 'othering' the Indian female body. She juxtaposed this to historical and more recent Indian responses, and traced what she considers an effective act of decolonisation in praxis in the art of Telangana women. This piece is also included in the contents of this volume.

The conference concluded with a panel on the prospects of Open Access publishing to contribute to diversifying the epistemological landscape. Romina Istratii, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Religions and Philosophies at SOAS and current Open Access advocate and co-editor of the current volume, underscored the potential of Open Access to make state-of-the-art research accessible to children of disadvantaged families and to contribute in this way toward the diversification of what has been historically an elite-dominated knowledge realm. She examined the prospects of Open Access publishing to contribute toward an

epistemological decolonisation in view of linguistic, cosmological and attitudinal obstacles. Helen Porter, who is responsible for policy development in Open Access and Research Data at SOAS, provided her expert commentary on how Open Access resources could be leveraged best and how recent shortfalls could be circumvented to serve the needs of decolonisation. Both presentations are hosted in this volume.

The conference triggered multiple promising dialogues but also doubts, not least regarding the discursive deployment of the concept of decolonisation. As some conference attendants observed, the terminology—like all concepts circulating in the mainstream—has already started to become merely “cosmetic,” so much so that it seems to have been appropriated by some to disguise the very continuation of colonial attitudes. We are aware of these appropriations, but we believe that the problem is not one of terminological choice (since there will never exist a perfect concept that will eschew the risk of de/politicisation), but one of personal attitudes which we must reverse. A practical decolonisation does not mean anything more than changing our own attitudes and becoming more reflexive about ourselves and others. It requires embodying our distinct positionalities and cosmologies transparently within our research and scholarly engagements and recognising humbly that we have no authoritative grounds for imposing our worldviews as normative on our interlocutors.

Romina Istratii, Monika Hirmer, Iris Lim

## EDITORIAL II: THE PRAXIS OF DECOLONISATION

...a statement on the political responsibility of the critic: the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present.

Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*<sup>1</sup>

The same narrative that underpinned centuries of colonialism, governs the current assumption that the state of modernity is to be aimed at universally. Centred around ideas emanating from strands of the European Enlightenment such as secularism, democracy and progress on the one hand, and equality, autonomy and individualism on the other, modernity represents the imaginary culmination of forms of statehood and expressions of personhood. Whereas colonialism operated primarily through political, military and economic control, modern discourse manifests predominantly at the level of epistemic and ontological hegemony. What remains unchallenged is the conviction that the West embodies the epitome of humanity at large. This constitutes the model to which non-Western peoples have to conform, lest they be considered backward and uncivilised.

Although it is easy to discern the brutality of colonial territorial occupations, often it is still difficult to perceive the imposition of modes of knowledge-production and concepts, such as rationality and individualism, as profoundly damaging forms of dominance that ultimately enable the perseverance of colonial dynamics. The apparent invisibility and the pervasiveness of this form of Western hegemony is an indication of its successful implementation. As Anibal Quijano's (2000) concept of 'coloniality of power' illustrates, the legacy of colonialism outlives the formation of independent states in the form of racial, political, sexual and cultural hierarchies that perpetrate and reinforce the centrality of Western societies.<sup>2</sup> The coloniality of power, in manifesting as the continuation of power structures that were established over centuries of colonialism, reveals the oftentimes-fictitious nature of the current postcolonial era. The difficulty in detecting the continuity of colonial forms of dominance lies in the naturalisation and universalisation of the modern discourse, a process by which—Western and non-Western—conditions of subjectivity are pre-inscribed within Western epistemic and ontological frameworks.

Following Bhabha's exhortation in the opening quote, it is the unspoken and unrepresented realities subdued by Western modernity, experienced in part by some of the Editors themselves, which we wish to bring to the fore through the contributions to this volume. It is precisely as a result of the persistence and ubiquitous presence of the colonial discriminatory discourse, that decolonisation can occur at innumerable junctures and take on multiple expressions; in fact, it existed from the very first acts of resistance to the colonial enterprise. Within academic writing, decolonisation has taken on a variety of approaches and methods, emanating from all regions of the world. From the early revolutionary

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<sup>1</sup> Bhabha Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Quijano Anibal. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80.

writings of Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)<sup>3</sup> to the postcolonial pronouncements by Edward Said (1935-2003),<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Spivak (1942-)<sup>5</sup> and Homi K. Bhabha (1949-),<sup>6</sup> the emphasis was on uncovering the histories of colonised people and exposing the power structures that sustain(ed) colonialism. With the turn of the millennium, Latin American scholars such as Anibal Quijano (1928-2018),<sup>7</sup> Walter D. Mignolo (1941-)<sup>8</sup> and Ramón Grosfoguel (1956-)<sup>9</sup> have instead brought to the fore processes of delinking from the colonial matrix of power and expressions of radical alterity sustained by peoples at the margins of the Eurocentric narrative. No account on decolonial scholarship would be complete without mentioning the seminal works of African scholars, such as those of Archie Mafeje (1936-2007)<sup>10</sup> and Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (1957-),<sup>11</sup> who criticised accepted representations of African societies within Western and European epistemology, providing much-needed alternative portrayals. The recent focus on difference and ontology, alongside the established attention to power and resistance, is testimony to the vibrancy of postcolonial and decolonial efforts.

As a departure from Bhabha's view, it is our conviction that the unspoken and unrepresented realities are not only matters of the past, but that, as decolonial projects advance, they will emerge in their full-fledged presence as significant protagonists of new geographies no longer organised around one centre and histories no longer governed by linearity. The praxis of decolonisation, as we understand it, is tripartite: the recognition and display of the irreparable damage that has been inflicted by centuries of colonial violence; the acknowledgment and affirmation of subjectivities that fall outside the purview of Western modes of thinking and expressions of being; and the re-dimensioning of Western political, economic, epistemic and ontological superimpositions and the resolute condemnation of their claim to universality.

With the variety of approaches and areas of study represented by the articles of this volume, we hope to reflect the dynamic nature and the vast outreach of decolonisation. With the focus on praxis, instead, we wish to encourage the next step into the direction of a truly postcolonial world where alternative histories cease to be alternative and margins become new centres of a mandalic polity. Importantly, it is also a world where English as the medium of this collection, London as the venue of its publication, and Western as the

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<sup>3</sup> Fanon Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin Books, 2001 [1961].

<sup>4</sup> Said Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Spivak Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 66–111. Basingtoke: Macmillan Education, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Bhabha Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Quijano Anibal. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80.

<sup>8</sup> Mignolo D. Walter, and Walsh E. Catherine. *On Decoloniality. Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. London: Duke University Press, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Grosfoguel Ramón. *Colonial Subjects. Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective*. London: University of California Press, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Archie Mafeje. *Anthropology in Post Independence Africa: End of an Era and the Problem of Self-redefinition*, African Social Scientists Reflections Part 1, Heinrich Böll foundation, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

educational background of its editors, are no longer matters of default, but matters of coincidence—or, as the case may be, non-occurrences. While talking back to the West and denouncing its crimes is one mode of decolonisation, we believe that a decolonial world is also one that disengages from the Western matrix of power and manifests its metaphysical and epistemological diversity through methods and languages that need no longer conform to the canons of Western academia.

We invite the readers to engage with the diverse contributions of the authors, some of which express for the first time points of view historically silenced or underrepresented, making this volume a game-changer in Western epistemological production.

## RESEARCH ARTICLES

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One research article that conceptualises decolonisation at the epistemological level is Romina Istratii's proposed reading of St John Chrysostom's teachings on man-woman relations, marriage and the conjugal relationship beyond the boundaries of a western feminist hermeneutics. Istratii, born in the Republic of Moldova and raised in the Hellenic Republic, leverages on her triple-positionality as a citizen of two historically Orthodox countries and a researcher located within a western epistemological framework to propose a representation of St John Chrysostom's commentaries that eschews western hermeneutics and is more compatible with an insider's theology-informed point of view. She explains that her attempt is to convey the works of this Church Father in their exegetical and cosmological context, which requires a sense of the Orthodox *phronema*, defined here as the historical experience-based conscience of the Orthodox Church. While Istratii does not claim to be fully equipped for such a task, she feels compelled to speak against on-going misrepresentations of eastern epistemology within western perception by proposing an alternative reading. This is necessary both in order to diversify the theological and gender landscape and to make visible cosmology-sensitive resources for the alleviation of pernicious attitudes regarding women and marriage within Orthodox societies that a western feminist standpoint might hastily dismiss as irrelevant.

Shifting the attention from decolonisation as act of speaking back to the West in order to rectify misrepresentations, to decolonisation as expression of radical alterities that position themselves outside the Western metanarrative, Monika Hirmer focuses on contemporary art by Telangana women. Based on interviews with the artists and analyses of their works, Hirmer argues that these women set themselves outside the purview of gendered and racial dialectics of othering that have underpinned Indian and European art for centuries. The article opens with an excursus through salient European artworks that exemplify how female bodies were deployed as tropes of otherness for the assertion of Western men's gendered selves. Successively, Hirmer provides an account of how, during colonial and postcolonial times, depictions of Indian and Western female bodies became metaphorical grounds on which racial confrontations between colonisers and colonised unravelled. Set against a context of gendered and racial othering, the art of Telangana women, in rejecting canons firmly rooted in Indian and European art, appears not only to subvert, but to completely disregard the objectifying and centre-margin dynamics governing mainstream art. Art thus becomes the locus for the unapologetic expression of these artists' radically delinked subjectivities.

Jonathan Galton's approach to colonialism, and hence decolonisation, is particularly innovative: while colonialism is mostly associated with European occupations, he explores internal colonisation within India, as it is illustrated by the "alternative history" advocated by a community of Mahars, a Dalit (formerly "untouchable") caste that converted to Buddhism en masse in 1956. Mahars see themselves as the original inhabitants of an ancient Buddhist India, which was overpowered by Aryan invaders originating from an undefined West, who imposed caste Hinduism. As part of their history, the Mahars annually commemorate the 1818 Battle of Koregaon, in which, fighting for the British, they defeated the local high-caste Hindu rulers. The celebration of the Battle provides Dalits with the opportunity to portray Hindu rulers as their oppressors, and the British as their liberators. Having conducted ethnographic fieldwork among the Mahars in Mumbai, Galton asks whether the community's alternative history can be viewed as "decolonisation in praxis" with regards to the oppression perpetrated through the Hindu caste system. By engaging with various ways in which this history and its associated scholarship is intertwined with British colonial knowledge-production, Galton suggests that an adoption of the Mahar's alternative history would at the same time be fruitful and problematic.

Dhruv Ramnath's article is an exploration of a postcolonial identity in the making. Analysing the formation of the Sharavana Baba movement, a guru movement in its early days, Ramnath asks how the Baba's Hindu identity is constructed and maintained, and where the guru positions himself amidst other Hindu and non-Hindu religious movements both, in India and abroad. Since the new religious movement of the Baba is still in the process of being institutionalised, it provides a fortuitous opportunity to observe how the Indian New Age consolidates itself with respect to other religious groups constituting India's multifarious spiritual landscape. Ramnath draws from existing academic literature on gurudom to map the initial stages of new spiritual ethics and sacred sites, as well as to observe how the new spiritual leader construes his image and negotiates his differences and similarities vis-à-vis more popular movements. The article addresses the lacuna in the literature on gurudom in the modern world through an anthropology of insight, thus offering a perspective through which this particular movement can be fruitfully understood.

Exploring how boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are drawn in the increasingly global practice of diaspora engagement, Catherine Craven's "Critical Realism, assemblages and practices beyond the state: A new framework for analysing global diaspora engagement" shows how methods of global governance demonstrate a systematic undermining of diaspora agency. Suggesting a new analytical framework of "assemblage theory", the author presents how scholars and policymakers can contribute to "decolonisation in praxis" at the ontological level. Finding theoretical grounding in Bourdieuan practice theory, this work rethinks how actors engage with the politics of diaspora in the spaces where these practices occur. In doing so Craven supports the decolonisation of academic praxis from Western-centric ontologies, which manifest as methodological positivism and state-centrism. This critical discussion offers a way to conduct post-positivist social science research and move beyond state centrism in the study of diaspora engagement, and Craven's articulate and clear construction provides a comprehensible read of a theory heavy account.

## OPINION PIECES

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Roxy Minter's opinion piece makes an attempt to verbalise what she discerns to be tacit biases in contemporary aesthetic studies. The author builds her argument by drawing from Kant's theory of aesthetics, which proposed essentially that the definition of art be premised on the ability of a work to trigger "disinterested" responses via the capacities of taste and productive imagination. She contrasts this articulation with what she describes as "simplified readings" of Kant's aesthetic theories that favour autonomous art works, underpinnings of which are discerned in the works of Bourdieu and Danto with regards to class aesthetics and their validation. The author's argument comprises of various parts: contemporary aesthetic evaluative criteria are not immune to class biases and by favouring autonomous works they exclude non-autonomous works; working-class works are not only excluded within this institutionalised art arena, but they are appropriated to fit the class-based aesthetic evaluative criteria; in the end, the original intentions and connotations of the working-class art works are obscured. Minter deploys examples of tattooing and computer gaming to pronounce working-class evaluative criteria and urges a decolonisation of the institutional art arena by pointing to what could be an alternative platform not accountable to class biases and interests, the YouTube.

Simon Donald Forbes' opinion piece lies at the heart of the decolonisation debate within the academic environment and engages with the interests that could be underpinning the discourses of both those who oppose it ardently and those who promote it. In his piece, he undertakes to clarify the positions and intentions of SOAS faculty speaking in favour of decolonising SOAS vis-à-vis more simplistic journalistic representations that have portrayed such efforts as part of the widely affirmed ideological movement of "cultural Marxism" impacting on Western universities and academia in recent decades. Forbes' article helps to show that locating debates of decolonisation under concrete ideologies is not easy; for the SOAS faculty who have been raising the needs for enlarging the curriculum and reconsidering pedagogies the aim is neither to exclude nor to include, but to promote a more critical type of teaching and learning where all authors and theories are appraised and none is excluded *a priori* by tacit racialised criteria. It also means overcoming prejudices in student acceptance or faculty requirement policies that sustain inequalities. Pertinent to the focus of the volume's editors, Forbes concludes his piece by noting that perhaps the discourse of decolonisation needs to be broadened to include more epistemological questions, such as the situatedness of knowledge in history-telling.

As we explore the "decolonisation in praxis", this next article delves into what makes this practice difficult but vital. Highlighting the relevance and need for decolonisation, Tung-yi Kho's "The urgency of decoloniality" discusses the logic that reinforces the political-economic, socio-cultural, and ecological crises of contemporary modern civilisation and considers its repercussions. Drawing upon Anibal Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power, which sees modernity as an inseparable part of the colonial project, the article first examines the severity of modern day crises of civilisation that is a culmination of the European colonial project. Next, the author looks at the example of climate change to underline the urgent necessity of decolonisation. The piece concludes with some thoughts on praxis, exploring a variety of ways to engage with decolonisation. The author's differentiation of "colonisation" and "coloniality" is a noteworthy conceptual distinction that can deepen understandings of how to effectuate decolonisation.

## LANGUAGES

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Andrew Harvey's linguistic description "*Pakani: A Gorwaa story*" analyses the telling of a story by Aakó Bu'ú Saqwaré, a singer and knowledge-holder from north-central Tanzania. The story tells an account of the Gorwaa people and their response to mandatory military training brought on by the European colonisation of East Africa. This particular story was a part of a larger project that set out to understand and record the grammar of the Gorwaa language, a language that has been disappearing at an alarming rate due to increased urbanisation and national government policy that effectively bans local languages. Through this submission, the author seeks to correct the assumption that such descriptions seem removed from the practice of decolonisation. As a record of a language endangered by colonisation and as a story of how people who experience colonisation respond to their oppression, Harvey's work represents a part of a growing body of scholarship that illuminates the experiences and understandings of colonised people as "decolonisation in praxis."

## TECHNICAL PIECE

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Lastly, this issue includes its first technical piece, which we hope to make a convention at the Journal. Since the Editorial Board was only recently established and the formulation of a permanent body is still on-going, this year's technical piece is an enhanced version of the panel discussion that was held at the 'Decolonisation in Praxis' conference on publishing and disseminating research in view of decolonisation concerns. The panel was comprised of Romina Istratii, a current SOAS student involved with Open Access issues on campus, and Helen Porter, Digital Services expert at SOAS. Their interactive presentations triggered important comments from the audience and it is hoped that a wider online dissemination will prove equally fruitful.

Monika Hirmer, Romina Istratii, Iris Lim

# BEYOND A FEMINIST 'HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION': READING ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM'S COMMENTARIES ON MAN-WOMAN RELATIONS, MARRIAGE AND CONJUGAL ABUSE THROUGH THE ORTHODOX *PHRONEMA*

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper aims to provide a summary of St John Chrysostom's teachings on man-woman relations as pertinent to marriage and the conjugal relationship through the prism of the Orthodox *phronema*, defined here as the experience-based conscience of the Orthodox Church. The aim is to contribute toward a better representation of non-western religious-cultural cosmologies within western academia and specifically within gender and theology/religion(s) studies. The employment of a western feminist analytical/hermeneutical lens in these disciplines has many merits, but it has tended toward transposing presuppositions that emanate from western experience with Christianity and context-specific forms of social sexism to non-western traditions. As a result, eastern traditions such as Orthodoxy have been presented in essentialising terms that do not generally reflect how these have been experienced within their indigenous epistemological frameworks. It is the argument of this paper that this insider's conscience and the unique Orthodox cosmology need to be grasped by scholars of gender and theology/religion(s) who are only now beginning to be exposed to eastern Christian traditions. This cosmology-informed approach can allow a deeper insight into gender and religious issues in these communities and can reveal that commentaries such as Chrysostom's could serve to alleviate pernicious attitudes regarding women and marriage where these exist.

**Key words:** John Chrysostom – Orthodoxy – gender and theology/religion(s) studies – feminist hermeneutics – epistemological decolonisation – marriage

## INTRODUCTION

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The One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the full name of the Orthodox Church, traces its beginnings in the revelation received by the disciples of Christ at Pentecost. Through the Apostles and their followers the Orthodox message was disseminated to peoples in the Middle East, Asia Minor, Mediterranean Europe, Africa and the Indian subcontinent in a short period of time, where Orthodox communities exist to this very day. In the early centuries Christians experienced extensive persecution by different Roman Emperors until Christianity was accepted as the official faith of the Roman Empire. While early Christians all belonged to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, different historical, political and theological factors grew the hiatus between Oriental, Eastern and Western Christians.

Political events had led the Western Church to steadily differentiate itself on important doctrinal/theological matters, which fostered an eventual schism in the eleventh century.<sup>1</sup> The Eastern Church Fathers relied on ancient Greek texts and redefined the philosophy critically to express the soteriological message of the ancient apostolic Church, without adding new doctrine. It is understood within Orthodox conscience that their work was not the product of intellectual exercise and syllogistic philosophy, but rather theology as a result of *ascesis*<sup>2</sup> and enlightenment. St John Chrysostom (original being ‘Chrysostomos’ which means ‘Golden-mouthed’) is considered one of the most prolific theologians/saints in the line of Orthodox Church Fathers.<sup>3</sup> Chrysostom was born in the mid of the fourth century in the city of Antioch, a prominent Roman capital. He studied Greek philosophy under Libanius, a great orator of the time, but he eventually turned to Orthodoxy. After living some time an ascetic life, he was ordained a priest at Antioch’s cathedral, before becoming Archbishop of Constantinople. Chrysostom produced numerous homilies (speeches delivered to the faithful) that commented on or explained the works of the apostles and especially the epistles that the apostle Paul had written to different early Christian converts in the first century.<sup>4</sup> In his commentaries, Chrysostom was driven by the concern to edify his audiences in the apostolic message and to counter the worldliness and licentiousness that he perceived to be thriving in the city of Antioch.<sup>5</sup>

This paper is dedicated to St John Chrysostom’s commentaries regarding man-woman relations in marriage and the conjugal relationship as they emerge from seven homilies. An

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<sup>1</sup> As Fr. John Romanides has aptly put it, the schism was not between Western and Eastern Christians, but between Eastern *Romania* and the Frankish conquerors or the Western Roman Empire who distorted the previously uniform Christian doctrine and tradition for their political ends. See John Romanides, *Romiosini, Romania, Roumeli* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> ‘*ἄσκησις*’; translates in English as ‘practice.’

<sup>3</sup> According to the Greek Synaxarium, about 804 homilies of his have survived. See Ορθόδοξος Συναξαριστής, “Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος Αρχιεπίσκοπος Κωνσταντινούπολης,” <http://www.saint.gr/3021/saint.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> Traditionally the Orthodox Church has accepted some fourteen letters/epistles to have been authored by Paul. These are: Romans, First/Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First/Second Thessalonians, First/Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Hebrews. Thirteen of these bear his name while one (Epistle to Hebrews) does not. Notably, modern scholarship has questioned the Pauline authorship for a number of these epistles.

<sup>5</sup> Disagreements as to where different commentaries were produced exist among modern scholars. Nonetheless, there seems to be agreement that the bulk of homilies were spoken in Antioch.

attempt is made to provide a reading of these homilies through the Orthodox *phronema*<sup>6</sup> understood here as the experience-based historical conscience of the Church. The aim is to contribute toward a better representation of non-western religio-cultural cosmologies<sup>7</sup> within western academia and particularly within gender and theology/religion(s) studies. While Chrysostom's commentaries have been available in English<sup>8</sup> and multiple excellent efforts have been made to convey his teachings in their original spirit,<sup>9</sup> these discussions have yet to extend into gender and theology/religion(s)<sup>10</sup> studies which have become increasingly internationalised. In these disciplines, western feminist hermeneutics are employed for the analysis of religious traditions and communities with the aim to redress what are perceived to be patriarchal biases in theology and to give more voice to historically marginalized groups, especially women. This paper aims to problematize the tendency to transpose these hermeneutical methodologies to non-western religious traditions, and particularly Orthodoxy which developed within a distinct eastern epistemology.<sup>11</sup> It will argue the importance of appraising these traditions embedded in their respective cosmological

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<sup>6</sup> 'φρόνημα'; can be translated in English as 'conscience.' It is implicit in this terminology that the *phronema* emanates from one's practice/embodiment of the faith. Why it is also called historical will emerge later in this paper.

<sup>7</sup> Cosmology is defined here as a holistic knowledge system, worldview or belief system. A cosmology is directly linked to epistemology (valid ways of knowing), ontology (ways of being) and ethics (principles governing social relations). This definition departs from a clearly etymological one (cosmogony, ontology, ways the world operates; Ioannis Kyriakakis, "Traditional African Religion, Cosmology and Christianity," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 11, no. 32: 135.

<sup>8</sup> A large collection of his works is available through the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/chrysostom>

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Kelvin Mutter, "John Chrysostom's Theology of Marriage and Family," *BRT/RBT* 6, no. 2 (Autumn, 1996): 22-32; David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. Chrysostom* (Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1996); Catharine Roth and David Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom: On Marriage and Family Life* (St. Vladimir Press, 1997); and P. Cox Miller, *Women in Early Christianity: Translations from Greek Texts* (Catholic University of America Press, 2012). The series edited by Philip Schaff available through the Christian Classics Ethereal Library is another example.

<sup>10</sup> It is recognised that the disciplines of theology and religious studies have been demarcated within western epistemology. This paper addresses primarily gender and religion(s) studies and extends to the discipline of theology only in view of the fact that feminist critiques by theologians/Church scholars have defined the presuppositions and analytical methodologies of gender and religion(s) studies.

<sup>11</sup> Epistemology is understood according to this definition: "epistemology defines the criteria and sources for valid knowledge as related to a specific cosmology [...] under the understanding that individuals become conscious agents within specific belief systems where they acquire the tools and standards for reasoning" (Romina Istratii, "Mainstream Gender and Development Concepts and Theories at the Interface with Local Knowledge Systems: Some Theoretical Reflections," *The Journal of Development Practice* 3 [2017]: 4).

frameworks.<sup>12</sup> This requires understanding, first and foremost, what counts as theology locally and the conditions that have defined the repertoire of hermeneutical possibilities of a certain faith. Taking this approach in this paper will help to evidence that Chrysostom's commentaries have been understood and deployed to promote the dignity of women within the Orthodox tradition. Moreover, his commentaries could serve as a resource to alleviate pernicious attitudes regarding women and marriage among Orthodox Christians in the modern era.

In order to develop this rationale the paper is organised as follows: A first section highlights the limitations of mainstreamed feminist hermeneutics in gender and theology/religion(s) studies when these are employed beyond the western context. The subsequent section explains what it means to 'read' Chrysostom through the Orthodox *phronema*. This is followed by a methodological discussion, where the importance of engaging with the original Greek language is pronounced. The next section is the main analysis of Chrysostom's homilies and is followed by a discussion on how these teachings could be deployed to alleviate harmful attitudes toward women that depart from the Orthodox *phronema* espoused by Chrysostom and the Orthodox Church. A conclusion summarises the argument and the main points of this article.

## DECOLONISING GENDER AND THEOLOGY/RELIGION(S) SCHOLARSHIP

The incorporation of gender-sensitivity in theology/religion(s) studies has been premised generally on the belief that women within western Christian experience were historically marginalised and suppressed in a male-dominated society and biblical scholarship, which begot the need to rediscover these female voices and experiences and to reformulate theologies in ways that aligned better with contemporary feminist ideals.<sup>13</sup> Methodological approaches in this discipline have therefore placed emphasis on looking at the historical and societal context in which these traditions developed so as to understand what might have fostered their tendencies. They have been shaped by the influential works of seminal feminist writers in the West who criticised (western) Christian traditions from different angles and include Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), Mary Daly (1928-2010), Rosemary

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<sup>12</sup> It needs to be said that the paper focuses on the Eastern Orthodox Churches and does not engage directly with Oriental Orthodox traditions. John Chrysostom has been equally influential in many of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, which are the Ethiopian/Eritrean, Coptic, Syriac, Indian and Armenian Churches. While the fundamental eastern epistemology and Christian cosmology espoused in his commentaries would not differ within these traditions, not all of his works were absorbed in the Oriental Orthodox Churches to the same degree, and those which were absorbed were most likely incorporated or understood through local exegetical traditions, such as the Ethiopian *andämta* commentary tradition in the case of the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahədo Church. A discussion of Chrysostom's commentaries within these communities would need to be provided in reference to the conscience and holy traditions of these respective Churches.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, Darlene Juschka in *Feminism in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (Continuum, 2001) explains that the focus of feminist scholars in theology and religious studies has been to reinterpret sacred texts so as to address biases in what is considered male- and elite-dominated scholarship.

Radford Ruether (1936-) and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1938-). Especially influential has been Fiorenza's feminist exegetical approach premised on a 'hermeneutics of suspicion.'<sup>14</sup>

While this paradigmatic approach has made historical contributions to western theology, it can become problematic when it is monolithically transposed cross-culturally. Using such an analytical prism, prominent feminist scholars in gender and theology/religion(s) studies have already shown essentialising tendencies that present all 'Christian theology' as patriarchal,<sup>15</sup> sexist and other such characterisations.<sup>16</sup> Within western feminist literature, Paul and Chrysostom, both historically embedded in an eastern epistemological framework, have been frequently described as misogynists ('haters of women').<sup>17</sup> Other scholars who have studied eastern traditions from a gender-sensitive prism have produced representations that are theologically questionable.<sup>18</sup> Such universalising tendencies seem to emanate from the fact that usually scholars presuppose a feminist hermeneutics in their study of 'other' Christian traditions. Their rationale seems to be that since women were

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<sup>14</sup> In her book *Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Beacon Press, 1984), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza presented a systematic approach toward a feminist biblical exegetical approach or what she called 'feminist evaluative hermeneutics.' Fiorenza proposed a paradigm shift from understanding the bible as archetypal myth to conceiving it as a historical prototype. As this historical context was androcentric and biased toward women, a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' was needed to detect the ideological underpinnings and distortions. It should be noted that she did not assume feminist authority over the Bible or truth. This critical reading needed to be combined with a 'hermeneutics of remembrance', a reconstruction of women's history from the perspective of the oppressed.

<sup>15</sup> For example, some feminist writers have expressed issues with a 'male' God or an all-male clergy. However, these apparent 'patriarchal' tendencies need to be placed and appraised in their proper epistemological framework and theology. Regarding the Orthodox tradition, it is understood that the designation 'Father' is not an effort to ascribe anthropomorphic/androgenic qualities to God, which would be considered heretical, but rather to denote that He alone is the Cause in the Trinity. On the other hand, the priestly order follows Christ (or the 'New Adam') who is considered the Archpriest of the Church.

<sup>16</sup> For example, in the seminal volume *Feminism in the Study of Religion* Darlene Juschka cited Mary Daly's critical writings against patriarchal Christianity and suggested that the latter was inherently androcentric without nuancing this statement in view of cross-cultural particularities (Juschka, *Feminism in the Study of Religion*, 163). Fiorenza herself, although careful not to "reify texts and traditions as oppressive or as emancipatory" extended her critique cross-culturally, saying that "in most societies and religions wo/men have been excluded from the authoritative traditions and classic texts not just by historical accident but by laws and custom" (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Method in Women's Studies in Religion: A Critical Feminist Hermeneutics", 224 and 226). Similar tendencies are found in Rosemary Ruether's work. While she reported that her analysis had incorporated Orthodox Christianity, she stated uniformly that "[a]ll of these traditions are sexist." (Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1983], 22).

<sup>17</sup> These criticisms are mentioned in various works, such in Susan Heine, *Women and Early Christianity: Are the Feminist Scholars Right?* (SCM Press Ltd., 1986) and David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. Chrysostom* (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Indicatively, the author will point to Kari Elisabeth Børresen's article "Gender, Religion and Human Rights in Europe" in *Pieties and Gender*, ed. L. Sjørup and H. R. Christensen (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 55-64. In her analysis, Børresen took a comparative approach in appraising world "religions" and reached general conclusions such as regarding her understanding that "Christian theology" is "redemptive", "sexophobic" and accessible to scientific analysis. While such characterisations may apply to some theological traditions, it is important to recognise that there is no single or monolithic "Christian theology" but many historical, context-specific, embodied traditions. Additionally, the above three characterisations are unreflective of the Orthodox tradition and cosmology.

historically demeaned in most societies, sexism must have also defined the attitudes and discourses of male theologians in all religious traditions (and especially of a Christian theology). This logic would fail to explain however ‘readings’ of Paul and Chrysostom that have promoted the visibility and dignity of females as have been typical in the Orthodox tradition.<sup>19</sup> Mainstreamed feminist paradigms seem to be blind to these specificities, and ultimately result in a ‘reading’ of Eastern Church Fathers, such as Chrysostom, out of their epistemological context which defined their attitudes and perceptions, as well as the meanings of their teachings.

Essentially, the fundamental limitation of feminist paradigms in theology/religion(s) studies is that these are too conditioned to the western cosmological and sociological contexts that begot them in the first place, which limits their applicability and relevance elsewhere. For example, the hermeneutics developed by Fiorenza were motivated by her positionality as an academic in the United States with a German background who had been exposed to a certain tradition of biblical scholarship.<sup>20</sup> This limits considerably the relevance that such exegetical presuppositions and tools can have in non-western theological systems,<sup>21</sup> which are expected to have followed their own progressions and developed unique exegetical traditions. Such epistemological concerns are not new and have been expressed in other contexts by scholars who have concerned themselves with the situatedness of western knowledge.<sup>22</sup> They have also been raised by scholars of Islam and Islamic feminists motivated to provide an alternative perspective into their faith traditions in contrast to

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<sup>19</sup> The messages espoused in Chrysostom’s commentaries will be analysed in detail in this paper. Regarding Paul’s teachings, which have been criticised substantially within western scholarship, the Orthodox tradition considers his teachings to have given prominence to women in the Church and to have redefined conventional understandings of male headship in marriage in terms of altruistic love. Especially the epistles of Paul to Philemon, Romans and Philippians which include references to female figures (Apphia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis, Euodia and Syntyche) showcase that female activity in disseminating and strengthening the early Church was equally valued to male activity, so much so that their names were mentioned by the apostle at the beginning of his addresses, often preceding the names of men.

<sup>20</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Biblical Interpretation and Critical Commitment,” *Studia Theologica-Nordic Journal of Theology* 43, no. 1 (1989): 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> See Tina Beattie and Ursula King, ed. *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 4-9; Rita Gross, “Where Have we Been? Where do we Need to Go? Women’s Studies and Gender in Religion and Feminist Theology” in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Tina Beattie and Ursula King, ed. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 22; Katherine Young, “From the Phenomenology of Religion to Feminism and Women’s studies” in *Methodology in Religious Studies: The Interface with Women’s Studies*, A. Sharma, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 36; and Elina Vuola, “Patriarchal Ecumenism, Feminism, and Women’s Religious Experiences in Costa Rica” in *Gendering Religion and Politics*, H. Herzog and A. Braude, ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Istratii, “Mainstream Gender and Development Concepts and Theories,” 2017.

western feminist discourses imbricated with political ideologies of the day.<sup>23</sup> While nominally such critiques have been acknowledged within paradigmatic gender and religion(s) scholarship,<sup>24</sup> essentialising and a-contextual appraisals of non-western Christian traditions have yet to be systematically problematized. This explains why in 2004 Tina Beattie found the need to urge gender and religion(s) scholars to avoid universalisms and acknowledge the historicity and contextuality of different religious traditions, including those which share a Christian teaching.<sup>25</sup>

Following this call, this paper aims to present a more systematic critique of universalising epistemological tendencies in these disciplines and to underscore the ethical and practical urgency for prioritising the insiders' cosmological frameworks. It is an imperative to recognise that any 'readings' of Christian theology through the prism of western/feminist hermeneutics remains disproportionately informed by western forms of Christianity and societal experience and succumbs to the same colonial epistemological attitudes that defined early (and strands of later) feminist scholarship.<sup>26</sup> Within the study of religious systems a decolonial approach is one that examines faith traditions through the indigenous theological, doctrinal, hermeneutical and sociological prism as a means to understanding gender issues redressing potential inequalities and injustices.

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<sup>23</sup> Among scholars of Islam one may site the seminal work of Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005). Islamic feminists, for example, in response to many religious leaders' use of classical jurisprudence to enforce gender asymmetries in their geographical contexts, have selected to work within the religious framework, careful not to deviate from perceived divinely inspired tradition and opposing what can be established as manmade interpretations. (Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 [2006]: 629-645; Ziba Mir-Hosseini Ziba and Vanja Hamzić, *Control and Sexuality: The Revival of Zina Laws in Muslim Contexts* [Nottingham: The Russell Press, 2010]; Amina Wadud, "Islam Beyond Patriarchy through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis" in *Wanted: Why Equality and Justice Now*, edited by Z. Anwar [Malaysia: Musawah, 2009], 95-111). In the understanding of this researcher, Islamic feminists by taking this approach have deviated somehow from local/insiders' hermeneutical traditions motivated by certain feminist standards. In contrast, this study suggests a need to approach the Orthodox tradition through the historically valid exegetical framework of this tradition and the faithful.

<sup>24</sup> For example, in the introduction of the aforementioned edited volume *Feminism in the Study of Religion*, Darlene Juschka appeared to be conscious of west-centric feminist interpretations and representations of traditions such as Islam, citing the works of Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi as seminal critiques. In her references to Christian traditions, however, she did not show similar awareness of possible epistemological bias. The discussion was limited to western Christian traditions and no affirmation was made that Eastern Christianities have an ancient history and have differed theologically, ecclesiastically and socio-culturally.

<sup>25</sup> Tina Beattie, "Religious Identity and the Ethics of Representation: The Study of Religion and Gender in the Secular Academy" in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, T. Beattie and U. King, eds. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 65-78.

<sup>26</sup> See for example, Chandra T. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 61-88; Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Uma Narayan. "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Woman." In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, edited by S.G. Harding, S.G. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 213-224.

## THE URGENCY FOR A DECOLONIAL STUDY OF ORTHODOX TRADITIONS

This approach is especially vital in regards to Orthodox societies due to the particular nature of this tradition. The Orthodox Church not only has a distinct theology, but historically acted with a missionary spirit, engaging cautiously with pre-existing social and political systems with the aim to transcend them and to consolidate the Christian message among new converts. In some cases, the early Church was accommodating if it was felt that local systems did not hinder the Christian message to develop,<sup>27</sup> or if a non-confrontation approach was necessary to avoid exacerbating risks for the new converts. Consequently, pre-existing social systems did not entirely disappear and vestiges carried into the new Christian communities. Church Fathers who lived in subsequent eras were not oblivious to these customary or normative understandings and attitudes that persisted and condemned them openly, such as when Chrysostom spoke against slavery among his audiences, or other instances.<sup>28</sup>

Such a history-based and context-sensitive approach is pertinent also to subsequent communities of Orthodox Christians and the national Churches that eventually emerged.<sup>29</sup> Socio-cultural, economic and political realities specific to the histories of what have been traditionally Orthodox societies mediated both the ways in which theology was pronounced by Church hierarchies or communicated through the clergy and the extent to which the faithful could embody the Orthodox worldview in everyday life.<sup>30</sup> It should be recognised also that the traditional prominence of the Orthodox Church in these societies deemed religious discourse susceptible to appropriation by different parties for political, socio-cultural and other vested interests, contributing to further distortions. Still, such discursive deployments need to be differentiated from the historical experience-based Orthodox

<sup>27</sup> This tactic is exemplified in the instance where Paul used the Greek inscription of worship 'To An Unknown God' in order to introduce to the Athenians the Christian message of salvation (Acts 17:23).

<sup>28</sup> It is worth citing also Gregory the Theologian who, referring to the asymmetrical law that stipulated punishment for an adulterous woman but no punishment for an adulterous man, said characteristically: "Τι δήποτε γὰρ τὸ μὲν θήλυ ἐκόλασαν, τὸ δὲ ἄρρεν ἐπέτρεψαν; Καὶ γυνὴ μὲν κακῶς βουλευσαμένη περὶ κοίτην ἀνδρός μοιχάται καὶ πικρά ἐντεύθεν τὰ τῶν νόμων ἐπιτίμια, ἀνὴρ δὲ καταπορνεύων γυναικὸς ἀνεύθυνος; Οὐ δέχομαι ταύτην τὴν νομοθεσίαν, οὐκ ἐπαινώ τὴν συνήθειαν. Ἄνδρες ἦσαν οἱ νομοθετοῦντες, διὰ τοῦτο κατὰ γυναικῶν ἡ νομοθεσία." This roughly translates as: "For what reason they punish the woman but they forgive the man? When the woman insults the spousal bed she commits adultery and the law punishes her with heavy sentences; when the man goes with other women why is he left unpunished? I do not accept this legislation and I condemn this convention. Those who created the laws were men and this is why legislation turns against women." See *Patrologiae Graecae Tomus XXXVI: St. Gregorius Nazianzenus. ΛΟΓΟΣ ΑΖ'* (Migne, 1858).

<sup>29</sup> It must be mentioned that while the Orthodox Church is a single ecclesiastical body, demarcations into national Churches occurred as issues of national identity became salient. Currently there are various national Churches that follow the Orthodox tradition and are in communion, such as the Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, and so on. Many of these Churches extend beyond their national boundaries as a result of missionary activity, displacements and immigration.

<sup>30</sup> For example, regarding the historically Russian Orthodox populations, Elisabeth Gassin observed that "[a]lthough these cultures may be considered traditionally Orthodox, given the modern history of these lands—which includes domination by Islamic and Communist forces that often did not allow the Church to educate its children fully—one may question how deeply an Orthodox ethos has penetrated such societies." See Elisabeth Gassin, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Men's Violence against Women" in *Religion and Men's Violence against Women*, A. Johnson, ed. (Springer: New York, 2015), 165.

*phronema* which the Church Fathers/saints consistently embodied and conveyed in their works, despite each having lived in different eras and societal conditions.

It is the proposition of this paper that explications of Orthodox theology as provided in Chrysostom's commentaries need to be given due attention as they could help to alleviate pernicious societal attitudes and norms regarding women and marriage in Orthodox societies. Such attitudes have been reported for tradition-oriented Orthodox communities and these include tendencies to emphasise honour that can lead men to become controlling or abusive with females, exceeding preoccupation with women's chastity but not men's, expectations that women should fulfil household works and meet the needs of the husband at all times, or emphasis on male authority.<sup>31</sup> Such attitudes have also been associated with various forms of conjugal violence in Orthodox societies.<sup>32</sup> These are well-known customary attitudes in tradition-oriented Orthodox societies and may emanate either from lack of familiarity with Orthodox theology or an extreme emphasis on aspects of life that appear to be valued also within the faith (such as marriage or the family).<sup>33</sup> It is the position of this author that resources for alleviating these misunderstandings cannot be cosmologically alien, but must emanate from within these same traditions so that they can speak to the insiders' logic effectively and motivate local attitudinal and normative changes.

This rationale is enforced by the consideration that the large majority of Orthodox believers have espoused an ancient cosmology that has been rather suspicious of western gender norms and modern standards of life. This suspicion is expected to have increased in recent years that western gender metaphysics have steadily moved toward a secular philosophical worldview, some strands of which have predicated gender equality on gender fluidity<sup>34</sup> while other strands have criticised marriage and the family as a locus of female subordination.<sup>35</sup> Contrary to this, the Orthodox faithful, generally speaking, have not only espoused a faith-based cosmology premised on a divinely-instituted gender binary system,

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<sup>31</sup> See also Gassin, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity," 2015, 163-175; Paulette Geanacopoulos, *Domestic Violence: A Training Manual for the Greek Orthodox Community* (New York: Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society, Inc., 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Regarding conjugal violence, physical, sexual and psychological forms of abuse have been reported to affect tradition-oriented Orthodox societies such as Greece, Russia and the former soviet republics, and Orthodox diaspora communities living in the US, Australia, Canada and the UK. See Gassin, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity," 2015, 163-175; Andrew Stickley et al., "Attitudes Toward Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Moscow, Russia, *Journal of Family Violence* 23 (2008): 448; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Violence against Women: An EU-wide Survey," 2014, <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

<sup>33</sup> While these attitudes do not emanate from Orthodox theology, they might have been unwittingly enforced through the discourses of Church hierarchies and clergy when the preservation of the family is pronounced without the proper qualifications and clarifications.

<sup>34</sup> These strands appear to have been influenced by theorists who have been particularly influential in gender theory in recent times, such as (but not limited to) the works of Judith Butler [For example, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993)].

<sup>35</sup> See for example, Elizabeth Brake, "Marriage and Domestic Partnership," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/marriage/>; Clare Chambers, "The Marriage-Free State," [https://www.academia.edu/11480382/The\\_Marriage-Free\\_State](https://www.academia.edu/11480382/The_Marriage-Free_State).

but have appraised this through the prism of Orthodox Soteriology that considers this binary a mandatory condition for achieving salvation.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it is not claimed in this paper that Chrysostom's teachings as have been understood in the Orthodox tradition would necessarily align with or respond to western feminist critiques of Christian theology.<sup>37</sup> However, they comprise a resource that emanates from within the Orthodox cosmology that can 'speak' to Orthodox populations directly and could 'correct' customary attitudes, especially if premised on distorted religious ideals.

## APPRAISING CHRYSOSTOM'S WORKS THROUGH THE ORTHODOX PHRONEMA

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As it was explained, Orthodoxy pertains to the upright (ortho-) faith or belief (doxa) which was revealed to the disciples of Christ at Pentecost. Part of this faith has been preserved in written form through the Holy Scriptures. However, in Orthodox tradition the unwritten Holy Tradition which was perpetuated through the life of the Church and embodied in the experience of the saints has been equally important and complementary to the written revelations. The Holy Scriptures validate the importance of the Holy Tradition, while the Holy Tradition confirms and reinforces the revelations of the Holy Scriptures. This Holy Tradition was not altered, but has been preserved in its essence as inherited by Christ. It includes the teachings of Orthodox Church Fathers, the Synodical decisions of the Church

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<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, it is recognised that many feminists' concern with issues of gender fluidity are important and need to be considered, especially in Orthodox societies where such issues were traditionally more taboo. The topic of gender fluidity (usually understood among the Orthodox in conjunction with homosexuality since gender identity has been generally perceived to incorporate/determine sexuality in this cosmology) is a subtle one and cannot be possibly addressed here. The emphasis in this paper has been placed on issues concerning women in view of marriage and the conjugal relationship, which Chrysostom's commentaries have been especially influential on. Suffice it to say that the Orthodox Church embraces all humans, but it also accepts the binary gender as a sacred trust not to be violated. Within the Orthodox cosmology, any gender proclivities that deviate from the natural order that was divinely instituted (Mark 10:5-6; Genesis 1:27-1:31) have tended to be understood as comprising temptations/sinful acts like all other in the sense that they emphasise worldly indulgences that do not accord with God's laws, hindering thus continuous communion with God and *theosis*.

<sup>37</sup> It is not denied that western feminist critiques of Christianity are important and merit consideration. Among other things, western feminists have criticised the language used in Christian teachings (such as male headship, female submission, Eve and the disobedience, androcentric perspectives, the prioritisation of patriarchal figures, etc.) for having contributed to foster the development of harmful masculinities and pernicious attitudes toward women. These are serious concerns, and as it was recognised, even among the Orthodox religious discourses might have been enforced in distorted ways for vested interests. However, these concerns do not alter the fact that Orthodox theology developed in a distinct epistemological framework that was neither gender-exclusive nor centred on intellectualism. Since arbitrary interpretation was not encouraged in this tradition, Orthodox theology did not offer the same grounds for sexist 'interpretations.' In other words, the same language and symbolic images were understood within a very different cosmological framework, as will be evidenced below.

Councils<sup>38</sup> and other elements that have defined the liturgical life of the ancient Orthodox Church.

At the core of this Holy Tradition is the very soteriological aim of the Orthodox faith to heal the corruption of the human nature that was incurred following the disobedience of the first-fashioned couple and their expulsion from heaven.<sup>39</sup> In the Orthodox Church, the faithful aim to achieve likeness with God and salvation by achieving uninterrupted communion with God by participating in the Sacraments and living a life of Orthodox *ascesis*. Following St Maximos the Confessor, this therapeutic pathway has been described as purification, enlightenment and *theosis*<sup>40</sup>. As the faithful undergoes purification, she begins to be enlightened and to obtain insight into divine mysteries. This awakening of the *nous*<sup>41</sup> to the grace and wisdom of God is what the Orthodox tradition has identified with 'noetic' theology. In other words, theology in this tradition has not been predicated on reason or intellect, which has been equated to an androcentric perspective within much western feminist critique, but rather on the enlightenment of the *nous*.

The implication of this 'noetic' Soteriology and theology is that women had no reasons to be excluded from this Holy Tradition. In fact, women were as much involved in the preservation and embodiment of apostolic teachings as were men. Readers should not be led to believe that theology was gender-exclusive on the premise that the actual articulation of theology was dominated by males, which has ecclesiastical and socio-cultural explanations.<sup>42</sup> It is undisputed that the Orthodox Church has historically venerated both female and male prophets and saints, with the Virgin Mary being considered the Holiest of all the Holy. In

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<sup>38</sup> This is best exemplified in the Church's Patristic tradition and in the Ecumenical Synods of the Church. The Synodical decisions were considered valid because of the Holy Fathers who participated in them, who were proven to be holy due to being steady in their faith and echoing apostolic teachings. Therefore, Chrysostom's commentaries have been considered Orthodox not because he was a convincing homilist, but because he echoed apostolic teachings through the grace of the Holy Spirit who dwelled in him.

<sup>39</sup> Within this tradition, it is understood that the first-fashioned couple was made in the image and likeness of God. As a result of the fall from heaven, the latter prospect was not fulfilled. The Orthodox are called to become one with God and to fulfil the potential that God had in mind when He fashioned them. In this strife, the Orthodox must face their sin-prone nature which carries the marks of the expulsion from heaven (physical desires, genetic inclinations, idiosyncrasies, temperament, etc.). This struggle is exacerbated by the works of Satan and his fallen angels who are the eternal enemies of God and humanity. Satan may attack the cognitive, emotive and affective functions of the human individual to tempt the latter into sinful acts that ultimately distance the believer from God and His grace. The faithful are called to overcome these attacks and temptations through prayer, *ascesis* and the cultivation of the Orthodox *phronema*. This should ultimately result in the achievement of meekness and love that emanates from a full union with God.

<sup>40</sup> 'Θέωσις'; translates verbatim as 'making divine' or 'deification.'

<sup>41</sup> 'νοῦς'; might be thought of as the rational core of the human soul, as differentiated from the intellect. It has also been called the 'eye of the soul.'

<sup>42</sup> This is probably explained by the fact that males already held more prominence in the early societies and women were generally dedicated to the life of the household and child-rearing. In addition, in the Orthodox traditions only men could serve in the role of priests and this provided an additional platform for prolific teaching, such as in the case of Chrysostom. However, it should be noted that while the Orthodox Church has traditionally preserved the priestly order for men, this has been explained in reference to theological reasons that do not suggest an ontological male superiority. This is one issue that has attracted attention in contemporary debates among some strands of Orthodox scholars.

addition, there have been instances where female saints have explicated divine mysteries to male saints with extraordinary theological clarity,<sup>43</sup> and have been considered authoritative to settle doctrinal Church positions among male clergies.<sup>44</sup>

Chrysostom's homilies should be assessed within this comprehensive Orthodox cosmology, which he echoed and enforced through his commentaries. In accordance with apostolic teachings, Chrysostom taught the full spiritual equality of men and women and seemed to grant women a higher capacity to create an environment of spiritual renewal and growth in their homes for their husbands and their families.<sup>45</sup> Simultaneously, as it was cautioned, his commentaries should not be isolated from the context in which he lived and the conditions of the faithful and especially of women in the times during which he spoke his homilies.<sup>46</sup> It is to be apprehended that his pastoral concern led to some concessions or adaptations in the expression and rhetorical strategies of the saint to make himself relevant and convincing to his audience.<sup>47</sup>

To appraise this tradition through the Orthodox *phronema* is to understand that the Orthodox tradition does not consider the saints infallible and understands that there should be *accord* among their teachings, which should echo the apostolic didascalia. For other matters that are not directly doctrinal or theological, the teachings of the Church Fathers are taken as suggestive. It is upon the faithful and their own Orthodox *diakrisis*<sup>48</sup> to decide how these teachings reflect on their own life. Reading through the Orthodox *phronema* means to understand all the aforementioned characteristics of the Orthodox tradition and these

<sup>43</sup> As exemplified in the dialogue that bedridden St Macrina had with her brother Gregory Nyssa on the state of the soul which enforced his steadiness in the faith. Notably, Gregory of Nyssa considered St. Macrina his 'teacher'.

<sup>44</sup> As exemplified at the fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in Bithynia (AD 451) when the final decision about Christology was made by a miracle of the deceased local saint Euthemia.

<sup>45</sup> David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. Chrysostom* (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1996).

<sup>46</sup> See for example, Deborah F. Sawyer, *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>47</sup> It is thus not denied that Chrysostom seemed inclined to believe that the female sex was inherently more delicate or weaker, such as in instances where he said that the woman needs more understanding and condescension. (*In Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20). He also seemed to suggest at various occasions that women could be more talkative, frivolous or superficial (*De Virginitate*, Paragraph 40). These comments should be appraised in consideration of women's realities in the early centuries. Since females in the pre-Christian times had been generally treated as lesser than men, it is understood that they had consistently lacked opportunities for education and refinement of thought, which could have made them susceptible to such proclivities, as well as enforced the general idea of them being less intellectual. However, while Chrysostom showed these proclivities, he attributed to men their own share of negative tendencies, such as irascibility, arrogance and abusiveness (*De Virginitate*, Paragraph 40). In speaking this way, Chrysostom was ultimately trying to help females and males recognise commonplace spousal defects and cultivate a Christian ethos in their marriage, which he considered essential to achieve the soteriological ends of the union. (See "Ο Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος και η Οικογενειακή Ζωή του Αρχιμ. Εφραίμ, Καθηγούμενου Ιεράς Μεγίστης Μονής Βατοπαιδίου. Πηγή: Περιοδικό 'Πεμπτουσία' No 25," republished by OODE, April 18, 2008, [http://www.oodegr.com/oode/koinwnia/oikogeneia/xrysost\\_oikog\\_zwi1.htm](http://www.oodegr.com/oode/koinwnia/oikogeneia/xrysost_oikog_zwi1.htm)).

<sup>48</sup> 'διάκρισις'; translates as 'discernment'. It is understood that one cultivates this through prayer and Orthodox *ascesis*.

nuanced hermeneutical particularities, which only personal exposure to the tradition could grant. While the logic of the tradition may be penetrated by reading established Church Fathers or modern Church scholars who have summarised the Orthodox cosmology faithfully, unless this 'reading' is complemented by an insight into the experience-based conscience of the Orthodox Church, the tradition cannot be grasped in full.

This ultimately draws attention to the importance of personal positionality, indicating also the unique intervention that this article can make to the relevant disciplines. It is important to recognise that the author writes from the perspective of an Orthodox insider who has studied and experienced this tradition in everyday life across multiple cultural contexts.<sup>49</sup> While the following presentation is not without shortfalls, it can serve as a modest attempt to provide a delineation of an experiential realm that western gender scholars of religion(s) appear to have had little familiarity with.

## METHODOLOGY

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The analysis in this paper was premised on a careful reading of Chrysostom's commentaries referring to man-woman relations, especially in the context of marriage and conjugal abuse. The author read in full over twenty homilies in the original Greek of which seven were cited in this work.<sup>50</sup> The identification of which homilies to scrutinise was premised on: a) biblical verses that referred to man-woman relations and marriage which usually pertained to the epistles of Paul, and b) on pertinent references made by previous works on Chrysostom written in either English or modern Greek. While the study cannot be considered comprehensive, an attempt was made to summarise what would be considered essential understandings in the Orthodox tradition pertinent to the themes examined here.

As a principle, the original Greek passages or terminologies that were selected for citation were included in footnotes. This was deliberate and emanates from the overall argument of this paper that religious traditions ought to be approached within their proper epistemological frameworks, of which the indigenous language makes an essential component. In general, the English translations that were consulted in preparation of this paper did not make transparent always their logic/method for translating Chrysostom. Translation, however, should be considered a crucial stage due to the malleability of the Greek language and the ways in which the Church Fathers tended to redefine terms that were previously widely in usage.<sup>51</sup> Due to limited space, it was not possible to provide such an exercise here. References are made to available works where the reader can find an

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<sup>49</sup> The author was born in the Republic of Moldova and was raised and educated in Greece. Both countries have been traditionally Orthodox, albeit socio-cultural specificities.

<sup>50</sup> These were accessed through the Index of Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* made available online by the initiative of the Aegean University, Department of Cultural Technology and Communication.

<sup>51</sup> Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspective on the Nature of the Human Person* (New York: St Vladimir's Press, 1987), 16.

English translation. However, the author's altered/adapted renderings in English of all the passages cited in the text and in the footnotes are readily available upon request.<sup>52</sup>

An important terminological comment that needs to be made regards the translation of the term 'γάμος' which has been rendered in most existing works uniformly as 'marriage.' It was felt that giving this translation in all instances that Chrysostom used the word would risk obscuring the expansion in the meaning of 'γάμος' when it was employed to refer to the post-fall condition (after the disobedience of the first couple and the expulsion from heaven). In commentaries referring to the non-existent relations of man and woman in the heavenly state, Chrysostom clearly used the word 'γάμος' to refer to the lack of carnal attraction and sexual union.<sup>53</sup> Following the fall from heaven, however, this primal carnal attraction acquired the understanding of marriage as sacramental and spiritual bond which was intended for the salvation of the fallen humanity. Under Chrysostomean logic, God apprehended the fall and had providentially created the close bond between man and woman (with woman originating from man) that would provide the substructure for marriage to serve the ends of salvation in the post-fall condition. It follows from this that whichever spousal dynamics Chrysostom considered ideal for marriage, he strictly referred to the post-fall married state and this differed from man-woman relations in the heavenly state and the state of virginity.

## AN OVERVIEW OF CHRYSOSTOM'S TEACHINGS

To understand Chrysostom's positions on man-woman relations it is important to start with his commentaries on the fashioning of Adam and Eve and their disobedience that led to their expulsion from heaven. Examining his commentaries on Genesis, makes evident that Chrysostom exerted important energy to establish that the woman was made of "like fashion" and "like honour" to the man.<sup>54</sup> He echoed emphatically the Orthodox understanding that man and woman had been originally one. In his commentaries on the Ephesians he reiterated this<sup>55</sup> and mentioned how content Adam was when he realised that he had a partner similar in all ways to him, exclaiming upon beholding her: "This now is bone of my bones" and "flesh of my flesh!"<sup>56</sup> Chrysostom, in fact, believed that the woman's

<sup>52</sup> It should be observed that some of the English renderings cited in the text were reproduced from existing translations by English-speaking scholars; however, minor or major changes were made to approximate better the nuances of the original according to the discernment of the author. Italics were used to signify the changes proposed.

<sup>53</sup> This reflects in the very etymology of the noun 'γάμος' which derives from the verb 'to sleep with' ('γαμέω/γαμώ').

<sup>54</sup> "πόσης εύφροσύνης αὐτοῦ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐνεπίμπλατο κοινωνῶν θεωρῶν τὴν γυναῖκα, καὶ ὁμότροπον καὶ ὁμόδοξον αὐτὴν καθεστῶσαν;" In *Genesim* (sermo 3).

<sup>55</sup> "ὥσπερ καὶ ἡ Εὐὰ σὰρξ ἀπὸ τῆς σαρκὸς τοῦ Ἀδάμ." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>56</sup> "Ἄκουε· Τοῦτο νῦν ὅσπουν ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων μου, φησί, καὶ σὰρξ ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς μου". In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

fashioning from man was God's Providence<sup>57</sup> to ensure that under no circumstances would man look down on woman as alien to him.<sup>58</sup>

Expressing the Orthodox understanding, Chrysostom explained that prior to their disobedience Adam and Eve had existed in a relationship of comradeship and mutual help without any sexual attraction that required physical union between the two. As he spoke in his Homily on Virginity, while they were still in heaven the two had been uncorrupted like children, had direct contact with the Creator and were fully satisfied with their life in the Garden.<sup>59</sup> It was their disobedience that resulted in the corruption of their minds, which fundamentally altered also the nature of their relationship. It was at that time that the woman lost her equal authority in the Creation, initially granted to her by God in being fashioned alike to Adam. Chrysostom explained that due to her weak judgement which contributed to their disobedience she was thenceforth consigned to be dependent on her husband.<sup>60</sup> However he ventured to clarify that this was not meant as punishment, but as an act of Providence by a merciful God who knew that the fall from heaven would put the woman in much terror and risk. He explained:

And notice God's benevolence here. For lest when she heard the word, "He shall rule over you," she might imagine them to mean a burdensome tyranny, God puts the words of caring first. He did this by saying, "You will depend on your husband," that is to say, "He is your refuge, your haven, and your security: he shall be these things to you. Amid all life's daily terrors, I give you the right to turn to him, to take refuge in him." And not only to her [He allowed these], but also he joined the two with physical needs just as in an unbroken bond, arraying the chain with desire. You see how sin introduced woman's subjection, but God, so ingenious and wise, used the result of sin for our benefit?<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Original being 'οικονομία.' This is another important concept within Orthodox cosmology and pertains to the understanding that some things that may not be in line with Orthodox ideals are allowed providentially or temporarily for the sake of securing an unseen spiritual benefit and, ultimately, salvation.

<sup>58</sup> His emphasis on both the flesh ('σάρκος') and the bones ('ὀστών') betrayed his intention not to leave any doubt that woman was made in every way similar to man.

<sup>59</sup> "Πλασθεὶς δὲ ἐκεῖνος ἔμεινεν ἐν παραδείσῳ καὶ γάμου λόγος οὐδεὶς ἦν. Ἐδέησεν αὐτῷ γενέσθαι καὶ βοηθόν, καὶ ἐγένετο, καὶ οὐδὲ οὕτως ὁ γάμος ἀναγκαῖος εἶναι ἐδόκει. Ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἐφαίνετό που, ἀλλ' ἔμενον ἐκεῖνοι τούτου χωρὶς καθάπερ ἐν οὐρανῷ τῷ παραδείσῳ διαιτώμενοι καὶ ἐντρυφῶντες τῇ πρὸς Θεὸν ὁμιλίᾳ. Μίξεως δὲ ἐπιθυμία καὶ σύλληψις καὶ ὠδῖνες καὶ τόκοι καὶ πᾶν εἶδος φθορᾶς ἐξώριστο τῆς ἐκείνων ψυχῆς." In *De virginitate*, Paragraph 14. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 109.

<sup>60</sup> "Ἐποίησά σε, φησὶν, ὁμότιμον· οὐκ ἐχρήσω καλῶς τῇ ἀρχῇ· μετάβηθι πρὸς τὴν ὑποταγὴν. Οὐκ ἤνεγκας τὴν ἐλευθερίαν, καταδέξαι τὴν δουλείαν. Οὐκ οἶδας ἄρχειν, καὶ δι' αὐτῆς τῶν πραγμάτων ἔδειξας τῆς πείρας· γενοῦ τῶν ἀρχομένων, καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα ἐπίγνωθι κύριον. Πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα σου ἡ ἀποστροφή σου, καὶ αὐτός σου κυριεύσει." In *Genesim Sermones*, Homily 4. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 30.

<sup>61</sup> "Καὶ ὅρα Θεοῦ ἐναυῖθα φιλανθρωπίαν. Ἴνα γὰρ μὴ ἀκούσασα τὸ, Αὐτός σου κυριεύσει, φορτικὴν εἶναι νομίση τὴν δεσποτείαν, πρότερον τὸ τῆς κηδεμονίας ἔθηκεν ὄνομα εἰπὼν, Πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα σου ἡ ἀποστροφή σου, τουτέστιν, Ἡ καταφυγὴ σου καὶ ὁ λιμὴν καὶ ἡ ἀσφάλεια ἐκεῖνος ἔσται σοι· ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἐπιούσις δεινοῖς πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ἀποστρέφου καὶ καταφεύγειν σοι δίδωμι. Οὐ ταύτη δὲ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ φυσικᾶς αὐτοὺς συνέδησεν ἀνάγκαις καθάπερ ἄρρηκτόν τινα δεσμόν, τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας περιβαλὼν αὐτοῖς ἄλυσιν. Εἶδες πῶς εἰσήγαγε μὲν τὴν ὑποταγὴν ἢ ἁμαρτία, ὁ δὲ εὐμήχανος καὶ σοφὸς Θεὸς καὶ τούτοις πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον ἡμῶν ἀπεχρήσατο;" In *Genesim Sermones*, Homily 4. Original translation in Miller, *Women*, 30 with underlined alterations.

To ensure that the woman's loss of authority did not expose her to more terror and vulnerability which the expulsion from Paradise was expected to bring, the Provident God instilled in the fallen pair natural desire for each other. In this new dynamic, the husband was made the wife's head so as to act as her refuge, while her 'natural' (post-fall) inclination toward him and his 'natural' (post-fall) desire for her were instilled by the caring God to increase the likelihood that their bond would be one of love and trust and would not turn into a bond of intimidation. This was apprehended to happen in view of humanity's susceptibility to sinfulness in the post-fall condition and Satan's perennial efforts to interfere with humanity's salvation.

It needs to be underscored here that while the subordination of Eve was traced back to the original disobedience, for which she had the largest share, this was never meant to inculcate her alone. In fact, Chrysostom appeared to hold Adam equally responsible, as evident in places where he observed that had it not been for Adam's disobedience, there would have been no necessity to preserve mankind in the first place.<sup>62</sup> At other times he referred generically to the disobedience of the "first human."<sup>63</sup> His approach reflects rather faithfully the Orthodox *phronema* within which more emphasis has been traditionally placed on rectifying the consequences of the fall rather than on attributing blame.

Within Orthodox tradition, following the fall, salvation could be achieved either by living a virginal, ascetic life or by marrying. Both these pathways have been considered honourable and have been protected by the Orthodox Church vehemently against multiple historical heresies. However, there were reasons for which Chrysostom held that the ascetic life was higher and nobler than the married life. This followed from his understanding that the physical attraction and carnal union of man and woman had resulted from the disobedience of the first couple<sup>64</sup> and had become necessary only because of humanity's 'infirmity.'<sup>65</sup> On the contrary, virginity had existed before the fall, and also in the angels.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, according to him one would aspire to live in virginity if one wanted to be as close as possible to the heavenly state.

In Chrysostom's commentaries virginal life was also perceived to be freer from worldly worries, which married life could not possibly avoid. In the recluse life, one would strive for the salvation of one's soul and could devote oneself entirely to spiritual work, but in the

<sup>62</sup> "Ὡσπερ οὖν τότε ἀπὸ νεκρῶν σωμάτων τοσαύταις μυριάσι δέδωκεν ὑπόθεσιν καὶ ρίζαν ὁ Θεός, οὕτω καὶ παρὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν εἰ τοῖς προστάγμασιν αὐτοῦ πεισθέντες οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἀδὰμ τῆς ἡδονῆς ἐκράτησαν τοῦ ξύλου, οὐκ ἂν ἠπόρησεν ὁδοῦ δι' ἧς τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος αὐξήσει." De Virginitate, Paragraph 15. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 110.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, in *Genesim* (sermo 3) where he mentions the first human "τὸν πρῶτον ἄνθρωπον" who failing to keep the fast, lost Paradise. While the etymology of the word 'ἄνθρωπος' ('human' in Greek) has been disputed, it is often associated with 'ἄνδρ-ωπος' which refers roughly to 'one who had the look of a man (ἀνήρ).' Chrysostom seemed to use 'human' and 'man' distinctively so it is unlikely that he referred here only to Adam. Even so, this would only strengthen the argument that he did not speak of the disobedience exclusively as being Eve's responsibility.

<sup>64</sup> "Ἀπὸ τῆς παρακοῆς, ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρᾶς, ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου. Ὅπου γὰρ θάνατος, ἐκεῖ γάμος." De Virginitate, Paragraph 14. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 109.

<sup>65</sup> Original being "ἀσθένειαν."

<sup>66</sup> "Ἄλλ' οὐχ ἡ παρθενία ταύτην ἔχει τὴν ἀκολουθίαν ἀλλ' αἰεὶ χρήσιμον, αἰεὶ καλὸν καὶ μακάριον καὶ πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου καὶ μετὰ τὸν θάνατον καὶ πρὸ τοῦ γάμου καὶ μετὰ τὸν γάμον," De Virginitate, Paragraph 14.

married life, a man and woman would have to concern themselves with worldly necessities and would need to worry about the material wellbeing and spiritual progression of both themselves and other family members. Moreover, for a marriage to be in God the married would need to act as if they were not married at all, which echoed Paul's commandment to the Corinthians: "Let those who have wives live as though they have none."<sup>67</sup> Thus, asked Chrysostom: "What occasion to take up such a load, when even after taking it you must use it as having it not?"<sup>68</sup>

He proceeded to explain that marriage should be understood as a mystery that was intended to assist men and women to overcome sin and to achieve holiness. Marriage, as a monogamous bond, could safeguard against fornication and prostitution, temptations that the Orthodox Church has acknowledged to have a stronghold on all fallen humanity and to impede the process to a union with God and salvation. Chrysostom explained that this aim of marriage was not always articulated as such, but originally more emphasis had been placed on procreation.<sup>69</sup> After the fall, there was a necessity for humanity to secure the reproduction of their species and fulfil the divine plan for salvation. However, the more fundamental objective of the marriage bond that God had apprehended was to alleviate humanity's harmful desires that served as obstacles to overcoming sin in the fallen state.<sup>70</sup> Chrysostom enforced this point by referring to the example of Abraham and Sara who had lived most of their married life childless. He observed that Abraham's marriage to Sara had not secured him the child he had earnestly hoped for.<sup>71</sup> This underscored his understanding that it was not by means of marriage and carnal union that people multiplied, but by God's commandment "Be fertile and multiply." In other words, Chrysostom observed that had God's aim been procreation alone, He would have not needed to provide the mystery of marriage. Subsequently, marriage must have been intended for a more profound purpose,

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<sup>67</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:29 (ESV).

<sup>68</sup> "τί χρη λαβεῖν τοσοῦτον ὄγκον, ὅταν καὶ μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν οὕτω δέοι χρῆσθαι, ὡς μὴ ἔχοντα;" In *Epistulam i ad Corinthios*, Homily 19. Original translation from Schaff, *NPNF1-12*, 194.

<sup>69</sup> "Ὅτι πάλαι μὲν τῷ γάμῳ δύο προφάσεις, νῦν δὲ μία. Ἐδόθη μὲν οὖν καὶ παιδοποιίας ἕνεκεν ὁ γάμος· πολλῶ δὲ πλέον ὑπὲρ τοῦ σβέσαι τὴν τῆς φύσεως πύρωσιν. Καὶ μάρτυς ὁ Παῦλος λέγων· «Διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἔχεται», οὐ διὰ τὰς παιδοποιίας. Καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συνέρχεσθαι κελεύει οὐχ ἵνα πατέρες γένωνται παίδων πολλῶν, ἀλλὰ τί; «Ἴνα μὴ πειράζῃ ὑμᾶς ὁ σατανᾶς», φησί. Καὶ προελθὼν δὲ οὐκ εἶπεν· εἰ δὲ ἐπιθυμοῦσι παίδων, ἀλλὰ τί; «Εἰ δὲ μὴ ἐγκρατεύονται, γαμησάτωσαν.» Παρὰ μὲν γὰρ τὴν ἀρχὴν, ὅπερ ἔφην, δύο ταύτας εἶχε τὰς ὑποθέσεις· ὕστερον δὲ πληρωθείσης καὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ τῆς θαλάττης καὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης πάσης μία λείπεται πρόφασις αὐτοῦ μόνη, ἡ τῆς ἀκολασίας καὶ ἡ τῆς ἀσελγείας ἀναίρεσις." De *Virginitate*, Paragraph 19. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 113.

<sup>70</sup> Predicting that he could be blamed for denigrating the laws of Moses, Chrysostom reassuredly explained: "Κακίζω μὲν οὐδαμῶς· Θεὸς γὰρ αὐτὰ συνεχώρησε καὶ γέγονεν ἐν καιρῷ χρήσιμα. Μικρὰ δὲ αὐτὰ εἶναι φημι, καὶ παίδων κατορθώματα μᾶλλον ἢ ἀνδρῶν. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἡμᾶς τελείους ὁ Χριστὸς δημιουργῆσαι βουλόμενος ἐκεῖνα μὲν ἀποθέσθαι ἐκέλευσεν, ὡς περ ἱμάτια παιδικὰ καὶ οὐ δυνάμενα περιβάλλειν τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν τέλειον οὐδὲ τὸ μέτρον κοσμησάει τῆς ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὰ δὲ ἐκείνων εὐπρεπέστερα καὶ τελειότερα περιθέσθαι ἐκέλευσεν, οὐκ ἀντινομοθετῶν ἑαυτῷ ἀλλὰ καὶ σφόδρα ἀκολουθῶν." De *Virginitate*, Paragraph 16. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 110-111.

<sup>71</sup> "Καὶ νῦν δὲ οὐχ ἡ τοῦ γάμου δύναμις τὸ γένος συγκροτεῖ τὸ ἡμέτερον ἀλλ' ὁ τοῦ κυρίου λόγος ὁ παρὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν εἰπὼν· «Αὐξάνεσθαι καὶ πληθύνεσθαι καὶ πληρώσατε τὴν γῆν." Τί γάρ, εἶπέ μοι, τὸν Ἀβραάμ εἰς παιδοποιίαν τὸ πρᾶγμα ὤνησεν; Οὐκ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτοις αὐτῷ χρησάμενος ἔτεσι ταύτην ὕστερον ἀφῆκε τὴν φωνήν· 'Δέσποτα, τί μοι δώσεις; Ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπολύομαι ἄτεκνος;" De *Virginitate*, Paragraph 15. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 110.

which was, at its most basic articulation, to avoid and to overcome sin, such as intemperance, wanton and other states of unchastity.<sup>72</sup>

Chrysostom spoke about the union of man and woman in the context of the Orthodox marriage as a mystery and explained that it was “a bond” that had been “ordained by God.”<sup>73</sup> The fact that man was asked to leave his father and mother, who bore him and raised him in order to attach himself to a stranger evidenced to him the depth of the mystery of marriage.<sup>74</sup> The carnal union of the spouses was understood to constitute part of the mystery, which he described as follows:

They come to become one body. Here is again the mystery of love. If the two do not become one, they cannot have many offspring, as long as each remains one. But when they come in union, then they can procreate. What do we learn from this? That the strength of the bond has much power. The genius of God divided the one into two from the beginning of the creation, and wanting to show that after this division each remains one, he did not let each be adequate for procreation. Because they do not yet make one, but each half of one, and it is obvious that each alone does not procreate, exactly as before.<sup>75</sup>

Just as Adam and Eve had been initially one, the husband and wife become one in one flesh in their marriage. According to Chrysostom, after the union wife and husband are not two people, but one person as the first-fashioned human.<sup>76</sup> He furthermore added: “That is why “helper” He also calls the woman, to show that they are one.”<sup>77</sup>

In the previous comment, it is important not to take his reference to procreation to mean that the Orthodox marriage was conditioned on childbirth. Chrysostom’s point that both woman and man were essential for child-bearing was only meant to illustrate the power of the bond at its most visible manifestation. The intensity of the bond was furthermore illustrated with his discussion of romantic love:

When blessed David was mourning for Jonathan, who was of one soul with him, what comparison did he use to describe the loftiness of their love: “Your love to me

<sup>72</sup> It is important to observe that sin within Orthodox theology has never been understood legalistically or moralistically. Sin is understood as a distancing from God, which impedes the process of enlightenment and the achievement of salvation.

<sup>73</sup> “δεσμός ὠρισμένος παρὰ Θεοῦ.” In *Epistulam ad Colossenses*, Homily 12.

<sup>74</sup> “Ὦντως γάρ, ὄντως μυστήριόν ἐστι, καὶ μέγα μυστήριον, ὅτι τὸν φύντα, τὸν γεννησάμενον, τὸν ἀναθρεψάμενον, τὴν ὠδινήσασαν, τὴν ταλαιπωρηθεῖσαν ἀφεις, τοὺς τὰ τοσαῦτα εὐεργετήσαντας, τοὺς ἐν συνηθείᾳ γενομένους, τῇ μηδὲ ὀφθείσῃ, μηδὲ κοινόν τι ἐχούσῃ πρὸς αὐτὸν προσκολλᾶται, καὶ πάντων αὐτὴν προτιμᾷ. Μυστήριον ὄντως ἐστί. Καὶ οἱ γονεῖς τούτων γινομένων οὐκ ἄχθονται, ἀλλὰ μὴ γινομένων μᾶλλον· καὶ χρημάτων ἀναλισκομένων καὶ δαπάνης γινομένης, ἤδονται.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>75</sup> “Ἐρχονται ἐν σῶμα γενησόμενοι. Ἰδοὺ πάλιν ἀγάπης μυστήριον. Ἄν οἱ δύο μὴ γένωνται ἐν, οὐκ ἐργάζονται πολλοὺς, ἕως ἂν δύο μένωσιν· ὅταν δὲ εἰς ἐνότητα ἔλθωσι, τότε ἐργάζονται. Τί μανθάνομεν ἀπὸ τούτου; Ὅτι πολλῆ τῆς ἐνώσεως ἡ ἰσχὺς. Τὸ εὐμήχανον τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν ἕνα εἰς δύο διεῖλε παρὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν, καὶ θέλων δεῖξαι ὅτι μετὰ τὸ διαιεθῆναι καὶ εἷς μένει, οὐκ ἀφῆκεν ἕνα ἀρκεῖν πρὸς τὴν γέννησιν. Οὐ γάρ ἐστιν εἷς [ὁ] οὐδέπω, ἀλλ’ ἤμισυ τοῦ ἐνός· καὶ δῆλον, ὅτι οὐ παιδοποιεῖ, καθάπερ καὶ πρότερον.” In *Epistulam ad Colossenses*, Homily 12. Translation with reference to the modern Greek in *Παιδαγωγική*, p. 22

<sup>76</sup> “Γυνὴ γάρ καὶ ἀνὴρ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἄνθρωποι δύο, ἀλλ’ ἄνθρωπος εἷς.” In *Epistulam ad Colossenses*, Homily 12.

<sup>77</sup> “Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ βοηθὸν καλεῖ, ἵνα δεῖξῃ ὅτι ἐν εἰσι.” In *Epistulam ad Colossenses*, Homily 12.

was wonderful, passing the love of women.” The power of this love (*the love between man and woman*) is truly stronger than any passion; other desires may be strong, but this alone never fades. This (*romantic*) love is deeply planted within the inmost being. Unnoticed by us, it attracts the bodies of men and women to each other, because in the beginning woman came forth from man, and from man and woman other men and women proceed.<sup>78</sup>

Chrysostom explained that the force of the love between man and woman was exemplified in the fact that Adam was given to unite with Eve, who herself was his flesh.<sup>79</sup> This original closeness was evoked to justify the strength of the heterosexual love, which attracted unrelated men and women to each other. Any disruption of this physical union or the dedicated love of the spouses was expected to spoil the bond of marriage itself. This was especially pronounced when Chrysostom compared the repercussions of being married to a non-believer and someone committing adultery. While being married to an “idolatress” did not spoil the marital bond because the believing spouse sanctified the unbeliever, adultery could destroy the adulterous spouse’s marriage rights.<sup>80</sup> Chrysostom’s comment was not made for purposes of condemning those who succumbed to these practices, since within the faith deep remorse can transcend any sin and wrongdoing, but rather to emphasise again that the power of the conjugal relationship lies in the exclusivity of the marriage bond.

Chrysostom was adamant that the union of the spouses had to be experienced in the faith. As he said, “[t]his then is marriage when it takes place according to Christ, spiritual marriage, and spiritual birth, not of blood, nor of travail, nor of the will of the flesh.”<sup>81</sup> Experiencing marriage as a spiritual relationship would require approaching marriage as a Sacrament that aims toward salvation and living with one’s spouse according to one’s duty to God to achieve that. In his commentaries, Chrysostom discussed the conjugal duties in detail, echoing Paul’s command: “Women submit to your own husbands, as if to the Lord, for the man is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the Church, and He is Himself

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<sup>78</sup> “Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ τις τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν ἀγάπην δηλῶν μακάριος ἀνὴρ, καὶ τινα τῶν αὐτῶ φίλων καὶ ὁμοψύχων πενθῶν, οὐ πατέρα εἶπεν, οὐ μητέρα, οὐ τέκνον, οὐκ ἀδελφόν, οὐ φίλον, ἀλλὰ τί; Ἐπεσεν ἐπ’ ἐμὲ ἡ ἀγάπησίς σου, φησὶν, ὡς ἀγάπησίς τῶν γυναικῶν. Ὅντως γάρ, ὄντως πάσης τυραννίδος αὕτη ἡ ἀγάπη τυραννικωτέρα. Αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλαι, σφοδραὶ αὕτη δὲ ἡ ἐπιθυμία ἔχει καὶ τὸ σφοδρὸν, καὶ τὸ ἀμάραντον. Ἐνεστι γάρ τις ἔρωσις ἐμφωλεύων τῇ φύσει, καὶ λανθάνων ἡμᾶς συμπλέκει ταῦτα τὰ σώματα. Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς ἡ γυνή, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ καὶ γυνή. In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 43-44 with underlined alterations.

<sup>79</sup> “Ὁρᾷς σύνδεσμον καὶ συμπλοκὴν, καὶ πῶς οὐκ ἀφῆκεν ἐτέραν ἐπεισελεθεῖν οὐσίαν ἐξωθεν; Καὶ ὄρα πόσα ὠκονόμησε. Τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἠνέσχετο γαμήσαι αὐτὸν τὴν αὐτοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ οὐ τὴν ἀδελφὴν, ἀλλὰ τὴν θυγατέρα, μᾶλλον δὲ οὐ τὴν θυγατέρα, ἀλλὰ τι πλέον θυγατρὸς, τὴν σάρκα τὴν αὐτοῦ. Τὸ δὲ ὅλον ἐποίησεν ἄνωθεν, ὡσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν λίθων, εἰς ἓν αὐτοὺς συνάγων.” Translation in Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 43-44.

<sup>80</sup> “Πῶς γὰρ ἡ τὸν ἔμπροσθεν ἀτιμάσασα χρόνον, καὶ γενομένη ἐτέρου, καὶ τοῦ γάμου τὰ δίκαια ἀφανίσασα, ἀνακαλέσασθαι δυνησεται τὸν ἡδικημένον, πρὸς τούτοις καὶ τὸν μένοντα ὡς ξένον; Πάλιν ἐκεῖ μὲν μετὰ τὴν πορνείαν ὁ ἀνὴρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνὴρ· ἐνταῦθα δὲ, κἂν εἰδωλολάτρις ἡ γυνή, τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τὸ δίκαιον οὐκ ἀπόλλυται.” In *Epistulam i ad Corinthios*, Homily 19. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-12*, 189.

<sup>81</sup> “Ἄρα γάμος ἐστὶν οὗτος γινόμενος κατὰ Χριστὸν, γάμος πνευματικὸς καὶ γέννησις πνευματικὴ, οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων, οὐκ ἐξ ὠδίνων.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-13*, 274.

the Saviour of the Body.”<sup>82</sup> Regarding this verse, Chrysostom explained that the wife was asked to show to her husband the type of sacred fear and reverence that the Church is expected to show to Christ who is Her Head. By the Orthodox *phronema*, this fear has been intimately tied to love and should be differentiated from more profane forms of fear motivated by threats or profane agony because of one’s sins.<sup>83</sup> As St Nektarios of Pentapolis has explained, “This fear—as a feeling—relates to love, and it generates piety inside the soul, so that she does not reach the point of being despised by the man through the outspokenness of love.”<sup>84</sup>

A further way to evidence this is by looking closely at how the duty of the husband in marriage was described, which Chrysostom appeared to consider even more difficult than women’s duty to honour their husbands:

But now listen to what else he requires from you; he has not finished with his example. “Husbands, he says, “love your wives, as Christ loved the Church.” You have seen the amount of obedience necessary; now hear about the amount of love necessary. Do you want your wife to be obedient to you, as the Church is to Christ? Then be responsible for the same providential care of her, as Christ is for the Church. And even if it becomes necessary for you to give your life for her, yes, and even to endure and undergo suffering of any kind, do not refuse. Even though you undergo all this, you will never have done anything equal to what Christ has done.”<sup>85</sup>

This was again pronounced in Chrysostom’s discussion of male headship in commenting on Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians. The homilist referred there also to the analogy between the relationship of man and woman and that of Christ and the Church.<sup>86</sup> He explained that Jesus Christ willingly gave His life for the Church, even though She rejected him, acted foolishly

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<sup>82</sup> “Αἱ γυναῖκες, τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὑποτάσσεσθε, ὡς τῷ Κυρίῳ, ὅτι ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐστὶ κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς, ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶ σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>83</sup> ““And the wife see that she reverence her husband- Ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα”: A theological commentary on Ephesians 5:33 by Saint Nektarios, Metropolitan of Pentapolis, 1902,” republished and translated in English by OODE, June 22, 2011, [http://www.oodegr.com/english/ekklisia/pateres/Saint\\_Nektarios\\_on\\_woman\\_respecting\\_man.htm](http://www.oodegr.com/english/ekklisia/pateres/Saint_Nektarios_on_woman_respecting_man.htm)

<sup>84</sup> ““And the wife see that she reverence her husband...” OODE, June 22, 2011.

<sup>85</sup> “Ἄλλ’ ἄκουσον, ἃ καὶ παρὰ σοῦ ἀπαιτεῖ· πάλιν γὰρ τῷ αὐτῷ κέχρηται ὑποδείγματι· Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε, φησὶ, τὰς γυναῖκας ἑαυτῶν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησε τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν. Εἶδες μέτρον ὑπακοῆς; Ἄκουσον καὶ μέτρον ἀγάπης. Βούλει σοι τὴν γυναῖκα ὑπακούειν, ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν; Προνοεὶ καὶ αὐτὸς αὐτῆς, ὡς ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας· κὰν τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς δοῦναι δεῖ, κὰν κατακοπῆναι μυριάκις, κὰν ὅτιοῦν ὑπομεῖναι καὶ παθεῖν, μὴ παρατήσῃ· κὰν ταῦτα πάθῃς, οὐδὲν οὐδέπω πεποιήκας, οἷον ὁ Χριστὸς.” In *Epistulam ad Corinthios*, Homily 18. Translation in Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 46.

<sup>86</sup> “Ἐποθῶμεθα οὖν τὸν μὲν ἄνδρα ἐν τάξει κεφαλῆς, τὴν δὲ γυναῖκα ἐν τάξει σώματος. Εἶτα καὶ ἀπὸ λογισμῶν δεικνύς, ὅτι ὁ ἀνὴρ κεφαλὴ ἐστὶ τῆς γυναικὸς, φησὶ, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶ σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος. Ἄλλ’ ὡς ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτω καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί. Εἶτα, Ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν, εἰπὼν, κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς, ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶ σωτὴρ, ἐπάγει, τοῦ σώματος· καὶ γὰρ ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος σωτηρία ἐστίν.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 45.

and was mired in darkness. Therefore, a husband who, contrary to Christ, chooses a wife of his preference should be willing to do at least as much.<sup>87</sup> He reiterated:

And even if it shall be needful for you to give your life for her, even if you have to be cut into pieces ten thousand times, even if you have to endure and undergo any suffering whatever, do not avoid it. And having undergone all this, you will have never done anything close to what Christ did.<sup>88</sup>

In other words, the headship conferred to the husband in marriage cannot be fulfilled unless it is based on the husband's loving and benign (gentle and kind) behaviour with his wife. However, this begs the question: What incentive does the husband have to behave in such a manner and not to abuse the authority bestowed on him, an inclination that would have most likely existed in the male-dominated society Chrysostom addressed? In response to what could have been such a concern, Chrysostom reminded his audiences that the husband represented the head and the wife the body of their common *soma*<sup>89</sup> and emphatically warned his audiences that "if the head scorns the body, it will perish with it."<sup>90</sup> Therefore, he advised: "[L]et the husband offer his love as counterbalance to her obedience."<sup>91</sup>

However, despite asking husbands to be their wives' refuge and spiritual mentors, Chrysostom understood the conjugal relationship to be grounded in a fundamental 'equality of honour'<sup>92</sup> that made the wife's dignity equally important to the husband's. This was highlighted in his commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians.<sup>93</sup> Chrysostom affirmed that as the wife is master and servant to her husband, the husband is servant and master to his wife. By this he aimed to denote a condition of simultaneous powerlessness and powerfulness so that no party would see itself as controlling the other, but as complementary to and dependent on each other. This should not be considered mere semantics. The kind of servitude a man is expected to enter upon marrying was emphasised in the words that Paul spoke to his disciples to dissuade them from marrying, which Chrysostom commented on:

He [Paul] desires by these very words to lead them [away] from it [marriage]. For when you hear that you will not be your own master after marriage but be subject to the will of your wife, you will quickly aspire not to pass under the yoke at all, since

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<sup>87</sup> "Τί δὲ λέγω; καὶ μωρὰ ἦν, καὶ βλάσφημος· ἀλλ' ὁμως τοσοῦτων ὄντων, ὡς ὑπὲρ ὠραίας, ὡς ὑπὲρ ἀγαπωμένης, ὡς ὑπὲρ θαυμαστῆς, οὕτως ἑαυτὸν ἐξέδωκεν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀμόρφου. Καὶ τοῦτο θαυμάζων ὁ Παῦλος ἔλεγε· Μόλις γὰρ ὑπὲρ δικαίου τις ἀποθανεῖται· καὶ πάλιν, εἰ ἔτι ἀμαρτωλῶν ἡμῶν ὄντων ὁ Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανε. Καὶ τοιαύτην λαβῶν, καλλωπίζει αὐτήν καὶ λούει, καὶ οὐδὲ τοῦτο παραιτεῖται." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Scaff, *NPNF1-13*, 270.

<sup>88</sup> "Κὰν τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς δοῦναι δεῖ, κὰν κατακοπῆναι μυριάκις, κὰν ὀτιοῦν ὑπομεῖναι καὶ παθεῖν, μὴ παραιτήση· κὰν ταῦτα πάθῃς, οὐδὲν οὐδέπω πεποίηκας, οἷον ὁ Χριστὸς," In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Scaff, *NPNF1-13*, 269.

<sup>89</sup> "σώμα"; translates in English as "body."

<sup>90</sup> "κὰν καταφρονῆ τοῦ σώματος ἢ κεφαλῆ, καὶ αὐτὴ προσαπολεῖται." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>91</sup> "ἀλλ' ἀντίρροπον τῆς ὑπακοῆς εἰσαγέτω τὴν ἀγάπην." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

<sup>92</sup> Original being 'ἰσοτιμία' which is begotten by the words 'ἴσος' and 'τιμή,' the first meaning 'equal' and the second translating as 'value' or 'honour.'

<sup>93</sup> In *Epistulam ad Corinthios*, Homily 18.

once you have entered into this state, you must be a slave henceforth, so long as it pleases your wife.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, despite the proclaimed difference in authority between husband and wife, the husband remains the servant of his wife in all matters. Husband and wife are equally responsible for preserving the honour of the marriage and the dignity of their partner. Similarly, wife and husband are equally reprehensible for committing adultery, which can irrevocably impair the strength of the marriage bond.<sup>95</sup>

It should be underlined that despite the husband and wife being described as the head and body respectively of their common *soma* in marriage, Chrysostom did not say anywhere that gender roles were stipulated by divine plan. Although women are called to entrust the judgement of their husbands and to honour them as spiritual leaders, a gender-segregated lifestyle has not been imposed doctrinally in this tradition. If Chrysostom associated wives with household responsibility on various occasions, it is understood that he did so in part because he was addressing a society that was segregated in that way.

In his commentaries, Chrysostom did not evade referring also to the sexual relations of the married couple. Echoing the Orthodox tradition, Chrysostom explained that in the physical union of marriage the man and woman become one in one flesh. He described that in this union the seed of the man is received by the woman and is lovingly nourished to produce a child.<sup>96</sup> The child then becomes the bridge between the parents and the three are one in one flesh. Here again Chrysostom drew a parallel between the physical union of the parents and the union of the believers in the Body of Christ by partaking in Communion.<sup>97</sup> It should be added that such depictions were not meant to suggest that Chrysostom confined sexual intercourse to child bearing, but rather to evidence that the child was the seed of the loving bond between the spouses realised in the sexual union.

Chrysostom was realistic and unashamed to declare the facts of life openly. He in fact blamed his audiences for bashing away from a discussion of sex in Church since the marriage bed, as he explained, was honourable and undefiled. It is not sex in marriage that is dishonourable, he said, but the minds and actions of men who use the union for licentious purposes. Thus he was not against spousal love-making, but he taught that the physical union needed to be done with modesty and with recognition that marriage represented a

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<sup>94</sup> “αὐτοῖς τοῖς περὶ τοῦ γάμου λόγοις ἐξαγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς τοῦ γάμου βουλόμενος. Ὁ γὰρ ἀκούσας ὅτι μετὰ τὸν γάμον οὐκ ἔσται κύριος ἑαυτοῦ ἀλλ’ ἐν τῇ τῆς γυναικὸς κείσεται γνώμη ταχέως ἀπαλλαγῆναι σπουδάσει τῆς πικροτάτης δουλείας, μᾶλλον δὲ μηδὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν τὸν ζυγὸν ὑπελθεῖν, ἐπειδὴ εἰσελθόντα ἅπαξ δουλεύειν ἀνάγκη λοιπὸν ἕως ἂν τῇ γυναικὶ τοῦτο δοκῇ.” De Virginitate, Homily 18. Translation in Miller, *Women*, 114.

<sup>95</sup> Roth and Anderson, *St. John Chrysostom*, 86.

<sup>96</sup> “Πῶς δὲ καὶ γίνονται εἰς σάρκα μίαν; Καθάπερ χρυσοῦ τὸ καθαρῶτατον ἂν ἀφέλης καὶ ἐτέρῳ ἀναμίξης χρυσοῦ, οὕτω δὴ καὶ ἐνταῦθα, τὸ πῶτατον τῆς ἡδονῆς χωνευοῦσης ἢ γυνὴ δεχομένη τρέφει καὶ θάλπει, καὶ τὰ παρ’ ἑαυτῆς συνεισενγκαμμένη ἄνδρα ἀποδίδωσι. Καὶ γέφυρά τις ἔστι τὸ παιδίον. Ὡστε οἱ τρεῖς σὰρξ γίνονται μία, τοῦ παιδὸς ἑκατέρωθεν ἑκατέρους συνάπτοντος.” In *Epistulam ad Colossenses*, Homily 12. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-13*, 569.

<sup>97</sup> “...καὶ λοιπὸν ἡ σὰρξ ὁ πατήρ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ καὶ ὁ παῖς ἔστιν ἐκ τῆς ἑκατέρου συνουσίας συγκραθεῖσα· καὶ γὰρ μιγέντων τῶν σπερμάτων, τίκεται ὁ παῖς· ὥστε τοὺς τρεῖς εἶναι μίαν σάρκα. Οὕτως οὖν ἡμεῖς πρὸς τὸν Χριστὸν γινόμεθα μία σὰρξ διὰ μετουσίας· καὶ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἡμεῖς, ἢ τὸ παιδίον. Τί δὴ ποτε; Ὅτι ἐξ ἀρχῆς οὕτω γέγονε.” In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-13*, 272.

vehicle to a spiritual aim, and was not itself a *telos*. To meet its Christian ends, marriage needed to be experienced as a spiritual union between wife and husband with Christ as their Head.

Within the Orthodox Church, the spousal bed is honourable and it serves the purpose of strengthening the spouses against the temptation of adultery and other unchastity. For this reason, Chrysostom advised against spouses withholding from each other for a long time without mutual agreement.<sup>98</sup> He explained that spouses should abstain from each other only if both agreed to dedicate more fully to prayer or fasting (which ideally should take place even when spouses do not abstain from sexual activity). He insisted, however that they should do so in mutual consent, otherwise one of the two may be tempted toward adultery and other sins, which would undermine the very purpose of marriage in cultivating holiness and spiritual growth for both.

While marriage was envisioned as a union between lovers aiming to mutual *theosis*, Chrysostom—as the pragmatist he was—understood that in reality the relationship was not always peaceful or partners' behaviours always altruistic. In his commentaries on Virginité, he acknowledged that marriage required much compromise and tolerance.<sup>99</sup> On one occasion he asked his audiences rhetorically: “What if the husband is lenient, but the wife is malicious, libelous, chattering, sumptuous...? What if, contrary to her who is comely and quiet, he is impudent, arrogant, and irascible, of a materialistic disposition and one to rule by force (greatly “puffed up” because of money and of oppressiveness)?”<sup>100</sup> His response reiterated Paul's teaching that each spouse should try to endure their partner's flaws and to

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<sup>98</sup> “Μη ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους, εἰ μή τι ἂν ἐκ συμφώνου. Τί δὴ τοῦτό ἐστι; Μη ἐγκρατευέσθω, φησὶν, ἡ γυνή, τοῦ ἀνδρός ἄκοντος, μήτε ὁ ἀνὴρ, τῆς γυναικὸς μὴ βουλομένης. Τί δὴ ποτε; Ὅτι μεγάλα ἐκ τῆς ἐγκρατείας ταύτης τίκεται κακὰ· καὶ γὰρ καὶ μοιχεῖαι καὶ πορνεῖαι καὶ οἰκιῶν ἀνατροπαὶ πολλάκις ἐντεῦθεν ἐγένοντο. Εἰ γὰρ ἔχοντες τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας, πορνεύουσι, πολλῶ μᾶλλον, ἂν αὐτοὺς τῆς παραμυθίας ταύτης ἀποστερήσης. Καὶ καλῶς εἶπε, Μη ἀποστερεῖτε, ἀποστέρησιν ἐνταῦθα καὶ ὀφειλὴν ἀνωτέρω εἰπὼν, ἵνα δείξῃ τῆς δεσποτείας τὴν ἐπίτασιν. Τὸ γὰρ ἄκοντος θατέρου ἐγκρατευέσθαι θάτερον, ἀποστερεῖν ἐστὶ· τὸ δὲ ἐκόντος, οὐκέτι. Οὐδὲ γὰρ, εἰ πείσας με λάβοις τι τῶν ἐμῶν, ἀποστερεῖσθαί φημι. Ὁ γὰρ ἄκοντος καὶ βιαζομένου λαβὼν, ἀποστερεῖ· ὅπερ ποιοῦσι πολλαὶ γυναῖκες, μείζονα τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἁμαρτίαν ἐργαζόμεναι, καὶ τῆς ἀσελγείας τοῦ ἀνδρός ὑπεύθυνοι γινόμεναι ταύτη, καὶ διασπῶσαι πάντα. Δεῖ δὲ πάντων προτιμᾶν τὴν ὁμόνοιαν, ἐπειδὴ καὶ πάντων τοῦτο κυριώτερον, καὶ εἰ βούλει, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν πραγμάτων αὐτὸ ἐξετάσωμεν. Ἔστω γὰρ γυνή καὶ ἀνὴρ, καὶ ἐγκρατευέσθω ἡ γυνὴ μὴ βουλομένου τοῦ ἀνδρός· τί οὖν, ἂν ἐκεῖνος ἐντεῦθεν πορνεῦῃ, ἢ μὴ πορνεῦῃ μὲν, ἀλγὴ δὲ καὶ θορυβῆται καὶ πυρῶται καὶ μάχηται, καὶ μυρία τῆ γυναικὶ πράγματα παρέχῃ; τί τὸ κέρδος τῆς νηστείας καὶ τῆς ἐγκρατείας, ἀγάπης διεβρόχημένης; Οὐδέν. Πόσας γὰρ ἔνθεν λοιδορίας, πόσα πράγματα, πόσον ἀνάγκη γίνεσθαι πόλεμον.” In *Epistulam ad Corinthios*, Homily 19. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-12*, 186-187.

<sup>99</sup> “Ὅτι πολλὴ ἡ τοῦ γάμου δουλεία καὶ ἀπαραίτητος. Τί οὖν ἂν μὲν ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐπεικὴς ᾖ, ἢ δὲ γυνὴ μοχθηρὰ, λοιδορος, λάλος, πολυτελής, τὸ κοινὸν τοῦτο πασῶν αὐτῶν νόσημα, ἐτέρων πλειόνων γέμουσα κακῶν, πῶς οἶσει τὴν καθημερινὴν ταύτην ἀηδίαν ἐκεῖνος ὁ δειλαιος, τὸν τυφόν. τὴν ἀναισχυντίαν; Τί δαί, ἂν τούναντίον αὐτῆ μὲν ᾖ κοσμία καὶ ἡσυχος, ἐκεῖνος δὲ θρασύς, ὑπεροπτικός, ὀργίλος, πολὺν μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν χρημάτων, πολὺν δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς δυναστείας ὄγκον περιβεβλημένος, καὶ τὴν ἐλευθέραν ὡς δούλην ἔχει καὶ τῶν θεραπανίδων μηδὲν ἄμεινον πρὸς αὐτὴν διάκειται, πῶς οἶσει τὴν τοσαύτην ἀνάγκη καὶ βίαν; Τί δαί, ἂν συνεχῶς αὐτὴν ἀποστρέφεται καὶ διὰ παντὸς μένη τοῦτο ποιῶν; Καρτέρει, φησὶν, πᾶσαν ταύτην τὴν δουλείαν· ὅταν γὰρ ἀποθάνῃ, τότε ἐλευθέρᾳ ἔσῃ μόνον, ζῶντος δὲ δυοῖν θάτερον ἀνάγκη, ἢ παιδαγωγεῖν αὐτὸν μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς σπουδῆς καὶ βελτίω ποιεῖν ἢ, εἰ τοῦτο ἀδύνατον, φέρειν γενναίως τὸν ἀκήρυκτον πόλεμον καὶ τὴν ἄσπονδον μάχην.” De *Virginitate*, Paragraph 40.

<sup>100</sup> “Τί οὖν ἂν μὲν ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐπεικὴς ᾖ, ἢ δὲ γυνὴ μοχθηρὰ, λοιδορος, λάλος, πολυτελής...; Τί δαί, ἂν τούναντίον αὐτῆ μὲν ᾖ κοσμία καὶ ἡσυχος, ἐκεῖνος δὲ θρασύς, ὑπεροπτικός, ὀργίλος, πολὺν μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν χρημάτων, πολὺν δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς δυναστείας ὄγκον περιβεβλημένος...” De *Virginitate*, Paragraph 40.

entreat and counsel them so as to help them to change pernicious behaviours and to edify them spiritually. He added that one is freed of this duty only at the death of their partner.

However, it is important to underscore that while Chrysostom considered patience in marriage and endurance of a difficult spouse to be an Orthodox trait (for both genders), he did not advise it indiscriminately.<sup>101</sup> In parallel, the condemnation of all conjugal abusiveness as un-Orthodox practice ran through his work and referred to both genders. This became evident, for example, when he warned wives against insulting or criticising their husbands because of poverty,<sup>102</sup> or when he instructed that husbands not be tempted to earn their wife's obedience "by fear and menaces, but with love and good temper."<sup>103</sup> This was emphasised below:

But nor should the husband who hears these, because he has authority, to resort to insulting and hurting, but to encourage her to the good, to advise and counsel her, and because she is less perfect than he to try to convince her with thoughts, never [should he] raise hands [on her]. All these should be far from a free soul; [he should use] neither hubris, neither insults, neither shame, neither ridicule, but because she is more frivolous [he should] direct her.<sup>104</sup>

Chrysostom cautioned men not to abuse their spiritual authority because a man free from worldly shackles who lives in faith should have nothing to do with abusiveness. He should be meek and patient and should always respond to his wife with careful words that aim to improve her understanding through constructive counsel. Chrysostom, in fact, seemed to encourage husbands to think of their wives as weaker vessels who required more consideration and thoughtfulness. One may argue that he believed this, but it should also be entertained that he employed this also as a rhetorical device to leverage the male listeners' pre-existing sense of superiority for the sake of promoting women's wellbeing.

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<sup>101</sup> It needs to be underscored again that the Orthodox tradition treats the works of the Church Fathers as suggestive on matters that are not clearly doctrinal or theological. Thus, Orthodoxy cannot take a single stance about how a spouse should react to a harmful partner. This relates to the concepts of *oikonomia* and *diakrisis* mentioned earlier.

<sup>102</sup> "Μὴ λεγέτω ταῦτα γυνή, καὶ τὰ τούτοις ὅμοια· σῶμα γάρ ἐστιν, οὐχ ἵνα διατάτῃ τῇ κεφαλῇ, ἀλλ' ἵνα πείθῃται καὶ ὑπακούῃ. Πῶς οὖν οἴσει, φησί, τὴν πενίαν; πόθεν εὐρήσει παραμυθίαν; Ἐκλεγέσθω παρ' ἑαυτῆς τὰς πενεστέρας, ἀναλογιζέσθω πόσαι πάλιν εὐγενεῖς καὶ ἐξ εὐγενῶν κόραι οὐ μόνον ἐξ ἀνδρῶν οὐδὲν προσέλαβον, ἀλλὰ καὶ προσέδωκαν, καὶ τὰ αὐτῶν ἅπαντα ἀνάλωσαν· ἐννοεῖτω τοὺς ἐκ τοιούτων πλοῦτων κινδύνους, καὶ τὸν ἀπράγμονα ἀσπάσεται βίον. Καὶ ὅλως εἰ φιλοστόργως πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα διακέοιτο, οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον ἐρεῖ, ἀλλ' αἰρήσεται πλησίον αὐτῆς ἔχειν αὐτὸν μηδὲν πορίζοντα, ἢ μυρία τάλαντα χρυσοῦ μετὰ μερίμνης καὶ φροντίδος τῆς ἐκ τῶν ἀποδημιῶν ταῖς γυναιξὶν ἐγγινομένης αἰεῖ." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-13*, 278-279.

<sup>103</sup> "οὐ φόβῳ καὶ ἀπειλαῖς δεῖ καταδεσμεῖν, ἀλλ' ἀγάπῃ καὶ διαθέσει." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-13*, 270.

<sup>104</sup> "Ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ ταῦτα ἀκούων ὡς ἀρχὴν ἔχων, ἐπὶ ὕβρεις τρεπέσθω καὶ πληγὰς, ἀλλὰ παραινεῖτω, νοουθετεῖτω, ὡς ἀτελεστέραν λογισμοῖς ἀναπειθέτω, χεῖρας μηδέποτε ἐντεινέτω· πόρρω ἐλευθέρας ψυχῆς ταῦτα· ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ὕβρεις, μηδὲ ὄνειδη, μηδὲ λοιδορίας· ἀλλ' ὡς ἀνοητότερον διακειμένην ρυθμιζέτω." In *Epistulam ad Ephesios*, Homily 20.

Chrysostom evidenced his genuine protectiveness toward women when he instructed husbands to be patient, kind and non-judgemental with their wives, even if the latter provoked them and were worthy of criticism.<sup>105</sup> He commented:

For, one may be able to tie down a servant through fear, but I daresay, not even him; for he, leaping out (of his fetters) will swiftly run away. As for her that shares his life, the mother of his children, the source of his every joy, she should not be “tied down” with fear and threats, but rather with love and cheerful disposition. For what kind of conjugal union can there be when the woman is afraid of the man? What kind of pleasure can that man enjoy, when living with the woman as if she were a slave, and not as a free individual? And even if you do suffer something for her sake, do not reprehend her, for neither did Christ do this.<sup>106</sup>

His emphatic differentiation between the fear that one coerces in a servant and the fear that one should inspire in a free-willed wife leaves no doubt that Chrysostom spoke of fear as reverence and respect that was inspired in the woman by the wise words, consideration and kind demeanour of the husband toward her. He drew again from the parallel between the relationship of husband and wife and that of Christ and His Church advising men against blaming their wives and urging them to suffer for their wives’ sake to imitate Christ in His approach. This was emphasised in the subsequent comment about using abuse: “Because she is your own body; because if you do this, you disgrace yourself in dishonouring your own body.”<sup>107</sup> And according to Chrysostom, “no man ever hated his own flesh.”<sup>108</sup>

Chrysostom told husbands not only that they had to treat their wives with kindness regardless of how intolerable they could be at times, but that this was their duty to God: “Love her therefore not for her sake so much as for Christ’s sake.”<sup>109</sup> Similarly, a wife was asked to respect and to honour her husband even if he did not love her as he ought to due to sacred fear for God.<sup>110</sup> Chrysostom explained that this was fitting because it could be that each spouse might display defects or disappoint the other at some point in their marriage and therefore should focus on fulfilling their duty to God without judging the other.

<sup>105</sup> “κἂν ὑπερορῶσαν, κἂν θρυπτομένην, καταφρονοῦσαν ἴδης, δυνήσῃ αὐτήν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας ἀγαγεῖν τοὺς σοὺς τῆ πολλῇ περὶ αὐτὴν προνοίᾳ, τῇ ἀγάπῃ, τῇ φιλίᾳ.” Translation in Roth and Anderson, St. John Chrysostom, 47-48.

<sup>106</sup> “Οἰκέτην μὲν γὰρ φόβῳ τις ἂν καταδῆσαι δυνήσεται, μᾶλλον δὲ οὐδὲ ἐκέινον· ταχέως γὰρ ἀποσηδήσας οἰχήσεται· τὴν δὲ τοῦ βίου κοινωνόν, τὴν παίδων μητέρα, τὴν πάσης εὐφροσύνης ὑπόθεσιν, οὐ φόβῳ καὶ ἀπειλαῖς δεῖ καταδεσμεῖν, ἀλλ’ ἀγάπῃ καὶ διαθέσει. Ποία γὰρ συζυγία, ὅταν ἡ γυνὴ τὸν ἄνδρα τρέμῃ; ποίας δὲ αὐτὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ ἀπολαύσεται ἡδονῆς, ὡς δούλῃ συνοικῶν τῇ γυναικί, καὶ οὐχ ὡς ἐλευθέρᾳ; Κἂν πάθῃς τι ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, μὴ ὀνειδίσης· οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ Χριστὸς τοῦτο ἐποίησε.” In Epistulam ad Ephesios, Homily 20.

<sup>107</sup> “Ἄλλ’ ὅταν ἀκούῃς φόβον, ἐλευθέρᾳ προσήκοντα φόβον ἀπαίτει, μὴ καθὼς παρὰ δούλης· σῶμα γὰρ ἔστι σόν· ἂν γὰρ τοῦτο ποιήσης, σαυτὸν καθυβρίζεις, τὸ σῶμα ἀτιμάζων τὸ σόν.” In Epistulam ad Ephesios, Homily 20. Translation from Schaff, NPNF1-13, 275.

<sup>108</sup> “Οὐδεὶς γὰρ ποτε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν.” In Epistulam ad Ephesios, Homily 20.

<sup>109</sup> “Μὴ δι’ ἐκείνην τοίνυν τοσοῦτον, ὅσον διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν αὐτὴν ἀγαπᾶν.” In Epistulam ad Ephesios, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, NPNF1-13, 277.

<sup>110</sup> “Τί οὖν, ἂν μὴ φοβῆται, φησὶν, ἡ γυνὴ; Σὺ ἀγάπα, τὸ σαυτοῦ πλήρου. Καὶ γὰρ ἂν τὰ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων μὴ ἔπηται, τὰ παρ’ ἡμῶν ἔπεσθαι δεῖ. Οἷόν τι λέγω· Ὑποτασσόμενοι, φησὶν, ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ. Τί οὖν, ἂν ὁ ἕτερος μὴ ὑποτάσσεται; Σὺ πείθου τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οὕτω δὲ καὶ ἐνταῦθα· ἡ γοῦν γυνὴ κἂν μὴ ἀγαπᾶται, ὅμως φοβείσθω, ἵνα μηδὲν ἢ παρ’ αὐτῆς γεγονός· ὅ τε ἀνὴρ, ἂν μὴ φοβῆται ἡ γυνὴ, ὅμως ἀγαπάτω, ἵνα μηδὲν αὐτὸς ὑστερῇ· ἕκαστος γὰρ τὸ ἴδιον ἀπέλαβεν.” In Epistulam ad Ephesios, Homily 20. Translation in Schaff, NPNF1-13, 274.

That Chrysostom did not consider forbearance binding was also evidenced in the fact that he was willing to allow physical separation when spouses could not co-exist. He explained:

Now what is that which to the married the Lord commanded? That the wife depart not from her husband; but if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled unto her husband. Here, seeing that both on the score of continence and other pretexts, and because of meanness of the spirit separations took place: it were better, he says, that such things should not be at all; but if they take place, let the wife remain with her husband, if not to cohabit with him, yet so as not to introduce any other to be her husband.<sup>111</sup>

Chrysostom was clearly concerned not to encourage divorce, the violation of God's divine bond that brought the two-haves into one. Nonetheless, he allowed that in cases where conjugal co-existence resulted in constant enmity, spouses could live separately. Ideally, they should not remarry so as to allow room for future reconciliation.<sup>112</sup> It is important to caution again that Chrysostom offered his counsel through the Orthodox *phronema* that he embodied and not to establish universal rulings.

## DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESENT

This overview should evidence that Chrysostom's teachings have not been understood in a pernicious manner within the Orthodox Church and have been appraised generally in recognition of the specific circumstances in which he lived and the kind of audiences he addressed. However, as it was mentioned, the degree to which these Orthodox teachings regarding man-woman relations and marriage have been understood with their intentions by the Orthodox has been dependent on a host of historical, ecclesiastical, sociocultural and individual factors. Chrysostom's explications of apostolic teachings could help to alleviate some of the pernicious attitudes and misunderstandings that were mentioned in earlier sections, provided that they are explained with caution.<sup>113</sup>

Within the Orthodox *phronema*, as highlighted in Chrysostom's homilies, male and female are understood to have been fashioned alike and with equal honour and to have been originally one, a union that is re-achieved in the Orthodox marriage. While Chrysostom suggested that a certain order in authority needed to be respected so as to preserve the harmony in the couple, his emphasis on the husband serving as the head and the wife as the

<sup>111</sup> "Τί οὖν ἐστίν, ὃ τοῖς γεγαμηκόσι παρήγγειλεν ὁ Κύριος, Γυναῖκα ἀπό ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωρισθῆναι; ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ, μενέτω ἄγαμος, ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλλαγῆτω· καὶ ἄνδρα γυναικα μὴ ἀφιέναι; Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ καὶ δι' ἐγκράτειαν καὶ δι' ἄλλας προφάσεις καὶ μικροψυχίας γίνεσθαι διαιρέσεις συνέβαινε, βέλτιον μὲν μὴδὲ γενέσθαι τὴν ἀρχὴν, φησίν· εἰ δὲ ἄρα καὶ γένοιτο, μενέτω ἡ γυνὴ μετὰ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς, εἰ καὶ μὴ τῇ μίσει, ἀλλὰ τῷ μηδένα ἕτερον παρεισαγαγεῖν ἄνδρα." In *Epistulam i ad Corinthios*, Homily 19. Translation in Schaff, *NPNF1-12*, 188.

<sup>112</sup> It is understood here that reconciliation is desirable insofar as the spouses change their behaviours to imitate that of Christ and His Church. Reconciliation not only evades the sinful act of divorcing but, when it is achieved in an Orthodox *phronema*, it can result in heightened humility (in view of one recognising one's own shortfalls) and subsequently more kindness and understanding between the spouses, fostering a spiritually stronger restored relationship.

<sup>113</sup> The potential of Chrysostom's commentaries to change attitudes and misperceptions has been suggested also in Gassin, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity," 2015.

body was motivated by his concern to underscore their mutual dependence and to deter them from mistreating and alienating each other. Such pronouncements could be deployed to obliterate misperceptions of divinely-instituted husband superiority and to enforce wives' dignity. They can also become a counter-discourse to rigid gender-segregated arrangements that place disproportionate burden on women, since they evidence that a husband and wife are one *soma* and should share the burdens of their life together.

Furthermore, Chrysostom clearly condemned husbands using any type of forceful and demeaning behaviour with their wives. He advised that husbands earn their wives' reverence by giving them steady, kind and considerate love to achieve a harmonious and mutually gratifying relationship. Such messages could help to counter some male abusiveness by cultivating Orthodox masculinities that emphasise spiritual leadership and altruistic giving. On the other hand, his discussion of sex in marriage, which emphasised mutual consent, dignity and modesty, could help to discourage practices such as sexual coerciveness in the bedroom (including marital rape), excessive sexual demands by husbands, or other perverse acts (including the use of pornography), all of which can further impair the dignity and wellbeing of the wife and the quality of the conjugal relationship.

Finally, Chrysostom's pragmatism regarding the difficulties of marriage and his nuanced counsels that simultaneously taught patience in marriage but allowed separation in cases of conjugal enmity could help women living with harmful husbands to realise that showing forbearance for the sake of preserving the family might become unjustifiable where their or their children's (and even their husbands') spiritual progress is hindered. This may be an especially pertinent message for women in Orthodox societies who have typically prioritised their family or their marriage. Chrysostom's suggestion for spouses to live separately could be a pragmatic option for some women, while wives' departure could provide husbands with the motivation to reconsider their pernicious practices and to take concrete measures to alleviate those. There can be no single solution for all women in this situation, not least because this depends on their own *diakrasis* and practical/material circumstances, but Chrysostom's commentaries help to enlarge the options.

Three caveats need to be mentioned briefly. The first consideration must be that not all Orthodox are expected to be motivated by Church teachings, not least due to a different spiritual state. In addition, these teachings cannot be expected to address more ontogenetic, psychological or environmental parameters motivating pernicious or abusive behaviours in the individual, which could require psychological remedies or other measures.<sup>114</sup> Finally, the communication of such teachings to the laity could be hindered by a limited understanding among some clergy of the Orthodox marriage, problematic attitudes about conjugal abuse and unhelpful counselling approaches to spiritual children, possibilities that would require understanding intimately the conditions of the clergy in a given context.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> James Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on our Deadliest Epidemic* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999); Donald Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2007); Linda Mills, "Shame and Intimate Abuse: The Critical Missing Link between Cause and Cure," *Children and Youth Services Review* 30 (2008): 631–63.

<sup>115</sup> Within the Orthodox tradition, most believers will have a spiritual father to whom they go for confession. The spiritual father is usually involved in the life of the couple and may be approached first when problems in the family arise.

## CONCLUSION

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This paper has put forward an argument for decolonising gender and theology/religion(s) studies from west-centric feminist representations of Christian theology on the premise that these hinder understanding non-western Christian traditions in their own cosmological and theological terms. It was argued that this is especially urgent in for Orthodox traditions and communities which developed in a distinct eastern epistemological framework. The endeavour was made to delineate the contours of the Orthodox cosmology and the socio-cultural context of the development of this tradition in order to provide a more informed prism through which to appraise the works of the Eastern Church Fathers. The ultimate aim was to evidence that commentaries such as Chrysostom's contain messages that have the potential to address pernicious attitudes regarding women and marriage in Orthodox societies provided that they are explained through the prism of the Orthodox *phronema*.

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# THE ART OF TELANGANA WOMEN AND THE CRAFTING OF THE DECOLONIAL SUBJECT: FROM DIALECTICS OF 'OTHERING' TO EXPRESSIONS OF RADICAL ALTERITY

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## ABSTRACT

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In this essay I propose a reading of the female body in art as a locus for the display, the negotiation and ultimately the overcoming of gendered and racial dialectics of 'othering'. First, from post-medieval until pre-colonial times, white female bodies depicted in European art largely represented a gendered, sexualised 'other' to the Western male gaze. Successively, with the unfolding of sexual politics of colonialism, non-European female bodies on canvas became metaphorical grounds for the unravelling of racial confrontations between colonisers and colonised. Finally, in the postcolonial era, it appears that women not only subvert, but entirely disregard the subject-object dynamics that for centuries constrained them to being passive objects. From paintings by contemporary female artists in Telangana (India), it emerges that women appropriate art, expressing their own subjectivities unapologetically and independently. Overcoming at the same time the gendered marginality conferred to women in European art, and the racial dialectics of 'othering' pursued through gendered colonial narratives, these artists represent an eminent example of decolonisation in praxis.

**Key words:** Art – colonialism – postcolonialism – subversion – women – Telangana – India – decolonisation

## INTRODUCTION

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Tracing women's voices through art is as fascinating a task, as it is an arduous and inevitably unfinished one. It is fascinating because art is that field where the unbridled freedom of imagination meets and negotiates the all too palpable constraints of matter and technique. It is an arduous task, since the artwork is a locus where a multiplicity of gazes—of the observer, the artist and, oftentimes, the product itself—converge, entering into simultaneous dialogues that reciprocally shape each other. Finally, to trace women's voices in art is an inevitably unfinished task, as the meaning of an art product is the eternally changing testimony of interpretive paradigms past and future.

While there are numerous points of confluence in the trajectory of women across Indian and European art, to focus on such parallels would be reductive. Not only would the sheer diversity of women's necessarily-contextualised voices be neglected;<sup>1</sup> also the significant role that gendered conceptions of race have played in the construction of a meta-narrative that portrayed Indian men as effeminate—and operated as a rationale of colonialisation—would be concealed.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, to reflect on the differences between women in European and Indian art offers the opportunity to appreciate the original contributions entailed in each milieu.

In the next pages, I briefly outline some trends in Western art that indicate a shift in the apperception of female figures, as from mere objectified muses they become full-fledged artists. Subsequently, following the white male's gaze as it expanded towards ever wider and exotic horizons, I discuss how India engaged with a Western visual narrative that made her the marginal 'other' to a central Europe. Initially, the Subcontinent reacted *within* the parameters of this one-history outlook (first by opposing and then by subverting it); later, in actualising new independent narratives, the Subcontinent positioned itself *outside* the one-history framework. In the last section, I illustrate the overcoming of the Western dialectics of 'othering' through the art of Telangana women, who ignore the assumption of a Western- and of a male-dominated world altogether, thus providing an exemplary case of decolonisation in praxis.

## ON 'BEING OTHERED' AND 'OTHERING' AS (WHITE) WOMEN

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Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.

Guerrilla Girls<sup>3</sup>

At least from the post-medieval period onward, women have been among the favourite and most persistently represented objects in Western art. From Michelangelo, Botticelli, Bernini, through Degas, Renoire, Monet, Gauguin, all the way up to Klimt, Modigliani and Warhol,

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<sup>1</sup> See Chandra Talpade Mohanty "Under Western Eyes" (1984) on the importance of appreciating women's realities and needs in their contexts.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Ashish Nandy's essays in *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (1983).

<sup>3</sup> Guerrilla Girls. *Conscience of the Art World*. 1989, <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/naked-through-the-ages>. Accessed 2 November 2017.

the most famous paintings of male artists are those representing women in different forms. Mostly they are scantily clad, and at times they even are the only naked presence among a congregation of fully dressed men. While early depictions of women were meant to evoke mystical or religious sentiments (see for example Botticelli and Michelangelo),<sup>4</sup> later, female bodies became the backdrop against which to study movement (as in Edgar Degas),<sup>5</sup> project exotic phantasies (see Paul Gauguin)<sup>6</sup> or explore erotic sensibilities (as has done Andy Warhol).<sup>7</sup>



Manet, Edouard. *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*. 1863. Musée d'Orsay.

To a large extent, it is only since the last decades of the Twentieth century that an increasing number of women in the West has been able to move away from the ascribed role as sublimated or sensationalised 'other'. Women have begun to take charge of the production of artworks by reclaiming a creative presence as art-makers, and the larger public of art-

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<sup>4</sup> This is expressed in Sandro Botticelli's numerous works depicting the Madonna, such as the famous *Madonna del Libro* (1479). A recent exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, *Botticelli and the Search for the Divine* (2017), examined in detail the religious sentiment represented in the artist's work. One of Michelangelo's most famous sculptures, the *Pietà* (1498-1499), housed in the Basilica di San Pietro in Vatican City, also directly appeals to the figures of Mary and Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> Edgar Degas is especially famous for his numerous depictions of dancers, which constitute more than half of his work. See for example *La Classe de Danse* (1873-1876).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Gauguin is widely known for his portraits of exotic Tahitian women, mostly represented bare-chested. See also the next section of this essay.

<sup>7</sup> Among Andy Warhol's best-known works figure the silkscreen painting *Marilyn Diptych* (1962) and the film *Chelsea Girls* (1966). In both transpires the confluence of eroticism and stardom, two themes running through much of Warhol's work.

consumers and critics has begun to recognise them as more than sole sources for male inspiration.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, a re-evaluative process is underway by which female voices from the past are retrieved and retrospectively appraised as influential in a field that was for centuries determined by men. Clara Peeters, Joan Carille and Artemisia Gentileschi stand out as women artists of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, whose paintings are today being rediscovered and gaining fame. Even though the retroactive acknowledgment of their talents is crucial for a historicisation of European art, it has to be remembered that women constituted a minority among the artists, as it was particularly arduous for them to gain access to the tools of the trade.<sup>9</sup>



Gentileschi, Artemisia. *Giuditta decapita Oloferne*. 1614-20. Galleria degli Uffizi.

Other women who have taken up the activity of artists and challenged the male gaze include the Nineteenth century impressionists Berthe Morisot and Marie Bracquemond and the Twentieth century expressionists Marianne von Werefkin and Gabriele Münter. The former

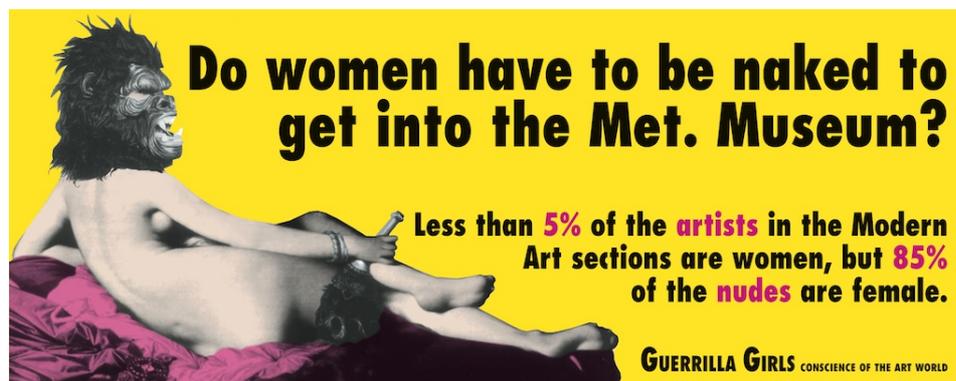
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<sup>8</sup> Among the contemporary female artists who have finally begun to be acknowledged as major players in the current art scene are Louise Bourgeois, Marina Abramović and Niki de Saint Phalle. While at times mentioned for their feminist perspectives, these artists do not necessarily associate themselves with the feminist or any other particular movement. Louise Bourgeois is particularly known for her large sculptures and installations where she explores domesticity, family, sexuality and the body (see Weidemann, Larass and Klier's *Fifty Women Artists You Should Know* (2008)). Marina Abramović's performative art centres around the limits of the body and identity, often making her audience an active component of her works (see *Fifty Women Artists You Should Know* (2008) and Cristina Demaria's essay "The Performative Body of Marina Abramović" (2004)). While the sculptor Niki de Saint Phalle has risen to fame with her playful sculptures such as those figuring in *Il Giardino dei Tarocchi* (1998) near Grosseto, Italy, her earlier work often expresses anger and violence in art pieces that she shot with firearms (see Jane Neal "Niki de Saint Phalle: The Power of Playfulness" (2008)).

<sup>9</sup> The art world was usually open only to women who were born into a family of artists, such as Artemisia Gentileschi, daughter of the accomplished painter Orazio Gentileschi. While Artemisia did gain some popularity among her contemporaries, her fame was however not primarily due to her art. Rather, she became renowned due to her outspoken testimony in court against Agostino Tassi for raping her. It is only over the last decades, that the brilliant follower of Caravaggio has been recognised for her work as such. See Linda Nochlin's essay "Why have there been no Great Women Artists?" (1971) and Griselda Pollock's essay "Feminist Dilemmas with the Art/Life Problem" (2005).

two chose predominantly female objects in their artworks, appropriating the representation of women until then chiefly undertaken by men; the latter two, in accordance with the artistic predilections of their time, experimented mostly with emotions, transposing sentiments such as angst into distorted landscapes.

From the later part of the Twentieth century onward, with second and third wave feminisms blooming, patriarchal structures that had suffused much of the Western art world were increasingly condemned also by the wider public discourse. Bringing to light gender injustices across politics and history primarily through provocative slogans, artists such as the US-based Guerrilla Girls refuse to be part of a narrative that repeatedly positions women either at the margins as artists, or at the centre as objectified bodies.



Girls, Guerrilla. Conscience of the art world. 1989.

Around the same time as Western women started to be increasingly involved in the production of art, destabilising centuries-old male-oriented perspectives, the white male gaze began wandering towards new territories, attracted by hitherto unexplored female bodies, and ready to craft new feminised subjects.

## ON 'BEING OTHERED' AND 'OTHERING' AS BROWN WOMEN AND AS A FEMINISED NATION

Even Madagascar is too near the civilised world; I shall go to Tahiti...and out there I hope to cultivate [my art]...in its primitive and savage state

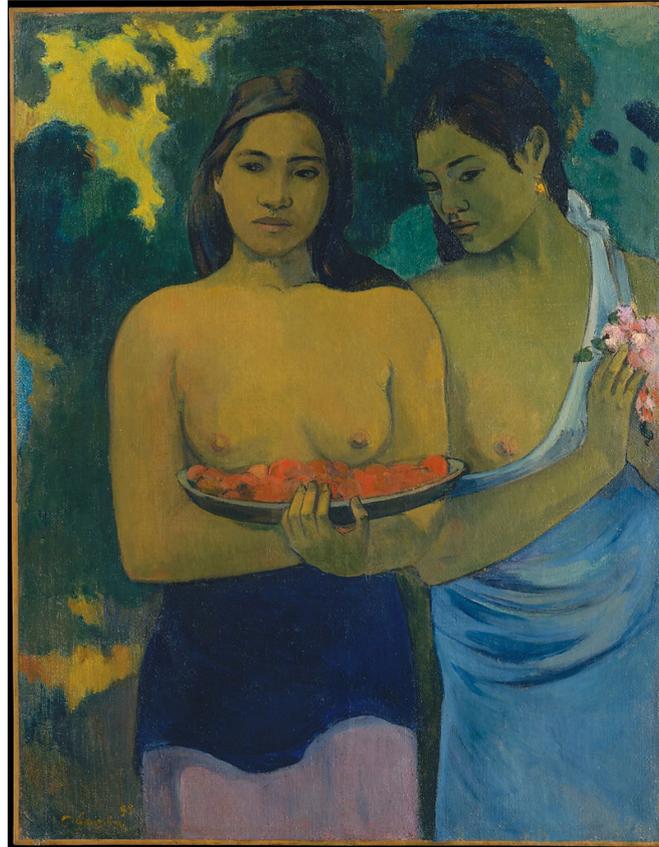
Paul Gauguin<sup>10</sup>

During India's colonial history, whereas the white settler shaped geo-politics, the white artist moulded imaginaries. In literary and visual representations, European artists advocated a meta-narrative that posited a virile, white male at the centre, surrounded by an emasculated, Indian subordinate at the margins.<sup>11</sup> This confluence of gender and race, whereby Indian

<sup>10</sup> Gauguin, Paul. Letter to Émile Bernard, from Arles, about November 9-12, 1888. Quoted from Ives Colter Feller and Stein Susan Allison, "Gauguin in Tahiti: 1891-93, 1895-1901", in *The Lure of the Exotic: Gauguin in New York Collections. The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Colta Ives and Susan Allison Stein. 77-79. London: Yale University Press, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> See Ashish Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983) for elaborations on the imposition of a gendered history.

men were construed as the antithesis of European men, gave rise to a sexual politics of colonialism, which ultimately was largely played out on the body of the Indian woman.



Gauguin, Paul. *Deux Tahitiennes*. 1899. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

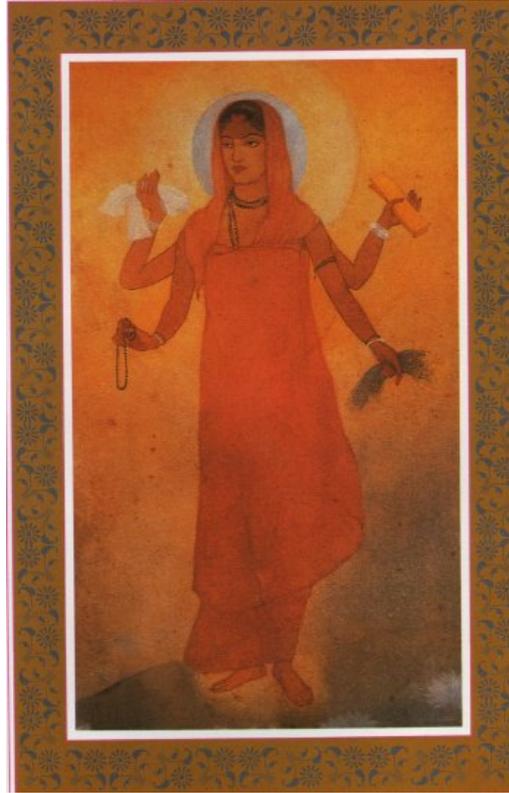
On the one side, for the colonisers, the brown or black female body represented the 'other' to the prude and clean body of the Victorian woman: lascivious, hyper-sexual, at times dirty, an object of lust to be conquered and onto which to direct one's exotic desires. This is perhaps most evidently expressed in several exaggerated depictions of Hottentot women,<sup>12</sup> fetishised harems, and throughout Gauguin's work. On the other side of the dialectic of 'othering', to the colonised, the body of the Indian woman became a repository of purity and chastity. The extent to which Indian men succeeded in protecting it from the invaders' debauching gaze became a proof and a directly proportional measurement of their disputed masculinity. Conversely, the degree to which Indian women could preserve their bodies untainted by the foreign salacious look became an indication of their moral strength and purity.

As a symbol embodying an undefiled and self-sacrificing woman, rose the image of 'Mother India'. In the homonymous film,<sup>13</sup> director Mehboob Khan depicted Mother India as a righteous and patriotic heroine who maintains the highest moral values despite adverse circumstances; similarly, in his painting *Bharat Mata*, Abanindranath Tagore represents a woman in the guise of a Hindu goddess as emblem of devotion to the motherland. The

<sup>12</sup> The most famous of the Hottentot women was Sara Baartman. Due to her large backside she was exhibited in various European exhibitions during the Nineteenth century, under the name Hottentot Venus. See Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully's biography *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A ghost story and a biography* (2009).

<sup>13</sup> Khan, Mehboob. *Mother India*. Directed by Mehboob Khan. 1957. India: Mehboob Productions. Film.

image of the chaste and strong Indian woman became a powerful political tool. At the same time vindicating Indian masculinities and symbolising an independent India, the pure and unscathed Indian female body was a sexually charged metaphorical battleground contested between Englishmen wishing to fulfil their colonial desires, and Indianmen striving to actualise their yearning for nationhood.



Tagore, Abinandranath. *Bharat Mata*. 1905. Victoria Memorial.

The counter-narrative that India advanced against the colonisers by presenting the image of a gendered nation embodied as 'Mother India', still unfolded within the contours laid out by the one-history vision furthered by Europe. It can thus be argued that during the colonial era and the early years of Independence, the Subcontinent's reaction against its ascribed moral and political inferiority rested upon an implicit admission of its own historical, political and geographical marginality. Shifting the analysis from still to moving images, it becomes evident that the dynamics of the gaze, and its implied power-relations, changed over time. In recent Indian cinematic productions, in fact, the politics of eroticisation have not only been reverted, but also used as a pervasive subversive tool.

Fully appropriating the dynamics of the exoticising game, Indian producers are today returning the gaze at the Western man and challenging his virility by sexualising and exposing white female bodies in item-songs or deploying Western women as negligible

background actresses.<sup>14</sup> Protracting the age-old imaginary of the pristine female body as a trope for integrity and morality, Indian cinema urges the white man to reassess his manliness and his ability to safeguard the honour of his women and, by extension, his nation. Moreover, when confining the roles of scantily clad white women to secondary characters, Indian movies perform more than just returning the gaze and reclaiming a subject-position in the dialectics of ‘othering’: by sexualising white female bodies first, and relegating them to trivial roles successively, Indian contemporary cinema effectively overturns the centre-margin positionalities envisioned by Eurocentric, one-history discourses.<sup>15</sup>

What remains intact in both, Eurocentric and Indiacentric narratives, is the notion of the female body as a repository of the virtue, dignity and prowess of a nation and its (male) citizens.

## ON OVERCOMING THE DIALECTICS OF ‘OTHERING’: THE UNAPOLOGETIC ART OF TELANGANA WOMEN

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A radical unsettling of the structures of ‘othering’ that have underpinned much Western and Indian art till date, can be observed in the work of some contemporary South Indian female artists. Collectively known as *Mukta*, a creative platform for Telangana women, these artists advance a fundamental change of the female presence in—and through—art. While the female body at first constituted primarily an ‘other’ against which European male subjects could assert their gendered selves and, subsequently, was deployed as a trope through which both, European and Indian men, could negotiate their racial identities, in the art presented by *Mukta*, women emerge as full-fledged subjects, on and behind the canvas.<sup>16</sup>

Observing the work of these artists, it emerges that they not only refuse to engage with common centre-margin dynamics and male-oriented discourses, but adamantly ignore them, allowing for the creation of uncompromised, novel narratives. Their paintings, depicting primarily women, but also men, animals and landscapes, strike for their candour and for the confidence with which the represented objects reclaim attention. Strong colours and bold shapes, unexpected close-ups and novel juxtapositions assert their presence audaciously—at

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<sup>14</sup> Foreign women are sought after as backup dancers in major Bollywood productions as well as in regional cinema. See the video to the song *Chammak Challo* from the film *Ra.One* (2011) as an example from mainstream Bollywood; for regional cinema see for example the Tollywood film *Yevade Subramaniam* (2015). See also the video to the song *Chiggy Wiggy* of the Bollywood film *Blue* (2009), featuring a very sensual Kylie Minogue; whereas Minogue plays a central role in the video of the song, in the larger context of the film hers is a cameo-appearance. For a scholarly analysis of the phenomenon of white women in Indian cinema see Ajay Gehlawat’s *Twenty-First Century Bollywood* (2015), especially the chapter “The Gori in the story: the shifting dynamics of whiteness in Bollywood” (pp. 66-87).

<sup>15</sup> See also my piece “The Gaze” for a more detailed discussion on the politics of ‘othering’ through cinema (Hirmer 2016).

<sup>16</sup> The argument that I am bringing forward in this section is the result of reflections on paintings by a group of female artists from Telangana, India, who collectively exhibited their works during the Hyderabad Literary Festival in February 2018. These reflections are further backed by conversations I had with some of the artists, which took place in Hyderabad in early 2017 and per email correspondence during 2018. I thank Vimala Katikaneni for giving me access to the paintings referred to and for facilitating the interviews with the artists.

times unwittingly. The bold lack of referentiality to established narratives not only expresses the radical alterity of these paintings, but also translates into their inherently self-sufficient nature.



Biluka, Nirmala. *Guns n roses*. 2016. Photograph by: Katikaneni Vimala.

*Guns n roses*, an artwork of Nirmala Biluka, is reminiscent of Tagore's *Bharat Mata*. Similarly to Tagore's work, the female warrior in *Guns n roses* is the sole subject of the painting; like *Bharat Mata*, she looks slightly to the side and far into the distance, and is equally dressed in red robes, holding her weapons in her hands. Differently from the ethereal *Bharat Mata* encircled by an aura, however, the Telangana warrior is a worldly woman from the Washermen caste. While *Bharat Mata* fights a battle on the grounds of morality and ethical values, the Telangana warrior fights against the *zamindars* (landlords) for her land during the peasant movement in Telangana. Moreover, while the honour and dignity of *Bharat Mata* depend on Indian and foreign men, the Telangana warrior does not repose her destiny into the hands of anyone other than herself: she fights with guns and roses, 'as symbolically they represent a woman's sensitivity and strength', says Nirmala.<sup>17</sup> The Telangana woman warrior resolutely devises her own history, shifting her local, female reality from the margins to a new centre, at once overcoming Eurocentric as well as androcentric accounts.

Similarly bringing centre-stage often neglected and marginalised subjects, Amila Reddy in her paintings presents women in everyday life as they attend to ordinary chores, inspired from her own village life. When asked about her work, the artist says that she depicts 'Telangana culture, especially rural environments and women's activities...women's emotions and their capability of working in different fields'.

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<sup>17</sup> The interviews with Nirmala, Amila, Preeti and Subhashini used in this essay were conducted in 2018 via email.



Reddy, Amila. *Untitled*. Not dated.  
Photocredit: Artist



Reddy, Amila. *Untitled*. Not dated.  
Photocredit: Artist

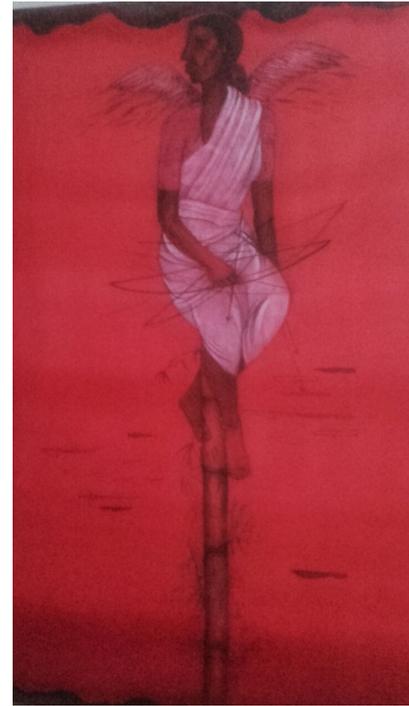
The women in Nirmala and Amila's paintings, as well as those in the works of other *Mukta* artists, do not look for external points of reference through which to find validation or with which to engage in subverted centre-margin dynamics. In proclaiming their autonomous completeness, and entirely eschewing the need to oppose, or subvert, ascriptions of ambiguous erotic moralities or marginal positionalities in imaginary topographies, these female artists transcend, at the same time, the politics of 'being othered' and of 'othering'.

Also when it comes to claiming their legacy, these women assert an exceptional autonomy that distinguishes them from other artists, who instead often inscribe their work into comforting, yet restrictive established traditions. When asked about her motivations to paint and where she draws inspiration from, Nirmala states: 'for me art is a way of living, expressing my thoughts and emotions. Usually my art reflects the current situations or experiences I go through as a woman artist'. Similarly, Preeti Samyukta explains: 'my works are a visual diary of myself, my thoughts...and they also include my growing up in the wilderness...it's a journey inside me, into my emotions and my memories'. She further declares that she is not part of any movement, since her 'preoccupations don't allow for such deliberations'. Subhashini, also an artist part of the collective, on a similar note affirms: 'I am not inspired by any artist but it is only my inner feeling which inspires me to paint'.

By delinking their art from established masters, the Telangana artists exhibit the confident bravery of those who have renounced being accountable to anyone but themselves, thus gaining a self-sufficiency and an authority brimming with creative possibilities. Resorting to legacies that are imbued with spontaneity rather than rooted in formality, and that appeal to emotional rather than intellectual judgments, they further break boundaries with prevailing patriarchal- and Western-oriented frameworks. They embrace what is understood to be a gynocentric, body- and nature-oriented outlook.<sup>18</sup> The work of these artists finds its *raison d'être* in alternative narratives, bringing hitherto marginal histories and the voices of nature, women, bodies and emotions centre-stage as they have rarely been before.



Samyukta, Preeti. *Untitled* 2016.  
Photograph by: Katikaneni Vimala



Reddy, Padma. *Of 1948*. 2016.  
Photograph by: Katikaneni Vimala

The disengagement with earlier canons of representation, and the power-relations entailed therein, allows these women to undertake an ontological shift that demands, on the part of the observer, an openness toward unexpected and unfamiliar—often displacing—frameworks. Whereas postcolonial artworks from the early independent era onward expose and unsettle the ideologies and power relations perpetrated by colonialism, the art of Telangana women engages in a more fundamental reconfiguration of centre-margin dynamics. Rather than offering a response to colonialism, these artists propose an 'epistemic

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<sup>18</sup> The alleged superiority of mind over body, and intellect over emotions is a consequence of the Cartesian mind-body dualism that became central to European thought around the Seventeenth century. The rise of the mind was accompanied by the devaluation of human procreation, given its often-unpredictable rhythms. Procreation being understood as closely linked with nature and female bodies, women were increasingly relegated to separate domains, considered devoid of the rationality that presumably governed men and the public and textual world of minds. For an elaboration on this topic see for example Frédérique Appfel-Marglin and Purna Chandra Mishra's "Gender and the Unitary Self. Looking at the Subaltern in Coastal Orissa" (2008).

de-linking' (Walter Mignolo 2007 p. 450) from its structures, and operate from a place of 'radical exteriority' (Alejandro Valleg 2014).<sup>19</sup>



Aeley, Priyanka. *Untitled* 2016.  
Photograph by: Katikaneni Vimala



Nagami. *Untitled*. Not dated.  
Photograph by: Katikaneni Vimala

The decolonisation in praxis brought forward through *Mukta* emerges as the formulation of a pristine world that no longer engages in the patriarchal, colonial or postcolonial predicaments that largely prevails across European and Indian art; it comes with striking simplicity, and endows the objects in the artworks with a presence that gains in strength proportionally to the ties left behind. It is thus that in these compositions we see, finally, no longer objects, but subjects: subjects that emerge and exist *per se*, outside the purview of a legitimising male gaze or of a centre to which to be a margin. These artworks are transgressive in the simplicity of their existence, unapologetically reclaiming their full legitimisation through the sole enactment of being.

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<sup>19</sup> While postcolonialism and decolonialism are intimately linked and guided by similar principles, the former is usually associated with Indian thinkers such as Gayatri Spivak (1988, 1999) and Homi K. Bhabha (1994), whereas the latter is connected to Latin American scholars such as Walter Mignolo (2007, 2011) and Alejandro Vallega (2014). It can also be said that decolonialism is a more radical effort to present non-Western world-systems, whereas postcolonialism analyses the profound consequences of the colonial enterprise. This is how I refer to the two terms in this essay.

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# CELEBRATING THE BATTLE OF KOREGAON: CONTESTED HISTORIES AND THE (DE)COLONIAL DALIT SUBJECT

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## ABSTRACT

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Colonialism, and hence decolonisation, is usually associated with European expansion overseas. This paper is premised on the possibility of an internal colonisation within India, a country famously colonised by Britain. My argument is rooted in ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Mumbai among a community of Mahars, a Dalit (formerly “untouchable”) caste that converted to Buddhism en masse in 1956. As a cornerstone of its self-respect, this community embraces an “alternative history” in which its members cast themselves as the original inhabitants of an ancient Buddhist India, subjugated through the imposition of caste Hinduism by Aryan invaders from an unclearly-defined West.

Another strand of this history is the 1818 Battle of Koregaon, in which a Mahar battalion, fighting on behalf of the British, defeated the forces of the local high-caste Hindu rulers. Through an annual commemoration, Dalits frame these rulers as oppressors, while portraying the British as liberators. I ask whether, counterintuitively, this alternative history can be read as “decolonisation in praxis” vis-à-vis Hindu caste oppression. By examining the multiple ways in which this history, and associated scholarship, is intertwined with British colonial knowledge-making I conclude that this is a fruitful but problematic position to adopt

**Key words:** Dalit – Koregaon – Ambedkar – Mahar – alternative history – Aryan invasion

Every year on January 1<sup>st</sup> large crowds converge on Bhima Koregaon, a village on the outskirts of Pune in western India. Today an educational and business hub, Pune was once the capital of the Maratha Empire which held sway over central India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Koregaon's draw is an obelisk commemorating an 1818 battle in which a British East India Company battalion defeated the numerically superior forces of the Peshwas, a Hindu Brahman<sup>1</sup> dynasty that ruled over the Maratha Empire in its later stages. Part of the Third Anglo-Maratha war, the Battle of Koregaon was a critical step in the British conquest of western India.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the 500 soldiers in the British-led battalion belonged to the Mahar caste, viewed as "untouchable" (ritually impure) under Peshwa rule, and subject to a variety of humiliating prohibitions.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, many of the crowds who now celebrate the victory at Koregaon are Mahars, although most prefer the label Dalit. This term, deriving from a Marathi-language word meaning "broken", was popularised in the twentieth century by the Mahar-born social reformer Dr Bhimrao "Babasaheb" Ambedkar as a generic term for castes subject to untouchability.<sup>4</sup> In recent decades it has acquired strong cultural and political connotations.<sup>5</sup> A large section of the Mahar community today adheres to Buddhism, following the example of Ambedkar who led a mass conversion in 1956 in an attempt to escape the stranglehold of the Hindu caste system.<sup>6</sup> For these Dalit Buddhists, to celebrate the Battle of Koregaon is to pay tribute to the bravery of their Mahar forebears in fighting the Peshwas, who they regard as brutal oppressors.<sup>7</sup> It is also a tribute to Ambedkar himself who is revered by the community, often to the point of deification, and is credited with initiating this annual pilgrimage.<sup>8</sup>

As this year (2018) was the battle's bicentenary, celebrations were on a grand scale and featured a conference themed around identifying the "neo-Peshwas", or upper-caste oppressors, of today.<sup>9</sup> Inevitably, this boosted the profile of what had hitherto been an

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<sup>1</sup> Brahmins (otherwise Brahmins) are usually considered the highest tier of the Hindu caste system.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. B. R. Ambedkar, "The Untouchables and Pax Britannica". In *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol 12*, edited by Vasant Moon, 75-147. (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1993), 83; S. R. Bakshi and Sri Kant Sharma. *The Great Marathas*. (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 2000), 43; A. R. Kulkarni, *Marathas and the Marathas Country*. (New Delhi: Books & Books, 1996), 176.

<sup>3</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, *The Annihilation of Caste, with Reply to Mahatma Gandhi*. (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 2013), 18; Johannes Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit: Religious Conversion and Socio-political Emancipation*. (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), 26.

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Eleanor Mae Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1996), 317.

<sup>6</sup> Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 55.

<sup>7</sup> Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 55; Shraddha Kumbhojkar, "Contesting Power, Contesting Memories: The History of the Koregaon Memorial". *Economic & Political Weekly* 47, no. 42 (Oct 2012): 103-107

<sup>8</sup> Kumbhojkar, "Contesting Power", 105.

<sup>9</sup> Chandan Haygunde, "Police nod for Elgaar Parishad comes with conditions attached" *The Indian Express*, December 29, 2017. <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/bhima-koregaon-battle-police-nod-for-elgaar-parishad-comes-with-conditions-attached-5002955/>

obscure local celebration, and by the afternoon of January 1<sup>st</sup> stories of violence were surfacing in the press. The *Indian Express* reported “incidents of stone pelting and vandalism”<sup>10</sup> and *India Today* later revealed that 50 cars had been damaged and one person killed.<sup>11</sup> Left-leaning online magazine *Scroll* relayed rumours that the attackers were waving saffron flags.<sup>12</sup> For an Indian reader, this detail would immediately align the vandals to the Hindu nationalist right wing, a majoritarian and often upper-caste demographic unlikely to be sympathetic towards Dalits celebrating a British victory. Indeed, through videos circulated over social media, a narrative emerged of an angry upper-caste Hindu mob sabotaging a Dalit celebration they considered “anti-national”.<sup>13</sup>

Even at this point, arguably, the violence was viewed by most as a spot of local bother. It was only the ensuing days’ events that propelled the story into the national spotlight. On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, Dalit groups blocked roads across nearby Mumbai in protest against the Koregaon violence,<sup>14</sup> and on the following day Ambedkar’s grandson, a politician himself, called for a state-wide *bandh* (shutdown) which was vigorously enforced by a broad coalition of Dalit activists.<sup>15</sup> National newspapers fixated on this disruption. The *Times of India* front page on January 4<sup>th</sup> focused almost exclusively on Mumbai, with headlines such as “Cops look on as mobs hold city to ransom”<sup>16</sup> while any meaningful discussion of the original violence was relegated to Page 4. Inevitably, perhaps, this was followed by a backlash in the liberal-left sections of the media which are generally supportive of Dalit causes and critical of the anti-minority jingoism often associated with the Hindu right. Some writers pilloried the predictability of a public response that prioritised traffic disruption over centuries of caste

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<sup>10</sup> PTI, “Pune: Violence marks the Bhima Koregaon battle anniversary event” *Indian Express*, January 1, 2018. <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/pune-violence-mars-bhima-koregaon-battle-anniversary-event-mevani-5007857/>

<sup>11</sup> PTI, “Riots over Dalit’s Koregaon-Bhima battle anniversary celebration in Pune kills 1, destroys 50 cars”. *India Today*, January 1, 2018 <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/violence-mars-bhima-koregaon-battle-anniversary-event-1120253-2018-01-01> (it later transpired that the person killed had been an apparently uninvolved bystander, belonging to a Maratha Hindu caste).

<sup>12</sup> Mridula Chari, “People with saffron flags allegedly attack Dalits going to Bhima Koregaon memorial near Pune” *Scroll.in*, January 1, 2018. <https://scroll.in/latest/863444/people-with-saffron-flags-allegedly-attack-dalits-heading-to-bhima-koregaon-memorial-near-pune>

<sup>13</sup> Anirban Bhattacharya, “Bhima Koregaon and the Dalits’ never-ending search for a nation”. *The Wire*, Jan 5, 2018. <https://thewire.in/caste/bhima-koregaon-dalits-never-ending-search-nation>

<sup>14</sup> Scroll Staff, “Mumbai: Five injured in Dalit protests, police detain at least 100”. *Scroll.in*, January 2, 2018. <https://scroll.in/latest/863568/mumbai-dalit-protests-five-injured-police-detain-at-least-100-traffic-affected>

<sup>15</sup> Express Web Desk. “Mumbai bandh highlights: Jignesh Mevani appeals for peace, says state govt must ensure rule of law” *The Indian Express*, January 3, 2018. <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/mumbai-bandh-live-updates-dalit-marathas-clashes-pune-bhima-koregaon-5008377/>

<sup>16</sup> TNN, “Cops look on as mobs hold city to ransom”. *Times of India*, January 4, 2018.

oppression,<sup>17</sup> while others lamented the exclusion of Dalit voices in a mainstream media “soaked in caste privilege”.<sup>18</sup>

My own involvement in these events came towards the end of a year’s anthropological fieldwork in Lower Parel, in central Mumbai. I had been engaging in participant observation and conducting interviews<sup>19</sup> to investigate social cohesion and identity in a cluster of tenement buildings called the BDD Chawls. These buildings were constructed in the 1920s, primarily to house migrant cotton millworkers from the surrounding rural districts. Many of today’s residents descend from these migrants. A large number are from the Maratha community, a predominantly rural Hindu caste grouping from which the original leadership of the Maratha Empire emerged. Many Marathas are vocal admirers of founding ruler Chhatrapati Shivaji, whose descendants controlled the empire until power passed to the Peshwas. There is also a sizeable Dalit Buddhist minority, mostly from the Mahar caste. Both groups speak Marathi as a first language and they sometimes mix together socially. Nevertheless, old prejudices linger, and a year of throwaway remarks led me to conclude that for many Marathas, their caste superiority was still profoundly internalised.<sup>20</sup>

Caste conflict is a familiar topic in Indian academia, but in line with this journal’s theme I examine it here through the lens of decolonisation. This term, beyond its narrow technical sense of colonised nations gaining independence, is typically used to denote processes of liberation from the psychological frameworks imposed by colonial rule. The work of thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, in a Francophone context, Ashis Nandy, in India and, notably, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, whose *Decolonising the Mind* examines the intimate relationship between colonisation and language, has become canonical in this respect.<sup>21</sup> In recent years, “decolonising” as an ideal has motivated initiatives in universities across the globe, from the famous Rhodes Must Fall movement, radiating out of the University of Cape Town, to

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<sup>17</sup> Rohan Venkataramakrishnan, “Are Dalits really oppressed? Five predictable responses to the Bhima Koregaon bandh” *Scroll.in*, January 3, 2018. <https://scroll.in/article/863684/are-dalits-really-oppressed-five-predictable-responses-to-the-bhima-koregaon-bandh>

<sup>18</sup> Rajesh Rajmani, “Bhima Koregaon and the Savarna gaze” *News Laundry*, January 5, 2018. <https://www.newslaundry.com/2018/01/05/bhima-koregaon-savarna-gaze-media-dalits-caste>

<sup>19</sup> Most of the primary source material used in this paper comes from my research fieldnotes, made in light of numerous conversations with research participants in Hindi, English or Marathi. In some cases I have quoted comments directly in the original language (Hindi or English) while in others I have translated or paraphrased for ease. All names have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals in question. Research was conducted between January 2017 and January 2018 with the help of funding from the Economic and Social Research Council, and a SOAS fieldwork grant.

<sup>20</sup> The exact caste status of the cluster of clans making up the Maratha community is a highly complex issue that I will not attempt to unpick here, except to say that they are non-Brahman Hindus belonging to the “open” category i.e. unlike Dalits, adivasis (tribal communities) and the lower caste grouping referred to as “Other Backward Classes”, they do *not* qualify for the affirmative action schemes operated by the central and state governments.

<sup>21</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey, 1986.

debates about the dominance of white, male writers in course reading lists at SOAS,<sup>22</sup> among others, as well as in India<sup>23</sup> and South Africa.<sup>24</sup>

Although decolonisation is usually associated with the legacy of European imperialism, it can theoretically be applied to any form of colonialism. Hence, I ask in this paper whether caste oppression, as exemplified by Peshwa rule, can be viewed in colonial terms. If so, can the celebration at Koregaon, particularly when understood as a Dalit reclaiming of Indian history, be considered a form of “decolonisation in praxis”? I will suggest that this is a fruitful but problematic position to adopt given the integral role the British colonial project has played in enabling history to be thus reclaimed.

Before continuing, a word on my own perspective is essential. As a white, British man, I believe I was viewed in the BDD chawls as an outsider with no clear affiliation to a caste, religion or linguistic community. This may in part explain the humbling generosity with which I was welcomed by both Dalits and Marathas. Moreover, my access to the all-male Koregaon expedition was uncomplicated in a way it might not have been for a female researcher. However, it would be misguided to equate my outsider status to neutrality of perspective, especially given the subject matter under consideration.<sup>25</sup> In tension with the obvious fact that my nationality and ethnicity align me, however indirectly, to one of the actors in this debate (i.e. the British colonisers), my own political and academic views lead me instinctively to condemn both casteism and colonialism. Whether this positionality undermines my ability to make a balanced argument on decolonisation in an Indian context, I will leave the reader to decide.

## “ANOTHER IMPERIALISM”: PESHWA OPPRESSION AND BRITISH “LIBERATION”

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I attended the Koregaon celebrations with a large party of Dalit Buddhists from the BDD Chawls. Over a hundred bikers set off from Lower Parel at midday on December 31st, while the more cautious among us travelled alongside in a chartered bus. The journey to Koregaon was slow but at times exhilarating as we chanted Ambedkar slogans at every toll-gate we passed, and stopped at Buddhist temples en route for speeches and prayers. When we finally reached our destination, after midnight, it took a few hours for the crowds to thin sufficiently for us to approach the victory obelisk. Although this was the crowning moment of the day it felt perfunctory – a brief speech from the rally organisers, a few more chants of

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<sup>22</sup> Meera Sabaratnam, “Decolonising the curriculum: what’s all the fuss about?”, Study at SOAS blog, January 18, 2017 <https://www.soas.ac.uk/blogs/study/decolonising-curriculum-whats-the-fuss/>

<sup>23</sup> Prasant Mishra, and Susanta Bardhan, “Decolonising English teaching and studies in India: need to review classroom practices and teaching material” *Journal of Teaching and Research in English Literature – Special Issue* n.d. <https://sites.google.com/site/splissueeltailiteraturejournal/articles/decolonizing-english-teaching>

<sup>24</sup> Brian Kamazi, “Decolonising the curriculum – a student call in context”, *University World News*. May 27, 2016. <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20160527145138375>

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, an argument frequently made in favour of decolonising education is precisely that of challenging the assumption of white male neutrality in academic perspective.

“Dr Babasaheb Ambedkarancha – Vijay Aso!”<sup>26</sup> and fifteen minutes of taking selfies before we were shepherded back to the bus. Due to some confusion, the place booked for us to rest for the night was now full, and after much discussion we set off home. By 8am on January 1<sup>st</sup> I was back in Mumbai, oblivious to the chaos about to unfold.

I had become familiar with the Battle of Koregaon long before the events of January 1<sup>st</sup>. Months earlier, Dalit Buddhist friends had insisted I keep the night free to accompany them to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of a battle between the Mahar Regiment and the Peshwas. No mention was made of the context of the battle in these initial conversations, and it was only through independent online research that I discovered the Mahars had been fighting for the East India Company. Horrified, I asked Anish, one of the most socially and politically active members of the community, why he celebrated a British victory over Indian forces that led to the consolidation of colonial rule in India.

His response was the same as many others I received throughout the year. For many Dalits today, the Battle of Koregaon represents a Dalit victory over Peshwa oppression. Indeed, several advance the opinion that the Mahars’ lot improved under the British, who provided them with a level of protection lacking under Peshwa rule.<sup>27</sup> I would fulminate against the rapaciousness and brutality of British colonialism but my protestations were waved aside. “Dalits and British, we are friends,” said Anish in the wake of the Koregaon events, “since 1818”. While flattered to be associated with Anish’s anti-caste struggles, I found the implication of complicity with British rule a bitter pill to swallow.

A version of this narrative can be found in Ambedkar’s own writing on the Battle of Koregaon. Although no apologist for colonial rule, he responded to those “who look upon this conduct of the Untouchables in joining the British as an act of gross treason” by arguing that it was in fact “quite natural” as “history abounds with illustrations showing how one section of people in a country have shown sympathy with an invader, in the hope that the new comer will release them from the oppressions of their countrymen”.<sup>28</sup> In his famous 1936 treatise *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar illustrates these oppressions in the specific context of the Peshwas:

[T]he untouchable was not allowed to use the public streets if a Hindu was coming along lest he pollute the Hindu shadow... In Poona, the capital of the Peshwa, the untouchable was required to carry, strung from his waist, a broom to sweep away from behind the dust he [treaded] on lest a Hindu walking on the same should be polluted... [and] an earthen pot, strung from his neck wherever he went, for holding his spit lest his spit falling on earth should pollute a Hindu who might unknowingly happen to tread on it.<sup>29</sup>

Far from being a purely historical account, this is presented alongside contemporary examples of casteism to demonstrate that the Congress Party, dominated as it was at the time

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<sup>26</sup> “Triumph be to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar” (Asang Wankhede pers. comm.)

<sup>27</sup> See also Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 173-4; Romila Thapar, “Some appropriations of the theory of Aryan race relating to the beginnings of Indian history”, in *The Aryan Debate*, ed. Thomas Trautman, 106-128. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 111.

<sup>28</sup> Ambedkar, “Untouchables and Pax Britannica”, 86.

<sup>29</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 18.

by upper-caste Hindus, was not fit to assume the mantle of political power after Independence. Four years later, in his *Pakistan, or the Partition of India* the point is more explicitly argued that “the British cannot consent to settle power upon an aggressive Hindu majority and make it its heir, leaving it to deal with the minorities at its sweet pleasure. That would not be ending imperialism. It would be creating another imperialism.”<sup>30</sup>

## INVASIONS FROM THE WEST

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Can it be argued, then, that Peshwa rule was itself a form of colonialism? And thus that the celebration at Koregaon is actually a celebration of decolonisation, albeit problematized by the inconvenient fact that the battle was won for a new set of colonisers? To answer this, we will need to take a closer look at Dalit Buddhist attitudes towards Hinduism itself. It became apparent early in my fieldwork that many of my interlocutors were passionate subscribers to the so-called “Aryan invasion theory”. According to local politician Mahendra, the first Hindus were actually “Eurasian” invaders who came from Central Asia to find places to graze their cows, in the process destroying India’s indigenous Buddhist culture. Another politician, Sandeep, told me that there is genetic evidence to show that Brahmans came from Portugal thousands of years ago and subjugated the local Buddhist community. He told me that Buddhism was not only the original religion of India, but it had been present historically in many countries (an inconclusive debate followed as to whether pre-Columbian America had been Buddhist, and whether Pali, the language of Buddhist liturgy, would have been spoken in ancient Europe). Social worker Manish agreed that outsiders, whom he described as fair-skinned Persians that would have looked rather like me, made slaves of the local population, also intermarrying with them to produce the first Brahmans, who “developed the rules, regulations, arranged all caste.”<sup>31</sup>

Appealing though it might be to many engaged in ongoing anti-caste struggles, especially those aligned to the decolonisation movement, to view the caste system as the legacy of an ancient “western” invasion, the historicity of these accounts is questionable and in some aspects entirely unfounded. Although Buddhism clearly held sway in parts of India in the centuries following the life of the Buddha<sup>32</sup> there is no evidence for a primordial Buddhism preceding the earliest forms of Hinduism. The theory of a violent Aryan invasion has a long history, beginning with a linguistic discovery announced by British judge Sir William Jones in 1786. Tasked by the colonial judiciary with mastering Sanskrit, he found that the language bore “a stronger affinity” to Greek and Latin “than could possibly have been produced by

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<sup>30</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, “Pakistan, or the Partition of India”. In *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol 8*, edited by Vasant Moon, 1-483. (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1990), 9. It should be noted that the minority under specific consideration here is the Muslim community rather than the untouchable community.

<sup>31</sup> Similar arguments were encountered by anthropologist Johannes Beltz in his 1990s study of Buddhist communities in Mumbai and Pune, where he was repeatedly informed that Dalits were the “aboriginal Indian ‘race’ that was conquered by the Aryans” and found that “Buddhism is considered to be an ancient universal religion, practised not only in India, but also in many European countries where Pali was once spoken.” (Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 141-144)

<sup>32</sup> Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*. (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications, 2003), 118-125

accident".<sup>33</sup> The wider implication of this is that all northern Indian languages related to Sanskrit belong to the Indo-European language family, which also includes most European languages.<sup>34</sup> Subsequent discoveries, such as the unity of the major South Indian languages in a separate (Dravidian) language family, led to a dominant paradigm among European Indologists in the later nineteenth century of "an ancient clash between a light-skinned [Aryan] race bringing Sanskrit and civilisation to an India inhabited by dark-skinned, savage speakers of Dravidian languages".<sup>35</sup>

This theory found support from missionaries, whose work among lower castes was predicated on the idea of their being "indigenous inhabitants who had been conquered and oppressed by Brahmins who represented the Aryan conquest"<sup>36</sup> and also among colonial historians for whom it provided a justificatory parallel with the British conquest of India.<sup>37</sup> The discovery in the 1920s that architectural ruins unearthed decades previously in the Indus Valley actually belonged to a distinct, ancient civilisation, complicated this narrative. Difficulties in deciphering the language used by the Indus Civilisation has spurred a protracted debate as to whether this represents a pre-Aryan, possibly Dravidian, civilisation or whether it indicates an Aryan presence in India much earlier than hitherto believed.<sup>38</sup> For archaeologist Mortimer Wheeler, the presence of unburied corpses at the Indus Valley site of Mohenjo-daro suggested that it was an indigenous civilisation that had been destroyed by Aryan invaders.<sup>39</sup>

In subsequent decades, due to archaeological evidence of the likely pastoral-agriculturalist lifestyle of the Aryans, the violent invasion narrative has largely been sidelined "in favour of a slower, more gradual migration of Aryans into India."<sup>40</sup> This "Aryan migration theory" is supported by a considerable body of linguistic, literary and genetic evidence<sup>41</sup> generally indicating an earlier homeland in the Pontic Steppe region<sup>42</sup> rather than Portugal as claimed by Sandeep.

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in David Anthony, *The horse, the wheel and language: how Bronze Age riders from the Eurasian Steppes shaped the modern world* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Trautmann, "Introduction", in *The Aryan Debate*, ed. Thomas Trautman, xiii-xliii. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), xxi.

<sup>35</sup> Trautmann, "Introduction", xxxi-xxxiii.

<sup>36</sup> Thapar, "Some appropriations of the theory", 110.

<sup>37</sup> Thapar, "Some appropriations of the theory", 115; Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Hindus: an alternative history*. (London: Penguin Press, 2009), 91.

<sup>38</sup> Trautmann, "Introduction", xlii-xliii; Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Hindus*, 91.

<sup>39</sup> Sudeshna Guha, "Negotiating evidence: history, archaeology and the Indus civilisation." *Modern Asian Studies*, 39 no. 2 (May, 2005): 412.

<sup>40</sup> Trautmann, "Introduction", xxxvii.

<sup>41</sup> For a non-technical summary of this evidence, see Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Hindus*, 86-102. For more on textual evidence see Michael Witzel, "Autochthonous Aryans? The evidence from old Indian and Iranian texts". *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 7, no 3. (Oct 2016): 1-93. <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-ejvs-8302>. For an example of a recent, and influential genetic study, see Marina Silva et al. "A genetic chronology for the Indian Subcontinent points to heavily sex-biased dispersal" *BMC Evolutionary Biology*, 17, no 88 (March, 2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12862-017-0936-9>

<sup>42</sup> Anthony, *The Horse*.

An opposing interpretation, the “Out of India” hypothesis, posits India as the sole historical source of Hindu culture and the Sanskrit language and in its most extreme form maintains that the entire family of Indo-European languages radiated out from an Indian homeland.<sup>43</sup> While few international academics subscribe to this position it has, understandably, gained considerable traction in India where it is often co-opted into the Hindu nationalist agenda. For example, M. S. Gowalkar, the second leader of the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) organisation insisted Hindus were “indigenouse [*sic*] children of the soil always, from time immemorial”.<sup>44</sup> For some “Out of India” advocates, any suggestion that Sanskrit or Hinduism might have their roots from outside India is Eurocentric neo-colonialism. Tellingly, a leading (European) Out of India proponent Koenraad Elst made his name with a study of Hindu revivalism entitled *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*.<sup>45</sup>

For Elst, of course, there is no question of Aryans as colonisers, and instead he writes of “Islamic and Western colonialism” although is at pains not to conflate the two into a simplistic “anti-Hindu front” as others have done.<sup>46</sup> Golwalkar, for example, describes the “degenerating” effect on Hindu culture from “contact with the debased ‘civilisations’ of the Musalmans and the Europeans” and in the same paragraph refers to the “average Hindu mind, not wholly vitiated by *Western* influences”.<sup>47</sup> I was, in fact, surprised that my Dalit interlocutors never brought up the issue of Islamic conquest in my hearing, and despite Ambedkar having written of the “invasion of India by the Muslim hordes from the north-west”<sup>48</sup> this did not seem to represent another significant “western” invasion for them. As we have seen, moreover, unlike some British colonial administrators, Anish and others did not explicitly draw a parallel between the other two perceived invasions from the west (i.e. Aryan and British), preferring to frame them in opposition to each other: Aryans as oppressors and British as liberators.

## FALSE HISTORY AND COLONISED MINDS

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Just as Hindu nationalism is often predicated on the belief that Hinduism and Sanskrit originated solely within India, for many Dalits, a belief in their own autochthony in the face of Brahmanic invasion is essential to their self-respect. I asked in the previous section whether the Peshwas can be regarded as colonisers. Extending this to the entire Brahmanic superstructure, and the perception of invading Aryans enslaving an aboriginal Buddhist population, it appears that some Dalits indeed view this as form of settler colonialism.

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<sup>43</sup> Doniger O’Flaherty, *The Hindus*, 93.

<sup>44</sup> M. S. Golwalkar, *We, or our nationhood defined*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Nagpur: Harihareshwar Printing Press, 1939), 8.

<sup>45</sup> Koenraad Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu mind: ideological development of Hindu revivalism*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co. 2001

<sup>46</sup> Elst, *Decolonizing*, 46 and 47. A discussion of Islam and its substantive presence in India from the 12<sup>th</sup> Century onwards is outside the scope of this essay but amply covered in a multiplicity of other sources.

<sup>47</sup> Golwalkar, *Nationhood defined*, 8 (emphasis mine)

<sup>48</sup> Ambedkar, “Pakistan”, 54.

In the histories recounted to me, Aryan invaders colonised not only the bodies but also the *minds* of the aboriginal population. For example, during the Hindu festival of Gudi Padwa I asked Mahendra if he would be taking part in the celebrations. “No” he said firmly. “Hindus blindly follow, but Buddhists always ask ‘why?’”. The expression “blindly follow” was used repeatedly in reference to Hindu customs, and Manish described the way the Aryan invaders had indoctrinated the indigenous population: “*Unko hammering kiya – aap log Hindu hain, aap log Hindu hain, aap log Hindu hain*” ([The Brahmans] hammered it into them – you’re Hindu, Hindu, Hindu). Sandeep was vociferous on this point during Ganesh Chaturthi, Mumbai’s biggest Hindu festival, telling me that Ganesh was a “fake god”, like all Hindu deities. Any “ancient” Ganesh carvings I might have seen were simply elephant figures that had been modified by fraudulent Brahmans to lend credence to their “false history”.

“False history” was an expression used frequently. Sandeep dismissed the Hindu epics as false history and he told me this history had been authored by Brahmans to brainwash Indians into complying with the caste system. More recently, according to Anish, the Mahars’ bravery at Koregaon and elsewhere has been edited out of mainstream, Brahman-controlled history. It was Ambedkar who managed to see through this fog, he explained, and after reading 50,000 books Ambedkar devised an “alternative history” of India that exposed the Aryan invasion and celebrated the unsung heroism of the Mahars. “*Ye hamara itihaas hai*” he said more than once: this is our (Dalit) history.<sup>49</sup>

## THE ROOTS OF ALTERNATIVE HISTORY

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But whose history is it? Reading through post-Koregaon broadsides against the upper-caste dominance over mainstream Indian media, I started seeing parallels, in the themes of exclusion and hegemony, between the Dalit Buddhists’ concept of false/alternative history and the decolonisation agenda in higher education. But while Anish’s alternative history appears “decolonised” with respect to Brahmanic imperialism, it is as much a bequest of the British colonial encounter as it is of Ambedkar himself, particularly where the Aryan invasion theory is concerned. I therefore attempt to examine the roots of this history, firstly by returning to Ambedkar.

Born in 1891 to a Mahar military family, Bhimrao Ambedkar was, unusually for his caste, educated in Elphinstone College in Bombay, before studying at Columbia University under a scholarship from the Maharaja of Baroda, and later at the London School of Economics. Ambedkar’s subsequent career defies disciplinary categorisation and he is remembered variously as a lawyer, economist, writer, politician and social reformer. The fact that his most significant life events and achievements are celebrated with the fervour usually accorded to religious festivals is testament to the towering position he occupies in Dalit Buddhist cosmology.

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<sup>49</sup>A recent initiative in this area is Dalit History Month, a collaborative social media project now in its fourth year. See “Dalit History Month”. dalitdiva. <https://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/423929/Dalit-History-Month/>

Every year in March, his 1927 crusade for untouchables to gain access to a public water tank in Mahad, southern Maharashtra<sup>50</sup> is celebrated with a pilgrimage to the site of the tank, now branded *krantibhumi*, Land of Revolution. On his birthday (Ambedkar Jayanti) on April 14<sup>th</sup>, Dalit-dominated neighbourhoods including the BDD Chawls erupt with speeches, flags and rambunctious processions. On India's Independence Day (August 15<sup>th</sup>) and Republic Day (January 26<sup>th</sup>) Dalit Buddhist celebrations place a distinctive emphasis on Ambedkar's role as lead author of the Indian Constitution. Come October, the mass conversion to Buddhism is celebrated as Dhamma Chakra Pravartan Din (Religious Conversion Day) with lectures and cultural programmes, while on Ambedkar's death anniversary on December 6<sup>th</sup>, Dalit groups from across India converge on Chaityabhoomi, the site of his cremation in central Mumbai.

The exact status accorded to Ambedkar by the Dalit Buddhist community is matter for debate. On the one hand, I was told many times that Buddhism is a scientific religion<sup>51</sup> in which there is no place for the fake gods of Hinduism. On the other, Ambedkar was often referred to in explicitly religious terms. During the Republic Day celebrations, Anish explained to me that Ambedkar is like a god, a mother and a father to him, while on another occasion he told me that "we only worship Ambedkar and Gautam Buddha. No other gods." Beltz notes that many accounts of Ambedkar's life "are more eulogies than historical descriptions, and can be studied as hagiography".<sup>52</sup> Great importance is attached to Ambedkar's writing in the Dalit Buddhist community, as attested by aspects of the alternative histor(ies) recounted to me. In some cases, I formed the impression that this attachment arose through discussion and through reading *about* Ambedkar rather than through direct engagement with Ambedkar's own texts.

I have already referred to the catalogue of Peshwa oppressions made in the *Annihilation of Caste* and the explicitly anti-caste interpretation of the Battle of Koregaon made in *The Untouchables and Pax Britannica*. The theme of historical conflict between Buddhists and Brahmans is dealt with at length in a number of Ambedkar's essays including *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*<sup>53</sup> where Hinduism is framed as "inequalitarian and oppressive" in opposition to the "advanced, egalitarian and rational mode" of Buddhism.<sup>54</sup> In *The Untouchables: who were they and why they became untouchables*, Ambedkar argues that the prohibition against cow slaughter and eating beef, so central to our understanding of Hinduism today, actually arose as a way for Brahmans to assert their superiority over

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<sup>50</sup> Maharashtra is the state in which both Mumbai and Pune (i.e. including Koregaon) are situated, and where the majority of the BDD Chawl residents, Dalit and Maratha, trace their roots.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 44-45 and Omvedt, *Buddhism in India*, 139-42 for Buddhism and scientific rationalism.

<sup>52</sup> Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 113

<sup>53</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, "Revolution and Counter-revolution". In *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol 3*, compiled by Vasant Moon, 151-429. Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1987.

<sup>54</sup> Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity*. Revised edition. (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006), 49-50.

Buddhists who they perceived as a threat.<sup>55</sup> Those Buddhists who continued to eat beef were branded untouchable.<sup>56</sup> The concluding sentences of *The Untouchables* point very clearly to a need for “alternative history”:

We can, therefore, say with some confidence that Untouchability was born some time about 400 A.D. It is born out of the struggle for supremacy between Buddhism and Brahmanism which has so completely moulded the history of India and the study of which is so woefully neglected by students of Indian history.<sup>57</sup>

Given Ambedkar’s clear intellectual influence on Dalit thinking today, it would be natural to assume that the Aryan invasion theory, so prominent in my interlocutors’ world views, was a position that he had adopted himself. In reality, Ambedkar explicitly rejected the theory in his treatise *Who were the Shudras*, in which he states that the “theory of invasion is an invention,” and even the notion of an Aryan race is “so absurd that it ought to have been dead long ago”.<sup>58</sup>

How, then, has the Aryan invasion theory come to occupy such a central place in contemporary Dalit thought? A partial answer can be found in the writings of Jyotirao Phule, a nineteenth century Maharashtrian anti-caste reformer. In addition to being a seminal influence on Ambedkar, Phule is best known for his pioneering work with his wife Savitri to promote education for girls and lower castes.<sup>59</sup> While he does not have the same stature among Dalit Buddhists as Ambedkar, Phule is nevertheless enshrined in the pantheon of respected social reformers, and his image is a common sight in Dalit-owned spaces. My interlocutors frequently cited Phule as part of their heritage and often ritually invoked him alongside Ambedkar at their functions. His writing, mostly in the form of short Marathi pamphlets, is more accessible than Ambedkar’s dense treatises,<sup>60</sup> so the currency his ideas hold today is hardly surprising.

Indeed, much of the alternative history I heard resonates with Phule. For Phule, the Aryans were responsible for the earliest and most damaging invasion of India, since they “solidified their power using a hierarchical and unequalitarian religious ideology”.<sup>61</sup> Phule, like Sandeep and Mahendra, argued that the resulting ideology, Hinduism, “is not a

<sup>55</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, “The untouchables: who were they and why they became untouchables?” In *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol 7*, edited by Vasant Moon, 239-382. (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1990), 311-379.

<sup>56</sup> Indeed, many Dalit Buddhists in the BDD Chawls continue to eat beef today, in the form of buffalo meat given the legal restrictions on beef eating in Maharashtra, and invest in it the pride and symbolism of not being Hindu.

<sup>57</sup> Ambedkar, “The untouchables”, 379.

<sup>58</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, “Who were the Shudras?”. In *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol 7*, edited by Vasant Moon, 9-229. (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1990), 78 and 80.

<sup>59</sup> Thapar, “Some appropriations of the theory”, 111.

<sup>60</sup> Gopal Guru, “Liberating Jyotiba Phule: Selected Writings of Jyotiba Phule by G. P. Deshpande and Jyotiba Phule.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no 35 (Aug-Sept 2003): 3703-3704. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4413968>.

<sup>61</sup> Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, 20-21. Also see Thapar, “Some appropriations of the theory”, 110; and Rosalind O’Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-century Western India*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 141.

legitimate religion but superstition, a bag of tricks, a weapon of domination".<sup>62</sup> Like Manish, he explicitly compared caste oppression to slavery in his treatise *Gulamgiri* (Slavery)<sup>63</sup> which he dedicated to the "good people of the United States".<sup>64</sup>

Phule's claiming a pre-Aryan status for the lower castes (including untouchables) can be understood within the hybrid milieu of Indian colonial-era thought. He was famously influenced by Thomas Paine, as well as by the Scottish mission school that he attended and with which he later remained involved.<sup>65</sup> His ideology can also be placed in the context of a growing number of non-Brahman movements across India which "all began to argue in terms of the Aryan conquest and brahman exploitation through religion."<sup>66</sup> Most notable of these was that of activist E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy whose demand for an independent Dravidian state was premised on an aboriginal Dravidian population of south India that had been conquered and oppressed by Aryans.<sup>67</sup>

## DECOLONISED OR ANTI-NATIONAL?

Having explored the roots of Anish's alternative history, I now ask how successfully it can be considered "decolonisation in praxis" and contend that we face several challenges. First, the theory of a violent Aryan invasion (as opposed to a migration) has not only been rejected by Ambedkar and much contemporary scholarship, but it is also inextricably tied to British and European knowledge production. Second, while the Battle of Koregaon can be framed as a victory against casteism, this does not erase its role as a catalyst for British colonial expansion. The most that can be said is that it led to the replacement of one imperialism by another. Finally, having implicitly framed Ambedkar as a "decolonised" thinker in regard to Brahmanic imperialism, the logical next step is to examine his relationship with the British colonial project and the traces this has left in the Dalit Buddhist community today.

Like Phule, Ambedkar drew on a wide range of material from within and outside India. The influences of his Columbia University professors are often cited,<sup>68</sup> notably the pragmatist John Dewey whom Ambedkar refers to in *Annihilation of Caste* as "my teacher... to whom I owe so much".<sup>69</sup> In itself, this is nothing remarkable – even the most strident advocate of decolonisation would be hard-pressed to insist on only following thinkers wholly uninfluenced by European-American academia – but it usefully prompts an examination of the broader context of Ambedkar's writing. For example, as he readily admits in the preface

<sup>62</sup> Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Jagannatham Begari, "Jyotirao Phule: A Revolutionary Social Reformer." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 71, no. 2 (2010): 399-412. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42753704>.

<sup>64</sup> Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, 82.

<sup>65</sup> O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology*, 108-131.

<sup>66</sup> Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, 35.

<sup>67</sup> Anita Diehl, *E.V. Ramaswami Naicker-Periyar: a study of the influence of a personality in contemporary South India*. (Stockholm, Goteborg, Lund: Esselte Studium, 1977), 70-77.

<sup>68</sup> Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 48; Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, 80.

<sup>69</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 74.

to *Who were the Shudras?* he could not read Sanskrit<sup>70</sup> and his access to ancient Hindu texts was entirely through the medium of English translations. He rightly suggests that this “deficiency... should not disqualify [him] altogether from operating in this field”<sup>71</sup> but nevertheless by today’s standards it undermines his stature as a historian of ancient India and an emancipator from the “spiritual subjugation”<sup>72</sup> imposed by colonial languages.

Likewise, Ambedkar’s adoption of Buddhism cannot be understood in isolation from the wider Buddhist revival in India and Sri Lanka in which the role of outside scholars was crucial. The interpretation of ancient Buddhist texts such as the Ashokan rock edicts owes much to British officials including James Prinsep and Alexander Cunningham.<sup>73</sup> T. W. Rhys Davids, a civil servant in Sri Lanka, founded the Pali Text Society in 1881 making English translations of the Buddhist canon widely available for the first time.<sup>74</sup> Colonel Olcott and Helena Blavatsky, founders of the Theosophical Society in New York, came to Sri Lanka in the 1880s and converted to Buddhism. Olcott, in particular, was instrumental in the intellectual and spiritual development of some of South Asia’s most influential Buddhist reformers including Anagarika Dharmapala in Sri Lanka.<sup>75</sup> This milieu of “Buddhist Modernism... essentially based on Western sources and English translations of the scriptures... [and] greatly inspired by the nineteenth-century scientific and evolutionist ideology”<sup>76</sup> heavily influenced Ambedkar, and lives on in my interlocutors’ claims that Buddhism is “scientifically proven” and that the Buddha was the first scientist.

Given the hybrid intellectual climate of Ambedkar’s time, seeking purity of ideas and influence is clearly inappropriate. More substantial questions, however, have been raised over Ambedkar’s role in India’s independence movement. In particular, his support for the creation of Pakistan has been “seen by many as a betrayal of the nationalist cause”<sup>77</sup> and in a controversial biography, politician-journalist Arun Shourie claims that “[t]here is not one instance... in which Ambedkar participated in any activity connected with the struggle to free the country.”<sup>78</sup>

Ambedkar’s own address to the 1930 Round Table Conference, called by the British Government to discuss constitutional reform, reflects a nuanced but clear position:

Before the British, we were in the loathsome condition due to our untouchability. Has the British Government done anything to remove it? Before the British, we could not enter the temple. Can we enter now? Before the British, we were denied entry

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<sup>70</sup> Ambedkar, “Who were the Shudras?”, 11. (This is not a coincidence, of course: as a Mahar, Ambedkar was unable to persuade any Brahman to defile themselves by teaching him the sacred language of Hinduism.)

<sup>71</sup> Ambedkar, “Who were the Shudras?”, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Ngūgī Wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the mind*, 9

<sup>73</sup> Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, 189.

<sup>74</sup> Omvedt, *Buddhism in India*, 234.

<sup>75</sup> Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 44-5; Omvedt, *Buddhism in India*, 234; Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, 189.

<sup>76</sup> Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 72.

<sup>77</sup> Shabnum Tejani, “The necessary conditions for democracy: B. R. Ambedkar on nationalism, minorities and Pakistan.” *Economic & Political Weekly* 48, no. 50 (Dec 2013): 115.

<sup>78</sup> Arun Shourie, *Worshipping false gods: Ambedkar and the facts which have been erased*. (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1997), 3.

into the Police Force. Does the British Government admit us in the Force? Before the British, we were not allowed to serve in the Military. Is that career now open to us? To none of these questions can we give an affirmative answer. That the British, who have held so large a sway over us for such a long time, have done some good we cheerfully acknowledge. But there is certainly no fundamental change in our position.... [The British] are quite incompetent to tackle our problems.<sup>79</sup>

Of course, a commitment to removing a colonial power does not require unambiguous loyalty to every independence movement at all costs. We have seen Ambedkar's fears of an "aggressive Hindu majority... creating another Imperialism"<sup>80</sup> and the 1930-2 Round Table Conferences further illustrate how Ambedkar's concerns over Hindu majoritarianism might be viewed as playing into British hands. Part of a series of legislative reforms through which the British government extended voting rights to Indians in a limited way, the conferences featured debates over dividing the electorate on religious lines. The 1909 Indian Councils Act<sup>81</sup> had already provided for a separate electorate for Muslims, and this was followed by the instigation of separate electorates for other religious minorities. At the Round Table Conferences Ambedkar argued, not for the first time, for separate electorates<sup>82</sup> for the "Depressed Classes"<sup>83</sup> to promote their fair representation and adequate participation in public life. This move was opposed by the Indian National Congress, and in particular Gandhi who feared this would lead to division and bloodshed and responded with a "fast unto death".<sup>84</sup> A compromise was reached under the Poona Pact (1932) which reserved seats for the Depressed Classes under a common Hindu electorate.<sup>85</sup>

One the one hand, attempts to compartmentalise the Indian electorate can be seen as a cynical British "divide and rule" ploy. In his compelling critique of colonial rule, Shashi Tharoor, while sympathetic to Ambedkar's cause, describes the "British attempt to separate the Depressed Classes" as a "strategy of fragmenting Indian nationalism and breaking the incipient unity of the Indian masses".<sup>86</sup> Beltz, on the other hand, in his history-ethnography of Maharashtrian Buddhism, presents Ambedkar's demands as a move born out of frustration at the lack of upper-caste commitment to combatting untouchability.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, "Dr Ambedkar at the Round Table Conferences". In *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol 2*, compiled by Vasant Moon, 503-792. (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1982), 504

<sup>80</sup> Ambedkar, "Pakistan", 9.

<sup>81</sup> Commonly referred to as the Morley-Minto Reforms after the principle architects of the Act.

<sup>82</sup> Ambedkar, "Round Table Conferences", 533-551.

<sup>83</sup> Ambedkar used "Depressed Classes" to refer to "untouchables within the Hindu religion but outside Hindu society", and this is the definition that, after much debate, was accepted more generally by the 1931-2 Indian Franchise Committee (C. J. Fuller, "Colonial anthropology and the decline of the Raj: caste, religion and political change in India in the early twentieth century". *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 26 no. 3 [2016]: 482.)

<sup>84</sup> Tejani, "The necessary conditions", 115; Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, 166-7.

<sup>85</sup> Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 49-50; Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, 168-169.

<sup>86</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*. (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2016), 147

<sup>87</sup> Beltz, *Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit*, 49.

I saw no such ambiguity in my Dalit Buddhist interlocutors' perspectives on Ambedkar's nationalism. The focus of the community's Republic Day celebrations I attended at the BDD Chawls was the garlanding of Ambedkar's portrait. Anish later took me aside to explain that they were celebrating Ambedkar's lead authorship of the Indian constitution. At a Buddhist musical programme later in the year, a singer delivered a charged paean to both Maratha Emperor Shivaji and Ambedkar. But whereas "Shivrao" wielded a sword, the song went, Bhimrao changed India with a pen. Gandhi and Narendra Modi also featured en route to the song's climax, a dramatic pause followed by a declamation that "*Bhimrao Bharat ka baap hai*" (Bhimrao [Ambedkar] is the father of India) to which the crowd erupted in cheers and applause.

A well-known epigram attributed to Ambedkar, "We are Indians, firstly and lastly" was printed on the back of t-shirts produced for the BDD Chawls 2016 Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations and still worn regularly by members of the Dalit Buddhist community. Following a dispute over outside space with a group of upper-caste Hindu neighbours, Manish told me that the Hindus don't believe in the principle "We are Indians, firstly and lastly" and that caste is more important to them than nation. I heard something similar from Mahendra, who told me to a chorus of agreement that Buddhists are the only community celebrating Independence Day. In response to my expressions of disbelief he conceded that other communities do celebrate in a small way, but that Hindus generally waste their time with religious festivals. Every building should have a flag, he said, and people should respect the national anthem if India is to become a superpower. Simultaneously, Mahendra argued, only the Buddhists will protest government decisions. Again, I disputed this, and he agreed that other communities sometimes protest but not to the same extent, and that Muslims, in particular, only protest to safeguard their own interests rather than those of the nation.

In fact, precisely this charge is often levied at Dalit protests such as those following the Koregaon violence.<sup>88</sup> I have described how the Battle of Koregaon celebrations were branded "anti-national" by many upper-caste Hindu commentators, and how some of my interlocutors were unapologetic in their admiration for British rule when compared to that of the Peshwas. The importance of British military recruitment in uplifting the Mahar community has been pointed out by Zelliott, who notes that most nineteenth century Mahar leaders had served in the British Army, effectively "expos[ing] them to British institutions much before the dissemination of western culture took place on a large scale".<sup>89</sup> Notwithstanding the subsequent disbanding of the Mahar regiment for several decades<sup>90</sup> due to a racially-motivated shift in British recruitment policy,<sup>91</sup> my Mahar friends remain proud of their caste's military credentials and link to the British. Indeed, they rarely referenced their Mahar identity except when recounting the exploits of the Mahar Regiment.

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<sup>88</sup> Venkataramakrishnan, "Are Dalits really oppressed?"

<sup>89</sup> Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, 90

<sup>90</sup> Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, 325

<sup>91</sup> Gavin Rand, "'Martial Races' and 'Imperial Subjects': violence and governance in colonial India, 1857-1914" *European Review of History* 13, no. 1 (Jan, 2011): <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507480600586726>

The ability to reconcile multiple narratives and identities – Mahar, Dalit, Buddhist, British beneficiary and proud Indian – struck me most forcibly during a conversation at the rally with one of the organisers, Pradeep. All day on our journey I had been hearing chants of praise not only to Ambedkar but also to Chhatrapati Shivaji. Surprised at Shivaji’s inclusion on a day celebrating a military blow to the empire he founded, I asked Pradeep if he saw any contradiction in this. His response threw me: the Battle of Koregaon was a battle against the Peshwas, not the Marathas. “But the Peshwas ruled the Maratha Empire!” I replied. He shook his head and reminded me that Shivaji had been a just leader who ruled for the benefit of all his subjects, and it was only later that the Peshwas assumed power and oppressed the lower castes. This crystallised my impression, formed throughout the year, that for Maharashtra Dalit Buddhists, pride in Shivaji indexed their own pride in being Maharashtra, and by extension Indian, and belonged in an entirely separate identity category to their hatred of the Peshwas.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, Pradeep told me, “Peshwa” did not simply refer to the erstwhile rulers of Maharashtra, but to upper-caste oppressors throughout India. Although sceptical, I nodded, remembering the “neo-Peshwa” against whom Dalit forces had united at the anniversary conference. He scrolled through his phone, saying he wanted to show me something that would make me understand. When he found it, I was surprised to see a Marathi news article citing DNA evidence that the Aryans had come from outside India. “*Ye final proof hai*” (this is final proof) he said. Final proof that Dalits were the original Indians, celebrating a victory against one colonialism while proud of their country’s independence from the colonialism that followed.

## CONCLUSION: DECOLONISATION IN PRAXIS?

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Navigating an academic path to decolonisation in praxis risks ruffling many feathers and demands a fearless clarity of argument. Regarding the Battle of Koregaon, we must begin by acknowledging the motivation behind the annual pilgrimage: a celebration of victory over oppression and a commitment to continuing this fight. This is the story as I first heard it, and the same clear-cut narrative can be found elsewhere.<sup>93</sup> However, an honest academic study requires us to grapple with the battle’s broader context as a British colonial victory, and here we reach an awkward fork in our path.

One route takes us to the absolutist position that British colonialism was uniformly damaging to Indian society, and thus the Koregaon celebrations are at best naive and at worst a threat to India’s postcolonial unity. As demonstrated in January 2018, this logic has been used to violently question Dalit loyalties at a time when Indian political discourse has taken a highly nationalistic turn. The other route forces us to downplay our anti-imperial fervour in favour of a robust condemnation of casteism. Like Ambedkar, we must

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<sup>92</sup> A richly informative discussion on the historical tensions *between* the Maratha and Brahmin communities in western India can be found in Chapter 2 of Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of violence: naming and identity in postcolonial Bombay*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2001), 20-36.

<sup>93</sup> For example, see how the Battle of Koregaon is described on “Dalit History Month”. dalitdiva. <https://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/423929/Dalit-History-Month/>

“cheerfully acknowledge” the possibility that the British did “some good”<sup>94</sup> for the Mahars in comparison to their systematic abuse and humiliation under Peshwa rule. Arguably, British rule benefitted them through military recruitment and employment opportunities.<sup>95</sup> But this narrative plays dangerously into the hands of imperial apologists, who readily endorse the claim that sections of Indian society benefitted from colonial rule. It is therefore crucial to make this argument with the backdrop of the multiple scars inflicted by colonialism, not least the drastic weakening of India’s economy,<sup>96</sup> which had a deleterious impact on the whole of Indian society, Mahars included.

Reconciling these two paths, we must appreciate that Dalits were “both externally and internally colonised”, and one way they responded to the British colonial project was to “erase their existing cultural memory and build a new one” by “promot[ing] alternative histories”.<sup>97</sup> As we have seen, these alternative histories are often too deeply intertwined with the (British) colonial enterprise to be treated as uncomplicated narratives of decolonisation. Ultimately, I suggest that we can only hope to approach decolonisation in praxis here by juggling these competing narratives while acknowledging our own theoretical biases but simultaneously respecting the deep conviction underpinning Anish’s alternative history: that India can only truly be independent when it is free from *all* forms of colonisation.

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<sup>94</sup> Ambedkar, “Round Table Conferences”, 504.

<sup>95</sup> Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, 88-93.

<sup>96</sup> Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, 4

<sup>97</sup> Peter Robb, “Memory, place and British memorials in early Calcutta: transcript of a lecture by Peter Robb”. In *Memory, identity and the colonial encounter in India: essays in honour of Peter Robb*, edited by Ezra Rashkow, Sanjukta Ghosh, Upal Chakrabarti, 31-53. (First ed. London: Taylor and Francis, 2017.), 46

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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After a Natural Science undergraduate degree and seven years in environmental consulting, I came to SOAS to study anthropology in 2014. I initially completed the MA Social Anthropology with Distinction, focusing on South Asia, and was subsequently awarded Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funding to undertake a PhD. I spent a year (Jan 2017 to Jan 2018) conducting fieldwork in Mumbai researching issues of social interaction and identity in a small neighbourhood. In particular, I grappled with questions of belonging and difference among the various communities living there. I am currently in the process of writing up my PhD thesis. Outside academia I compose and perform on the piano.

# THE MAKING OF A POSTCOLONIAL HINDU IDENTITY IN THE SHARAVANA BABA MOVEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the ways in which Hindu identity is constructed and maintained in the Sharavana Baba movement. As the Baba's new religious movement is still in the process of being institutionalised, there is much to be broached on the topic of the Indian New Age as it consolidates itself with varying devotional groups dotting India's vast spiritual terrain. Since this guru movement is gaining ground on the world stage, the paper draws from existing academic perspectives on gurudom and maps the beginning stages of sacred new ethics and sites, whilst charting out the ocular translations of this charismatic leader to depict the differences and similarities of his movement set against more popular ones. It fills part of the lacunae in the literature on guru-faith in the modern world by invoking the anthropology of insight, offering an optic through which this particular guru-faith can be understood within Hindu worlds of worship.

**Key words:** Transnationalism – new guru movements – Hinduism – globalisation – South Asia

This paper explores decolonisation in praxis through a relatively unknown guru movement that is attracting a vast transnational following.<sup>1</sup> It examines certain questions without providing textbook answers because it is the first academic paper on this movement. Where is the guru Sharavana Baba positioned in being a Hindu guru amidst varying religious communities in the world? Does he negate his Hindu identity, such as the hugging guru Amma (Lucia, 2011), or does he avowedly recreate his Hindu identity to suit the demands of his Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu following? What are the politics of being a transnational guru seeking larger provinces? The paper attempts to analyse the Sharavana Baba movement to posit that it is a movement based on Murugan culture from where myriad magical tropes can be imagined.

Unlike organised 'world' religions, such as Islam and Christianity, that do not accept other religious equals<sup>2</sup>, Hindu spirituality in the Sharavana Baba movement summons us to rethink preconceived notions of spirituality within the anthropology of religion. Sociologies of gender, class and religion implore us to question Hinduism and India's ways as their gurus emerge triumphant spectators of the methods of the academic establishment. Whilst they simply do not bother about what we write about them, it is clear that they will nevertheless expand and dominate<sup>3</sup> spiritual India. Scholarly attempts at absorbing the complexities of new-age guru movements are linked inextricably to careful observations on

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<sup>1</sup> Anthropologists such as myself use the word 'decolonisation' hesitatingly because to broach the topic in social anthropology would mean to speak in the personal pronoun and as the insider. This is problematic because it relegates decolonisation to atavistic readings of history and religion. I spot decolonisation on an inquiry that is essentially broad and that draws on cross-disciplinary, critical postcolonial interpretations that move beyond strict disciplinary boundaries. The move is not without pitfalls because a true decolonisation cannot exist without problematising the colonised zone. In other words, both the colonised and the coloniser carry histories of contention. The colonised had their own inherent problems before colonisation and this requires an appropriate account of the intersections between modernity and tradition as well as identity and religion in the postcolonial era. My reading of this movement is planted in this zone of meaning-making where gurus are figured as beings who attend to the masses who are swayed by their charisma and propaganda, the shifts and changes in their media. Due to space constraints, I cannot chart out the history of gurus and offer a weightier analysis of a gargantuan phenomenon. However, the decolonisation theme runs throughout this paper for it absorbs research methodologies currently animating academic discourse, which negotiates uncertainties like the generalisations and assumptions we have of our subjects whilst they are being probed. I, therefore, understand my subject through this pemmicanized view 'from below'.

<sup>2</sup> This is similar to the claim made by historian Romila Thapar that 'A fundamental sanity of Indian civilization has been due to an absence of Satan' in Romila Thapar, *Early India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 18. The truism that Hinduism is a pluralistic religion accepting of other faiths unlike Judeo-Christian religions which do not do so in their 'tolerance rhetoric', is brought out in Shashi Tharoor, *Why I am a Hindu*, (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2018), 310.

<sup>3</sup> My concern is neither to situate Sharavana Baba as a 'genuine' or 'fraudulent' guru nor to assume that all gurus are the same. Similar to the claims of many scholars who examine gurus in a monolithic whole due to the volume of guru movements warranting documentation, the construction of a guru as a charismatic leader capable of appealing to large sections of the electorate bears a mark on the social landscape of religion in the modern world where both the fraud and his counterpart feature as actors reflecting particular frameworks of the zeitgeist. On the other hand, as T. Srinivas writes, '[T]he McDonalds Corporation.. moved to India, but the Sathya Sai movement was an example of an Indian religiocultural movement that had people from different regions of the world gravitating towards it.' Tulasi Srinivas, *Winged Faith*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 3. Sharavana Baba's movement is similar to Sathya Sai Baba's movement inasmuch that it reimagines religion for devotees to contribute to the publicity of the Baba as he travels around the globe.

those movements that have already shifted paradigms, villages and cities, whereas the Sharavana Baba movement is still in the process of becoming as it reworks on Hinduism for a wider consumer base. I will now explain why these factors need to be weighed in.

## SHARAVANA BABA AND HIS MOVEMENT

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Sharavana Baba was born in the village of Sreekrishnapuram in Kerala on 8 October 1979. He was considered to be self-realised and a god from birth. His hagiography describes him as a reincarnation of Lord Murugan, Shiva's second son. He is believed to be a world preceptor or an avatar. His first ashram was established in Calicut and his second ashram in Palakkad in south India. Subsequently, a branch was established in Bangalore in July 2007 and later in London in 2010. Apart from spreading love, his mission consists of four main forces: 1) free food to those who need them 2) free clothing to those who do not have them 3) free books to the poor and needy and 4) free medicines for those afflicted by sickness.

As his movement was borne in India, the main services at the moment are geared towards the poor and village communities around his ashram in Kerala. Yet as he travels to Britain and around the world frequently, a large number of Sri Lankan Hindu followers seek his blessings and guidance.

## HINDU SPIRITUALITY AND AVATARS

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Religion is intimately connected to believers and their belief systems. Since most seekers of self-revelation are religious, religion is a set of practices and processes that dissect the nature of creaturely life for religious audiences who are very often themselves at the receiving end of the prescriptions laid down by worldly institutions. There are complex gender, caste, class, national, regional and ethnic divides that are embedded deeply into the systems of globalised religion where divinity is cathected into the worldly for living the good life. In the Sharavana Baba movement originating in Kerala, spiritual illumination is embedded within these fractures and bridges of the religious imagination.

Scholars have noted that devotees of popular new-age guru movements are primarily from the middle-classes (Warrier, 2006), with the exception of the many from the periphery who are reduced to the ideal-typical devotee waiting patiently in a queue for the guru's *darshan*, or seeing, which is 'the apotheosis of the devotional experience; a sacred moment both ritually and experientially' (T. Srinivas 2009, p.317). Whilst this is certainly the case, the Sharavana Baba movement accommodates all classes in the main so that all followers may receive *darshan*. Added to *darshan* is the preponderance of catering to the 'lower-classes' as beneficiaries of charitable services. The affluent put in energies into acts of *seva* (selfless service) which benefit the poor who receive free food, books and clothes. The devotional base varies in identity but those in the lower order of the economic hierarchy are primary recipients of the services of the mission owing to the money that the rich can afford to spend.

In most guru movements, the rich can secure a faster *darshan* of the guru if they know someone from the guru's bureaucracy or are a part of it. A politician ruptures the guru's stage further. Not only is s/he called to bear witness to the guru but s/he is also acquainted with the guru through party politics and utilises political affiliations to connect to the

divinity in question.<sup>4</sup> Whether right-wing or not, the politician registers on the guru's stage an invocation to the ideal politics where, gazers surmise that, all politicians work under a heterogenous guru system in which a guru can have many politicians at his/her disposal. The speed at which affluent devotees secure *darshan*, the politics of positioning and the surrounding atmospheres aiding in the goal of sacred sight are crucial in receiving grace from living gurus whose service-oriented activities are linked inseparably to the affluent whose wealth goes into the channeling of those very services.

So those who write about spirituality are those who occupy privileged positions, whilst those who write off spirituality as perpetuating otherness are prone to noticing how spirituality today is the management of high Hinduism across the board. The Baba makes a clear line between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' to his adherents:

"Mahatmas come into this world to spread the message of service and sacrifice. Among many millions, they will choose only a few. You are among the few. Know that this is a rare opportunity. Do not fritter it away." (p.107 of *GMSSB*)

Spiritual travel diaries and hagiographies are exclusionary, holding promises for believers who partake in ritualised Hindu modes of wondering, benefiting those who moderate the discussions of and on inter-faith dialogue. Rather than speaking of the subaltern, they speak to the subaltern in a rhetorical tongue, namely in postcolonial Guru English (Aravamudan, 2005) and from the spiritual discipline that does not accommodate a critique of itself. Why do guru movements refrain from accepting their Hindu modes? As A. J. Lucia (2011) writes, 'For many, the active distancing from the Hindu religiosity of their roots develops in tandem with their rise to global fame' (p.74). In the first official hagiography of Sharavana Baba<sup>5</sup>, the Baba comes across as deeply religious in his instructions to his followers:

"Every place of learning like a school must first teach morals (maybe one period per week) through the practice of explaining religious works like *The Bible*, *Quran* or the *Gita*, which contain the same message. It is important that children understand the logic and rationale behind the spiritual sciences. It is the responsibility of schools to teach values like respect, compassion and love through the study of the scriptures."<sup>6</sup>

Apparent in the Baba's take on an ideal education system (he runs a school free of cost for children belonging to low-income groups in Calicut) is that it should be religious. These views are not only symptomatic of the Baba's movement but also of other guru movements that focus on education as stemming from the 'heart' that has to put the 'head' to rest in a religious way:

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<sup>4</sup> Politicians from India's two main parties, the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), flocked to Sathya Sai Baba's ashram in Puttaparthi when the godman died. See "Prime Minister, Sonia Gandhi pay homage to Sathya Sai Baba," accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/prime-minister-sonia-gandhi-pay-homage-to-sathya-sai-baba-453991>. Mata Amritanandamayi has hauled devotees from the communist party as well. See "Praying for a revolution in the heart," accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.amritapuri.org/8884/06-praying.aum>.

<sup>5</sup> Ramnath Narayanswamy, *The Global Mission of Sadguru Sharavana Baba* (Bangalore: Books for Change, 2010), 28.

<sup>6</sup> This is dissimilar to the religious education project of ISKCON in Britain which is fundamentally a Hindu project. See Maya Warriar, "Krishna Consciousness, Hinduism and Religious Education in Britain," in *Public Hinduisms*, ed. Raymond Brady Williams, John Zavos, Maya Warriar, Pralay Kanungo, and Deepa S. Reddy, 463-486.

Sathya Baba: "Education that originates from within has a sound basis and is permanent. It is referred to as *sathyam*. A step higher than *sathyam* is *ritam*, as proclaimed in the *Vedas*. What we normally refer to as truth in daily life is merely a fact... What we need today is not bookish knowledge, though we require it to a certain extent to cope with life in this world. But what is essential to us is the knowledge of the *Atma*. Spiritual education is the highest education, says the *Bhagavad Gita*."<sup>7</sup>

Take, for another example, the essential Hindu underpinnings of the Amma movement:

Mata Amritanandamayi: "If you are reluctant to learn Sanskrit, how will you understand our scriptures? Sanskrit is our mother-tongue. You can't fully appreciate the *Upanishads* or the *Gita* without understanding Sanskrit. To understand the mantras and chants, you should learn them in that language. It is the language of our culture. We can't separate the culture of India from Sanskrit. It is true that we can buy the translations of the scriptural texts in other languages, but they don't amount to the real thing. If you want to know the taste of honey, you have to taste it by itself. If you mix it with something else, you won't get its true taste. Even uttering Sanskrit words is good for our mental well-being."<sup>8</sup>

Apparent as well in the Sharavana Baba movement's promulgation of spirituality is that its physicality and cultural proxy for communal harmony is Hinduism stemming from a premodern Murugan culture catering to Tamils and those who get accustomed to Murugan in his movement<sup>9</sup>:

"You need to recite 'Om Sharavanabhava' at least 21 times a day. Only through such recitation can you connect to Swamiji... The chanting of Om Sharavanabhava is enough for you! You don't have to go and find other solutions to your problems!" (p.41 of *LFTI*)

"You must utter the *Guru namam* 'Om Sharavana Bhava' always." (p.126 *ibid.*)

"Daily read the *Subramania Ashtothram* for at least 21 days and you will automatically notice all the changes in your life." (p.133 of *LFTI*)

Receivers of guru teachings, or practitioners, who read and listen to discourses, or *satsangs*, by self-realised masters do so to reflect on their personal journeys of self-transformation. The subaltern does not speak in these pages as these teachings are customised and contemporised artificially for devotees and potential devotees. Ramana Maharishi, the 19th century saint of Thiruvannamalai, who espoused the philosophy of non-dualism, was once asked if Hindu 'untouchables' should be allowed inside temples. He stated, 'There are others

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<sup>7</sup> "Educare Is True Education," accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.sathyasai.org/discourse//educare-is-true-education>.

<sup>8</sup> "Amma's words on Bhagavad Gita," accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.amritapuri.org/66743/16-gita.aum>.

<sup>9</sup> I have addressed the issue of how the Sri Lankan Tamils are attracted to Sharavana Baba in "Why a relatively unknown guru movement is attracting Sri Lankan Tamils in Britain," LSE South Asia, accessed May 31, 2018, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2018/04/24/why-a-relatively-unknown-guru-movement-is-attracting-sri-lankan-tamils-in-britain/>.

to decide it.<sup>10</sup> By not showing solidarity explicitly—as an opinion on the subject would entail he denounce it—he resonates tragically with the underlying assumption that the lowest denominator needs the state, not spiritual heads, to rearrange caste society. Considering the Maharishi was a Brahmin by birth (unfortunately the author is as well), why did he not sanction the reasons for 'touchability', whose attainability was impeded by caste-Hindus? Reading on, the Maharishi submerges the caste discourse with spiritual aggressiveness. Sharma (2013) writes, 'Ramana Maharishi refused to be drawn into a discussion of social issues of this kind' (p.108), preferring the alternate route of extreme spiritual questing to social activism. Similarly, Sharavana Baba's movement replaces social justice with spiritual service, as evident in its leader's pronouncements.

## POSTCOLONIAL MORE THAN DECOLONISED

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To invoke the meaning of a postcolonial movement I read Sharavana Baba beyond Sharavana Baba and ask: Is there really a public domain in the Sreekrishnapuram ashram or is there a clear demarcation between private and public, inner and outer? The answer lies in the conflictual presuppositions which come to bear upon a globalised network. Neither are private and public eliminated nor are they born from ashram spaces. They work in tandem in subjective encounters, negotiated difference and a studied acknowledgement of the Baba as incarnation. The private and public are established through an 'Easternisation thesis' (Warrier 2011) of which Oriental suppositions permeate the discourse. Lucia's (2011) conclusion that Amma's movement is couched in Hinduism, though alleging to be spiritual, copiously demands a relooking on the notion of spirituality as religion. Take, for example, the Baba's essentialising move to put himself in a position of absolute authority over his disciples' lives:

"Grow in *satyam* and *dharmam*. Develop *satyam* and *dharmam*. Everything that takes place in the universe, know that it is a result of My resolve. Everything is happening in the world because of Me. Nothing happens in the world without My resolve."  
 (p.110 of *GMSSS*)

The entire page, if not entire book, is dependent on an ecumenical spirituality which begets a kind of neo-Hinduism as a rightful place of honour. The semantics are heavily Sanskritic and other religions are placed accidentally but with precedence given to the 'Hinduness' of the movement's spirit.

Furthermore, the movement borrows from ritualised modes of the Amma and Sai Baba movements, where private and public are contested through public sociologies conversing with each other. It is palpable that guru movements work against each other, otherwise these two movements would have merged into a mammoth one by now, over which the masses can worship the same living leaders, yet this has not happened. Methods for outsiders to get to know insiders are through reading promotional material, things which other movements share, such as digging out avenues for a remarkable and eminently commendable free food culture (the mission feeds hundreds of persons a day free of cost); producing curious of

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<sup>10</sup> "Talks with Sri Ramana Maharishi," accessed May 31, 2018, [http://ramana-talk-mailer.appspot.com/read?post\\_name=Talk&index=308](http://ramana-talk-mailer.appspot.com/read?post_name=Talk&index=308).

magic (trinkets, glass-bead chains, rings and holograms); supplying playful interregnums in which stages are erected for cultural enactments such as Bollywood dances, popular musics, storytelling through syncretistic weaving of hybridised cultural forms borrowed from a utopia of the soul and inviting right-wing politicians, saffron activists and other religious leaders to share the podium with the Baba. This is not to say the mission does not involve leaders from other guru movements, in fact they come there as equal leaders endowed with the same power accruing to the legitimation of the powerful by a consolidated proletarian act of viewing.

Striving for complete glorification of the Baba, devotional literature is principally though not exclusively meant for devotees:

"These sayings of Mine must be absorbed by all of you, heard day and night so that you fully internalise them. In later years, when someone approaches you and asks you for anecdotes and events of those early years, you must give them these nuggets of wisdom so that they can build upon them and develop on them... This is your solemn duty. No excuses." (p.102 of *GMSSB*)

In respect to hagiography, devotees take part in buttressing tapestries of 'divine' light which to them are irrefutable. Arising from the Baba's mouth, they shiver when they come to know through guru discourse that that light of spectacularity and play is to be seen as stemming from the Baba's resolve that they must obey without questioning. Their reciprocation of their love for their guru is apparent in their social media deliberations where 'Om Sharavana Bhava' is keyed in as a reply to every post<sup>11</sup>.

It is known that devotees can become ex-devotees. The restrictions imposed by guru structures are such that identities must be categorically stated for a devotee to take part in praxis. When the devotion translates into outright rebellion not only to the structure but to national law itself, it reads as both against guru and state. On 8 August 2013, the Baba told his devotees, in a car on the way to Lourdes via Paris, of wily ex-devotees who went against international law:

"I know everything. I can tell you today that Gokul, Uma and Jyothi, were all created by Me and it was I who sent them off (this is a reference to some unscrupulous persons masquerading as devotees who sought to tarnish the reputation of Swamiji and the Ashram.) I know what goes on in all meetings, I know all conversations and I know what people speak about other people, including devotees. There is nothing that I am not aware of and I know what I need to do. You must understand Me." (p.91 of *GMSSB*)

Or a telling paragraph on internal politics at his London ashram:

"People should not think in our committee that they own Me. Have they come to listen to Me or have I to listen to them? The collections of Sri Sathya Sai Baba go to Puttaparthi and the same applies to the collections of Shirdi Sai Baba as they all go to Shirdi. It is my decision to decide the destination of funds raised in My name. Not anyone else. We have several options before us. We might like to dissolve the Trust

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<sup>11</sup> Satguru Shree Sharavana Baba ( Powerd by Sharavanabhava Matham ). Facebook, 31 May, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/Satguru-Sree-Sharavana-Baba-Powerd-by-Sharavanabhava-Matham--213491618686308/>.

or start a new Trust. Wait for My direction. Subramanya is the law. Everything originates from Him." (p.97 of *GMSSB*)

The addressees in these pages are devotees themselves who quest for higher plains. They are rallying for higher awareness by possibly being smitten by their master's enigmatic sayings. It is a truism that the audience for his promotional books are potential devotees as well. The idea of 'things to come' are suffused with serious proscriptions developed calculatedly for the Baba's promotional literature where astrological predictions are realised and revealed.

How do these alarmist comments to devotees play out in the minds of sceptics? A dichotomy between good and bad is palpably visible. There are no reasons not to find the quotes objectionable as their meanings do not surprise. This is illocutionary spirituality entailing a cutting up of previously held beliefs and gurus do not shy away from proclaiming their divinity through this enticing arena of possibility. The religious dissect innocently and slowly their wordy ways through contemplating on experiences in order to find a rightful place in the heart of their guru and when they cannot, due to personal or public defeat, they retard like badly behaved children or self-congratulate themselves upon their pro-rational activism. It is what makes the devotee and the guru a 'type' and a 'brand'.

In advanced capitalist societies, the trend to 'subscribe' is paramount. The Baba's quotes create a space for potential devotees to enter the cult officially through the imposition of to-be-followed rules and regulations. It could be said anyone who does not heed to these instructions are relegated as 'outsiders' but are devotees forced to listen to abidings and more importantly, heed to them completely? Is there a moral policing at work in the Sharavana Baba movement? The answer is no. The movement embraces a plural pedagogical superstructure in which freedom *to* choose is given primacy over freedom *from* choosing. Apparent in the exercise of to choose is the fact that not all men wear white in the ashram, although those who identify as 'devotees' do so since they are recognised by fellow travellers and have been part of the movement for a whilst. Needless to say, white as reflective of nearness to the Baba is translated into unwritten rules waiting to find expression in written codes and manifestoes.

It is not so easy to categorise 'insiders' and 'outsiders' when locating the porosity between choices and progressions in the outside world. His devotees pick and choose from a mix of his teachings that which suit their needs, wants and aspirations at certain critical moments in their lives. Membership to the movement is seen more as contribution to it rather than the imbibing of its armamentarium. Subscription to the movement at the expense of following the Baba's teachings is one aspect to a larger cosmological goal that accepts challenges along the way, mirroring in the quotable bromides littered across promotional literature that necessitate the free-flow of ideas.

Sharavana Baba does not hug thousands of people a day, his signature style has not been fully manufactured, marketed and worked upon like another guru from his state, Mata Amritanandamayi, though the movement takes Murugan out from both temple and legend and inserts him in Sharavana Baba. His devotees, however, try to package him well so that he may reach the alternative world soon enough to be like her. Outside India these include temples, community halls and yoga centres inside which he performs his main routines of

*pooja, bhajan, satsang* and *darshan*<sup>12</sup>. These performances are programmed meticulously for their transnational audiences who prepare themselves for the act of the spectacle and to be enamoured of the vestiges of a bygone past located in devotees' experiences of the Baba who strategises, reconstructs and preserves fascinating taxonomies of belief.

There is no scope for parabasis in his movement unless the parabasis stems from an inner world of cathecting. The chosen ones have access to resources which grant them a ticket in order to be released from profanity during their sojourns with him and during programmes they gather their minds to inscribe themselves into a shared culture borrowed from Murugan symbology, a profound new performativity I tease out at the end. These devotees attribute their nearness to him physically as a result of their past birth's good deeds and even to the Hindu god Murugan himself. As Shyamala told me on a hot afternoon in Sreekrishnapuram:

"What have I done to receive His grace? I do not know. I may have done a lot of good things in my previous births... My grandfather frequented Murugan temples and he prayed that I may find my guru. I know at last I have."

As memory positions the roles of devotees, *bhakti*, or devotion, balloons or slowly picks up speed with acute awareness of what was done in memory. Whilst academicians, recognising the lower orders as integral to the perpetuation of gurus' statuses, have pointed out that gurus are reoriented to suit soft Hindutva agendas<sup>13</sup>, it is a wonder how similarities between movements render intelligible the domains of community and shared life, on which traditional beliefs are uncontaminated by modernity and held on by devotees for salvation. An example of such balances between the two can be seen in the number of Indian engineers and doctors who have assimilated the knowledge and craft of 'modern' and 'Western' sciences but have not let go of traditional Hinduism in their everyday lives.

Lawrence Babb, who inaugurated the fieldwork of the global spiritual market for anthropologists, argued of Sathya Baba's teachings:

"His philosophical views are simplistic, eclectic, and essentially unoriginal. His ethics are basically common-coin, though certainly not to be dismissed on that account.... Rather, what is important about what Sathya Sai Baba says is not its *content*, but the fact that *he* is the one who is saying it." (Babb 1983, p.117)

Consider Sharavana Baba's words:

"Mindfulness is essential. Life must be lived mindfully,"; "Be in a meditative state all the time! There must be power in your sight! Pursue spiritual practise relentlessly! Develop positive affirmation! Bask in the Divine Presence! Quieten the mind! Absorb the power of silence!" (p.119 of *GMSSB*)

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<sup>12</sup> The author's ethnographic-cum-hagiographical film chronicles and captures the lives of his devotees. See "A Garland for the Guru," YouTube, accessed May 31, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PW\\_BrHbKnWc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PW_BrHbKnWc).

<sup>13</sup> Meera Nanda, "The God Market: How Globalisation is Making India More Hindu," accessed May 31, 2018, <https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/2238/the-god-market-how-globalisation-is-making-india-more-hindu-by-meera-nanda>.

Similar to such a reading is not so much *what* the Baba says but *how* devotees receive it. In a discourse given by the Baba to his devotees in May 2010, the author of the volumes *Living from the Inside* writes:

"After the *puja* I rushed to the Bank and returned home at around midday. I handed over our customary *dakshina* to Swamiji and He began to move around the house. He came near the *puja* altar and saw a photograph of Srimad Sai Rajarajeshwari Amma [a living guru] and playfully asked me whether She was Kali. I said no. I said She was Rajarajeshwari Amma. He asked me whether I was fond of Her and I said yes (as if He did not know all this already!). Then He said if a Sai devotee goes to another master, Sathya Sai will not like it. Similarly if an Amma devotee goes to somebody else, Amma will not like it. He said playfully that all this was a part of spiritual politics! I replied by saying that He was not present in Her as well? He smiled in reply." (p.97 of *GMSSB*)

Interesting in these sentences is that in the book from which it was taken the author quotes Sathya Baba quite frequently and alludes to the words of 'self-realised' masters very often, interspersed with the Baba's quotations. There are other delicious beliefs which strike one as stemming from a heightened self-awareness privy only to the Baba:

"In the car, He also said that all ashrams have problems in spreading the message of the avatar. He said like Lord Krishna, he too was born in a prison (*karaga vasam*) and that was why He had to undergo many challenges in the years 2008 and 2010. He said while the worst was over He was still to face two more challenges and after meeting those challenges, His mission will be smooth. He spoke of Jayalalithaa, Rajanikanth and Prime Minister Modi and said they were all avatars. We were a little taken aback. I asked about the case of the Kanchi Acharyas and He said that it was Jayalalithaa who secured their release. She had acted lawfully in this matter." (p.163 of *GMSSB*)

The words are daring, bold and imbued with political affect. By categorising political figures as avatars, the Baba is presented as a reader of fates, as someone who is omnipresent, someone who renders the 'bad' politician clean at the same time as he glorifies himself for his devotee base. The affect resonates with a larger discourse in which anything the Baba says is to be ipso facto god's very words. Since the Baba speaks in Tamil and Malayalam it is unclear whether translation has anything to do with what is lost, gained or withheld in the fulfillment of his missionary objective.

Copeman and Ikegame (2012) have reflected upon the politics of guruhood and the amputations of gurus via other gurus which result in subtle power plays which simply speed up the religious process enfolded in a Hindu teleological concept of the universe. How do Sharavana Baba's foreign devotees draw in their identities when participating in publicised and organised events? They assimilate the ideas, dramatics and rituals of this shared Hindu culture and spit out their dreams whilst making sense of the cosmopolitan creative matrix of a spiritual joint family. The politics of cultural assimilation and translation within other prominent movements, like Amma's and Sai Baba's, resonate well with these thematics and codes. Some of Sharavana Baba's followers come from the Skanda Vale ashram in Wales, from where Hinduism was taken to be the best vegetarian religion in Britain thanks to a tuberculosis-stricken bull that historicised a concern among academicians

as to where Hinduism in Britain is headed (Warrier, 2009). That the bull was killed in the end reflects the secular state's drive for equality amidst the cacophony of bull-lovers and assorted monks. Having fit into Sharavana Baba's movement as devotees, they stake claims in the movement whilst not leaving behind their Skanda Vale origins. They merely have one hand in one area and the other in another so that Sharavana Baba himself is brought to the Skanda Vale ashram to spread his sacred message.

In this sense, Shambo is also Sharavana Baba: he is susceptible to being castigated, appropriated, humiliated, blasphemed, obfuscated, tolerated, worshipped and confiscated. A guru acknowledges the spectacle of himself which, by the policies of guru governmentality, result in his idolisation. It is tough to be the centre of all attention. Therefore, he is an object of pity as he is a subject of control with eternal virtues ascribed to his divinity. In many instances, he is portrayed as a crook, but he also repudiates negative beliefs by sudden role-switching where he makes himself fleshly and emotional deliberately to straddle an identity of being human and divine simultaneously:

"Are you aware of even a fraction of the pain and sacrifice that is necessary to wear My clothes and perform My role? I have to show multiple faces to multiple personalities. Each devotee has his/her own disposition and inheritance and I must customise My message to each and every one I meet. Have you any idea of how difficult it is to manage this diversity and yet keep everybody happy and yet ensure that the contents of what I want communicated gets across?" (p.92 of *GMSSB*)

What exists in Sharavana Baba's movement is the staging of a new religiosity with whites, browns, et cetera, wrestling with 'foreign' or untranslatable categories. This is to be seen as a 'test' by which hurdles are necessary steps to attain self-revelation. In other words, they must know that the Baba comes from a taintless position. If the hurdles do not get translated properly by follower, it results in animosity towards all gurus, notwithstanding internal anti-guru politics. The Baba tries best to direct his permutations and combinations to a larger Hindu network in the hopes that they are not translated incorrectly. Examples such as ex-followers cheating former followers and stories of criminality are abundant when translation is withheld. When finding solace in the Baba's literature does not free them from the shackles of their personal hurdles, animosity replaces previously held emotions. The rather crude and deliberate misapprehension of the Baba in the video 'Jilebi Swamy' by a local television channel, Asianet News, is apt when speaking of such controversial and awkward parallel activism which invite viewers to perceive the Baba as trickster when ex-devotees are revengeful<sup>14</sup>.

For the reason that Sharavana Baba's enemies have not formed a large camp, though they exist, the politics of anti-guru activism in the Sathya Baba movement is revealing. Anti-Sai activists, consisting of foreign and Indian ex-devotees, who have a large online presence, continue to go on a rampage about Sathya Baba whom they assert, was in connivance with the corrupt. To devotees Sathya Baba (deceased) remains spectacularly above and beyond these pronouncements, withdrawing from the pettiness that is of concern to those who wish to believe in the activism of 'guru busting'. It is well known that ashrams house untold

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<sup>14</sup> ""Jileby Swami " - Sweet vendor turns saint," YouTube, accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWI2wuDHQ3M>.

secrets and politics and are often seen by the media as places of scandal, treachery and illicit activities, paralleling the schema of popular cultural motives that paint the Baba as fraud and misogynist in the eyes of the public. For example, in the documentary *The Secret Swami*<sup>15</sup> an ex-devotee of Sathya Baba had said that he felt outcasted in his American school when he identified as a devotee. Personal loss shelters ex-devotees into camps. Guru-rebellion annuls 'anything nice' of gurus and devotees. The deriding literature on gurus consolidates the experiences of 'whiteness within whiteness' and 'whiteness amongst brownness' as consistent with the ticklish matter of the Third World migrant transgender thrust into the First World male-dominated metropolitan city unable to negotiate claims from both outside and inside to merge effectively into becoming permanent citizen. The impulse to seek refuge is personal and historical at the same time as it marks the anticipation of an experience that is, like utopian idealism, untrammelled by all believers of the doctrine. Guru-faith is indeterminate in its persuasion towards persons from various walks of life who must enter into its intangible spheres without being swayed by the shifts and changes which take place during their journeys as ideal disciples.

Regardless of the countries to which they owe allegiance, current foreign devotees hold onto their guru with deep attachment. In this sense, allegiance to nationality is subsumed under allegiance to the guru. In fact, everything is brushed aside to invoke the guru as the prime steerer of synchronicity. Truly but not fully seen, diasporic cultures and affluent devotees relate themselves to the contexts in which they serve as temporary or permanent participants. They play a role in shaping his mission and even if they cannot be bracketed as official entrants, their participation is a contribution to the fulfilment of the guru's mission, or else as part of a diasporic community they act within the cultural network. Had the effects of war and migration not bolstered transnational guru governance in his movement, the Baba would not be able to travel so frequently as he does to Europe today.

## TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING A MURUGAN PHENOMENON

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In other worlds, diaspora, war and Murugan have pulled communities to engage with each other to move away from excessive materialism in the West, especially in Europe and London where majority of the affluent devotees work. Sharavana Baba's ritualised prescriptions borrow liberally and mostly from Murugan culture and are a clever way of bringing devotees to him. The Baba says he is Murgan himself, yet he subsumes himself under the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses occasionally:

"I am the third avatar. I am an avatar of Pashupati. I have close proximity to the earth. I am fond of the earth. I am associated with the third avatar of Vishnu: the Lord in His form as a boar lifting the earth from the ocean." (p.156 of *GMSSB*)

"Trichendur is my birthplace. I took birth here." (p.156 of *LFTI*)

"Lord Subramanya is in effect Shiva! This (pointing to Himself) personality stems from Shiva." (p.93 of *GMSSB*)

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<sup>15</sup> "The Secret Swami," YouTube, accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOjk2NpKMFm>.

"I know my job. You must know yours... You can play with other deities but Lord Subrahmanya is a deity that you should not fool around with. He is a strict and demanding deity. There should be no mistakes." (p.97 of *GMSSB*)

"I am Skanda." (p.107 of *LFTI*)

He is also introduced as Murugan's incarnation explicitly:

"Firmly identified with Lord Muruga since the date (1997), Sadguru Murali Krishna is widely regarded as an *avatar* (divine incarnation) of Lord Muruga. Lord Muruga, (second son of Lord Shiva and Devi Parvati, the other being Lord Ganesha), is usually regarded as the presiding deity of the Tamil community." (p.7 of *GMSSB*)

Insights into Sharavana Baba's Murugan idioms include the main mantra of the movement 'Om Sharavana Bhava'. The Baba's 'divine moods' (a phantasmagoric universe I am touring for an upcoming paper in which I reflect upon how we can read the advent of Prem Sai Baba, the last avatar of the Sai trilogy, as being possibly Sharavana Baba himself) soak him in a Murugan and Hindu space but his Muruganness comes out most through the nod he gives to the possibility that he is Murugan's incarnation. Literally, there is no question in his books that he is somebody else, though to devotees with moral-philosophic and neo-Vedantic leanings they see all the gods and goddesses inside Murugan, thus in him too. Still, Murugan culture is the open framework in which the movement's codes, symbols and motifs loom. 'The Subrahmanya Ashtothram' is chanted vehemently every morning, afternoon and evening by ascetic disciples sequestered in his ashram. The movement's greeting 'Haro Hara' is not only a metaphor for this shared Murugan spirit, denotive of the Baba's travels to the Palani temple once a month, but also an incantation to be replaced by other greeting styles. 'Haro Hara' promises a perfect opportunity for the movement to recover the phrase from its native origin and popularise it. If the Om Sharavana Baba Seva Foundation patents it, the move will proffer new understandings of the intersection between modernity and tradition in South Asia. The movement attracts Tamils from around the globe to look forward to sharing Murugan practice and theory, not only in Tamil Nadu where the six dominant Murugan temples were built but also in their guru Sharavana Baba whom they see as Murugan in all his glory.

What does Murugan as Sharavana Baba afford to the Indian spiritual terrain brimming with gurus? Firstly, as a Hindu movement, the Sharavana Baba movement explains its religiosity by employing a vigorous Hindu veneer on which Murugan is given primacy and leads the way for followers to understand the movement. Secondly, it obtains an ancient Murugan culture to suit a largely Tamil audience across the globe. Thirdly, in the complex space of gurus and devotees, the Sharavana movement can be placed in current academic literature on the subject of Hindu traditions in modernity which underscores aspects of devotion and communitarian life. Fourthly, this scholarship that is not devotional, is nuanced and of value to postcolonial literature rather than decolonised practices because decolonisation is, in point of fact, tied to notions of the postcolonial. In such a scheme of things, Murugan, a mythical figure from the Hindu pantheon, is abstracted and implanted into a living guru whose organisation seeks to institutionalise fully. The making of a postcolonial Hindu identity in the Sharavana Baba movement is ongoing.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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After completing his Bachelor's in English Studies from India, Dhruv worked as a filmmaker and photographer for various organisations and NGOs until he, followed by a long stint as an intern with Swarajya magazine and then as a copywriter for the Times of India, found his way to the School of Oriental and African Studies as a student of Social Anthropology. He is interested in the mainstream media's role in shaping opinion on Hindu gurus as well as in how guru organisations leverage the media to attract transnational followings. He has increasingly found himself writing about the Sharavana Baba movement due to his anthropological association with it for over ten years.

# CRITICAL REALISM, ASSEMBLAGES AND PRACTICES BEYOND THE STATE: A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING GLOBAL DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

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In recent decades state-based diaspora engagement institutions have proliferated. Meanwhile, the surge in diaspora engagement initiatives by non-state global governance actors is also on the rise. However, such ‘global-ising’ of diaspora engagement does not describe a simple ‘scaling-up’ of policies from the domestic to the supranational level. Rather, it suggests a reconfiguration of policies, actors and spaces by and through which diasporas are now being engaged/governed. No doubt, this calls for a reassessment of existing analytical frameworks. This paper makes the case for a new ontological perspective for studying global diaspora governance. It proposes that existing analyses of diaspora governance lack explanatory power for a number of reasons. They either fall into the trap of methodological nationalism, and thus fail to account for the complexities of contemporary global social and political configurations, or, if they do problematise complexity, they do so in a way that depoliticises global governance processes. Instead, this paper argues for a critical realist ontology, which suggests that we think about global diaspora engagement through the concept of the assemblage. Assemblages, this paper argues, allow us to consider global diaspora engagement as complex relations between human and non-human agents whose configurations shape the conditions of possibility for action in a particular circumstance. When paired with Bourdieusian practice theory, the assemblage can also act as the (de-/reterritorialised) field within which practices are hierarchically ordered, thus enabling the study of how political struggles unfold inside specific configurations of global diaspora engagement.

**Key words:** Practice theory – global governance – diaspora engagement – critical realism – post-positivism – decentering

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<sup>1</sup> A draft of this paper was prepared for the “Beyond Positivism Conference”, Critical Realism Network, 8-10 August 2017, Montreal.

## INTRODUCTION

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The last decade has seen a steady proliferation of institutions set up by states to harness the economic, social and political potential of their emigrant populations. A study found that in 2013 over half of United Nations member states had formal institutions dedicated to emigrants and their descendants.<sup>2</sup> These institutions have taken the form of symbolic and institutional capacity building processes; the extension of rights to the diaspora, such as voting-rights, dual nationality, extension of civil and social services; as well as extracting obligations from the diaspora through, for example, investment policies on remittances and foreign direct investment (FDI) capture.<sup>3</sup> More recently, there has also been a huge surge in interest directed at diasporas from countries with large immigrant populations, such as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, as well as non-state actors such as the EU<sup>4</sup> and the World Bank (WB), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and the private sector. Under Hillary Clinton's leadership, the US State Department set up the International Diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA), a public-private partnership designed to harness the potential of diaspora populations residing in the US to contribute to social and economic development in their countries of origin. Meanwhile, NGOs such as UK-based International Alert or the Mosaic Institute in Canada are working with diaspora peace-builders to confront prejudice on the involvement of diaspora communities in so-called 'home-grown terrorism' or 'imported-conflict' in the EU and North America<sup>5</sup>. Diaspora engagement is thus being pursued not only by states, but by a complex global set of actors that are operating beyond the state-level, across a multiplicity of spaces. It has overwhelmingly been framed as an operational strategy or management tool<sup>6</sup>, thought to enhance the legitimacy of global governance interventions by diversifying the range of actors involved in decision-making. However, the inclusion of some diasporas in these engagement strategies necessitates the exclusion of others. Thus, far from apolitical best practice diaspora engagement for remains contested and highly political. It produces hierarchies within and among diaspora groups, and it can create and reify oppressive and exclusionary categories related to diasporas and migrants more widely (the terrorist-financier, or the "model minority" for example). But how exactly are these boundaries of inclusion and exclusion drawn?

A growing body of scholarship, primarily in the disciplines of International Relations (IR) and Human Geography, has been addressing the politics of diaspora engagement. Overwhelmingly, explanations for diaspora engagement or non-engagement are considered

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Gamlen, Michael Cumming, Paul M. Vaaler and Laura Rossouw, "Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions," *IMI Working Paper Series* 78 (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Alan Gamlen, "Diaspora Engagement Policies: What Are They and What Kinds of States Use Them?" Working paper. COMPAS, University of Oxford (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Giulia Sinatti, Cindy Horst, "Migrants as Agents of Development: Diaspora Engagement Discourse and Practice in Europe," *Ethnicities* 15 no. 1 (2015): 134–52.

<sup>5</sup> John Monahan, Rima Berns-McGown, and Michael Morden. 2014. "The Perceptions and Reality of 'Imported Conflict' in Canada," (2014), <http://mosaicinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/15.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> For example, "The Diaspora Option", in Hélène Pellerin, Beverley Mullings, "The 'Diaspora Option', Migration and the Changing Political Economy of Development." *Review of International Political Economy* 20, no.1 (2013): 89–120.

to be located at the level of structural developments, either as a function of neoliberal capitalism<sup>7</sup> or the Western drive to discipline diasporic bodies<sup>8</sup> in order to stabilise liberal order in the global South<sup>9</sup>. Such critical assessments give us interesting accounts of the political logics that might be driving interest in diaspora engagement. And yet, the idea that a singular and universal logic is driving diaspora engagement is not entirely convincing. Especially, because most of the above accounts remain married to a nation-state centric understanding of global political processes, which brings with it several problems.

Consider the following: There have emerged a small number of Tamil diaspora-run development organisations in Toronto that are led by young professionals in the business and finance industries, who are well-versed in the ubiquitous discourses and practices of social innovation, entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility, are deemed legitimate and desirable partners in the international development community. These organisations and individuals win out over other grassroots, community-based, or culturally focused diaspora organisations whose work may not fit neatly into neoliberal discourses on individualised responsibility and thus rely on public spending. Meanwhile, the same entrepreneurial Tamils, who were just rewarded for their ability to raise money for homeland development initiatives, might also be under surveillance for suspicion of directing financial flows to insurgent/violent organisations in the homeland, because they are part of the oppressed ethnic minority. Alternatively, their technocratic professionalism, the very same quality that allowed them to act with authority in one context, might be considered illegitimate in local homeland settings, where cultural knowledge and shared experience/grievance outweigh other forms of social capital.

Political struggles like this remain entirely invisible to scholars who focus their attention on the macro level. And yet, it is precisely at this level - of practices amongst sub- and transnational networks of actors that diaspora engagement politics are fought out. This, no doubt, calls for a reassessment of existing analytical frameworks. Approaches that highlight the macro dimensions of diaspora engagement politics and remain tied to an understanding of the global order as being divided into nation-states, do not even see the political struggle that occurs at the level illustrated here. Thus, in the hope of advancing knowledge on the politics of diaspora engagement, in the following paragraphs I will explore the question of how we may go about studying them.

The paper will proceed as follows: first, I will present a brief review of the scholarship that deals with power relations in the field of diaspora engagement. I will offer some reflections on why these approaches fall short in terms of their conceptualisations of power, echoing the familiar agency vs. structure debate in the social sciences, but expanding it to include arguments made by critical realists on social ontology. I proceed to argue that the politics of diaspora engagement are best studied by employing Bourdieusian practice theory, which can offer a way out of the ontological impasse and also gives us a critical

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<sup>7</sup> Latha Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Francesco Ragazzi, "A Comparative Analysis of Diaspora Policies," *Political Geography* 41, (July 2014): 74–89.

<sup>8</sup> Elaine Ho, Mark Boyle, "Migration-as-Development Repackaged? The Globalizing Imperative of the Singaporean State's Diaspora Strategies." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 36, no.2 (2015): 164–82.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Laffey, Suthaharan Nadarajah, "The Hybridity of Liberal Peace: States, Diasporas and Insecurity." *Security Dialogue* 43, no.5 (2012): 403–20.

understanding of power relations. Finally, I outline how assemblage theory can further a post-positivist understanding of the politics of diaspora engagement by making it empirically possible to study spaces beyond the state.

## THE POLITICS OF DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT: A STATE OF THE ART

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What are the politics of diaspora engagement? Who wins and who loses when policy-makers decide to engage diasporas and who has the power to decide over the inclusion and exclusion into winning and losing camps? In order to answer these questions, we first have to have a theory on how and where power operates in the social world. The following section will review the extant literature on diaspora engagement and then offer some insights on how diaspora agency has been conceptualised in Political Science.

### DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT AND THE STATE

The most explicit discussion of the politics of diaspora engagement has taken place amongst scholars who have sought to make sense of the rapid proliferation of policies and institutions of emigrant states targeting their own diasporic populations. The bulk of scholarship has focused on explaining why individual states seek to manage<sup>10</sup> their diaspora populations, by, for example extending voting rights or introducing special visa programmes. For example, Mylonas<sup>11</sup> suggests that diaspora engagement, which he terms emigrant policies, are part of a wider nation-building project, while Gamlen et al.<sup>12</sup> have created a helpful typology for understanding why states might want to respond to the increased political and economic importance of diaspora by creating diaspora engagement institutions. Their large-N study found that diaspora engagement by states falls into either a ‘tapping’, an ‘embracing’ or a ‘norm diffusion’ logic. While these scholars can explain why states may seek to engage their own populations, drawing barriers of inclusion and exclusion along ethnic and national lines, this does not explain the interest in diaspora engagement by transnational and supranational actors or migrant-receiving states.

Others have taken a more macro-perspective, suggesting that diaspora engagement primarily benefits powerful western states. Here, the engagement of diasporas by the liberal international community is understood to be driven by a will to subjugate and discipline global populations. For example, Latha Varadarajan<sup>13</sup> suggests that contemporary state attitudes towards diasporas must be understood as part of the hegemony of a neoliberal global political economy, whereby diaspora communities offer opportunities for capitalist expansion. Meanwhile, Ragazzi<sup>14</sup> uses Foucauldian governmentality theory to explain why states are increasingly interested in engaging their respective diasporas, in an effort to

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<sup>10</sup> Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities*, (Cambridge University Press 2013); Gerasimos Tsourapas, “Why Do States Develop Multi-Tier Emigrant Policies? Evidence from Egypt.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 13 (2015): 2192–2214.

<sup>11</sup> Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*.

<sup>12</sup> Gamlen et al., *Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions*.

<sup>13</sup> Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad*.

<sup>14</sup> Ragazzi, “A Comparative Analysis of Diaspora Policies”.

reproduce the global political economy. Similarly, Laffey and Nadarajah<sup>15</sup> support the view that diaspora engagement forms part of a liberal government logic, albeit this time as part of a larger effort to securitise and generate liberal order in the Pacific region, and the Global South more widely. All of these authors offer critical insights into the structural forces that drive state-diaspora relations. In contrast to the liberal literature, they also make explicit the often-exploitative power relations which underlie diaspora engagement practices. The value of these critical contributions for the study of diaspora engagement politics is immense. And yet, some shortcomings remain, especially in light of the increasingly complex multi-level and multi-actor nature of diaspora engagement. The first problem is that they remain state-centric. They suggest that the state remains the main locus of power in global politics, and yet, diaspora engagement takes place in the spaces between states through networks of actors that include the state, but also non-state actors and processes. Only recently, has there been a loudening call to decenter the state<sup>16</sup> and to bring the role of NSAs to the fore of their analysis because clearly “both state and non-state agents are implicated in these projects”<sup>17</sup>. Similarly, others have noted that future studies on diaspora engagement strategies will “need to focus more on other actors and spaces” beyond the state<sup>18</sup>. However, this has yet to happen. A second shortcoming of the critical literature is that diaspora engagement is understood to be driven by singular overarching structural logics, be it the political economy or a liberal governmental rationality. This ‘structure-centrism’ means that they struggle to provide much detail as to how the systemic observations that they make might unfold at the micro-level. This essentially erases the agency of both the diaspora and the various actors that are tasked with engagement. Holzscheiter<sup>19</sup> has argued that poststructuralist approaches can often fall into this trap of ignoring the existence of social and political agents, or at least downplaying the ability of individual agency to bring about meaningful change. In the context of my study, such an oversight would mean that I would dismiss as meaningless cases in which diaspora engagement policies come to exist as a result of individual action. How can this dilemma be overcome? Délano Alonso and Mylonas<sup>20</sup> have suggested that we need to pay attention to ‘microfoundations’ of diaspora politics. One important aspect of these ‘microfoundations’ is diasporic agency. Thus, the following paragraphs will briefly outline how the issue of diaspora agency has been approached by scholars of diaspora politics.

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<sup>15</sup> Laffey and Nadarajah, “The Hybridity of Liberal Peace”.

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Ruth Craven, “Thinking about Governance through Diasporas: Decentering the State and Challenging the External/Internal Binary,” *SFB 700 Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood Working Paper Series*, (forthcoming 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Elaine Ho. 2011. “‘Claiming’ the Diaspora: Elite Mobility, Sending State Strategies and the Spatialities of Citizenship,” *Progress in Human Geography* 35, no. 6 (2011): 760.

<sup>18</sup> Alexandra Délano, Alan Gamlen, “Comparing and Theorizing State–diaspora Relations” *Political Geography* 41 (July 2014): 43–53.

<sup>19</sup> Anna Holzscheiter, “Between Communicative Interaction and Structures of Signification: Discourse Theory and Analysis in International Relations,” *International Studies Perspectives* 15, no. 2 (2014): 142–62.

<sup>20</sup> Alexandra Délano Alonso, Harris Mylonas, “The Microfoundations of Diaspora Politics: Unpacking the State and Disaggregating the Diaspora,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, special issue (2017): 1–19.

## DIASPORA AGENCY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

The bulk of the early literature on diaspora in Political Science suggests that diasporas are internally bound actors who have causal impact on the social and political world. Diaspora engagement is thus understood as a mode of managing this causal process, to avoid negative diaspora impact<sup>21</sup>. Causal power describes a mechanical and therefore completely apolitical process. If diaspora impact (on, for example, civil conflict) can be measured as an independent variable, then exterminating the diaspora variable is the only rational policy option for modern liberal states.

Over time, this form of research on diaspora populations has become more differentiated and reflexive. In more recent discussions of diaspora mobilisation the individual agency of diaspora members is highlighted and they are cast as development entrepreneurs<sup>22</sup> or mediators in peace processes<sup>23</sup>. Crucially, in these accounts causal power is transferred to the diaspora agent. Subsequently, power struggles between the diaspora and those (global governance) actors that are doing the engaging (for example, states, NGOs or IOs) are conceptualised as interactions between rational thinking agents, whether driven by a logic of profit maximisation or normative appropriateness. In that sense, the politics of diaspora engagement are the result of individual speech acts, of persuasion or negotiation. This logic of communicative power<sup>24</sup>, which is based on the writing of Habermas<sup>25</sup> and focuses exclusively on the micro-level mechanisms employed by individual agents, must confront several criticisms. First of all, while interactionist approaches manage to theorise a power struggle that takes place in real-time communication, they fail to acknowledge that agents who engage in this sort of discursive interaction also exist within a powerful structure. According to Anna Holzscheiter, assuming that norms and ideas are pre-given “discursive resources that can be intentionally put to use”<sup>26</sup> to further individual interests, is somewhat problematic. It assumes that discursive power flows simply from one actor to another in a discrete social event or speech act.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, the Habermasian conceptualisation of power as communicative or deliberative, also encounters significant problems when applied to global and/or non-Western contexts, as it presupposes a rational individualist subjectivity and is thus anchored in modern enlightenment thinking, all the while holding on to claims of universalism and human progress. At the same time, suggesting that all agents have power to engage in political struggle for their own advancement completely legitimises any form of

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<sup>21</sup> Such as violent conflict, e.g. in Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 563–95; Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, Måns Söderbom, “Post-Conflict Risks,” *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 4 (2008): 461–78.

<sup>22</sup> Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, *Institutional Reform and Diaspora Entrepreneurs: The In-between Advantage*, (Oxford University Press 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Bahar Baser, Ashok Swain, “Diasporas as Peacemakers: Third Party Mediation in Homeland Conflicts,” *International Journal on World Peace* 25, no. 3 (2008): 7–28.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Risse, “‘Let’s Argue!’: Communicative Action in World Politics,” *International Organization* 54, no. 1 (2000): 1–39.

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence,” *Inquiry* 13, no.1-4 (1970): 360–75.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Holzscheiter, *Children’s Rights in International Politics: The Transformative Power of Discourse*, (Springer Press 2010): 37.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

diaspora engagement policy that recreates injustice or inequality in the world, by suggesting that every person has the same tools at their disposal to negotiate for change. Unsurprisingly then, it is this decidedly liberal understanding of power (as individualised self-empowerment) that is highlighted most in policy circles that advocate for increased diaspora engagement. Evidently, where the literature on diaspora engagement is too structure-centric, the liberal mainstream of diaspora studies in Political Science overemphasises the power of the rational individual agent, often at the expense of social, political and historical context. Studying the ‘microfoundations’ of diaspora engagement politics does not mean doing away with all the structural constraints that diasporas and other global political actors find themselves in.

What becomes clear in the above paragraphs is that literature on diaspora engagement and the literature on diaspora agency both sit at different levels of analysis. And this problem of deciding at which level of analysis to situate power dynamics in social interactions is as old as social science itself. Accordingly, scholars have long attempted to resolve what some refer to as the structuration problem<sup>28</sup> or the levels-of-analysis problem<sup>29</sup>. However, most of these studies still give primacy or precedence to a certain causal mechanism (agency or structure), level of analysis (micro or macro) or a certain type of power (deliberative vs. constructive) when locating political struggles. So, in the seemingly endless debate about who has the power to act and to determine political outcomes, my suggestion is to look towards an analysis of practices.

By studying practices, not only can we reconcile the agency of global political actors with the structural constraints posed upon them by capitalism or liberal governmentality, we also begin to reterritorialise global politics. So, while post-structuralists rightly emphasise the spread of ideas and language, they fail to theorise how these processes of diffusion are embedded in material realities. The fact that even in critical social science spaces and bodies are so often overlooked, is a central tenet of critical realist theorising<sup>30</sup>. In the next section I will outline the conceptual building blocks of my study: practices and assemblages. I will conceptualise practices as my unit of analysis through which I can observe the local embodiment of global dynamics/structures; and I will locate these practices inside assemblages, which are a level of analysis that is different from the state.

## LOCATING POWER IN PRACTICES

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Practice approaches in IR are united by the premise that ontological priority is not given to either states, nor individual rational agents, or powerful structures, but instead to practices. Practices can be studied at the level of the individual person, where they might constitute a

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<sup>28</sup> As identified by both Giddens and Wendt; Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, (University of California Press 1984); Alexander E. Wendt, “The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory,” *International Organization* 41, no.3 (1987): 335–70.

<sup>29</sup> Henry R. Nau, *Perspectives on International Relations: Power, Institutions, and Ideas*, (CQ Press 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Roy Bhaskar, “Realism in the Natural Sciences”, ed. L. Jonathan Cohen, Jerzy Łoś, Helmut Pfeiffer, and Klaus-Peter Podewski, (Elsevier 1982), 337–54.

handshake or a wink<sup>31</sup>, or, at a more collective level, in the form of diplomatic practices<sup>32</sup> or discourses and norms<sup>33</sup>. What is essential, however, is that rather than looking at these things occurring in the world and asking what (kind of logic) they represent<sup>34</sup>, we take the practice itself seriously. Practices themselves are powerful and meaningful, not only as representations of structural or cognitive realms of consciousness. A practice always contains within it agency and structure. As it is embodied/enacted, it denotes an agent's positioning within a structure.<sup>35</sup> Thus, states and non-state actors, both individual and collective all have ontologically equal capability to act, and yet their positioning may be radically different. Beside decentering the state from its position as primary unit of analysis, by thinking about the world as constituted by practices we can also overcome the positivist inclination to search for an elusive a priori truth behind an action that we can never feasibly get at. Finally, practices ground structures in time and space and give them a material dimension (the body of the agent), thus countering the extreme ontological relativism of most post-structural approaches.

While a practice approach takes us some way towards overcoming the state-centric, positivist spectre that haunts the social sciences it does not, in and of itself, offer a theory on power which can shed light on the politics of diaspora engagement. It is specifically Bourdieu's practice theory which is required for this. Bourdieu's theory of power is a hierarchical one, rooted in neo-marxist theorising. In order to understand how power functions according to Bourdieu, we must familiarise ourselves with a few of his central concepts.

First of all, key to overcoming the agent-structure divide explored above is Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. *Habitus* circumvents what I have referred to above as the structuration problem, by making social practices not simply the outcome of mechanical imposition of structures or the free intentional pursuits of individuals<sup>36</sup>, but as the embodied interplay between agency and structure. In the words of Wacquant, *habitus*

is a mediating notion that revokes the common sense duality between the individual and the social by capturing 'the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality' [in the famous expression of Bourdieu], that is, the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways,

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<sup>31</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," *The Cultural Geography Reader*, (Taylor and Francis Group 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Iver B. Neumann, "Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy," *Millennium* 31, no. 3 (2002): 627-51.

<sup>33</sup> Holzscheiter "Between Communicative Interaction and Structures of Signification."

<sup>34</sup> Vincent Pouliot, "The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities," *International Organization* 62, no. 2 (2008): 257-88.

<sup>35</sup> Roxanne Lynn Doty, "Aporia: A Critical Exploration of the Agent-Structure Problematique in International Relations Theory," *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 3 (1997): 365-92.

<sup>36</sup> Holzscheiter "Between Communicative Interaction and Structures of Signification."

which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu.<sup>37</sup>

While habitus explains how agents enact and perform structures in the social world, the concept does not in and of itself explain exactly which practices end up being performed in a specific time and place. For this we must explore additional concepts. For Bourdieu, the concept of habitus is intimately tied to the concept of *capital*, in that habitus is essentially conditioned by it. Capital determines the power and position of an actor within a social order. Crucially however, capital is not just economic – as most Marxist scholars would argue – but also cultural and social. Whether capital actually translates to power is context-specific. Different contexts contain different hierarchical orderings of capital. Finally, Bourdieu conceptualises this context as a *field*. A field represents an arena or milieu of social interaction that is characterised by a particular hierarchical distribution of different forms of capital.<sup>38</sup> While one field may be structured so that economic capital is causally powerful, in another cultural capital may rank higher. In other words, it is a “structured space” that is organised around specific types of capital or combinations of capital.<sup>39</sup> This means that those actors who (through their specific intersubjective habitus) possess the dominant form of capital in a field are essentially more powerful in a given historically contingent context. Practices can then be understood as the outcomes of the constellations of habitus and capital within a field. Because distribution of capital is field specific and historically contingent, the struggle for power is the central dynamic of social life for Bourdieu.

In sum, a practice-based ontology allows us to overcome both the agent-structure divide in social research, and also circumvents the ontological fallacy of positivism. On top of this, Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of practices as being hierarchically ordered within distinct social fields offers a theory of power, which can help us to explain the politics of global diaspora engagement. Let’s briefly think back to our empirical example of young professional Tamil diaspora entrepreneurs. When we conceptualise diaspora engagement practices as taking place in different social fields, we are no longer at a loss to explain how struggles for power, legitimacy or political gain might play out differently depending on the hierarchical ordering of (social) capital in each field. And yet, Bourdieu alone cannot account for the politics of diaspora engagement in their full global complexity. His theory of power as embodied everyday struggles over capital is still intimately tied to his primary object of research – the French ruling class in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fields are very much imagined as existing within French national culture. In our effort to ontologically de-centre the state in our analysis of global diaspora engagement politics, we need to find a way of reshuffling Bourdieu’s practice theory and his concept of the social field to a level beyond or

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<sup>37</sup> Loïc Wacquant, “Habitus,” eds. Beckert, Jens, and Milan Zafirovski *International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology*, (Routledge 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Zander Navarro, “In Search of a Cultural Interpretation of Power: The Contribution of Pierre Bourdieu,” *IDS Bulletin* 37, no. 6 (2006): 11–22.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*: 18.

other than the state<sup>40</sup>, without simply scaling-up the assumption of *a priori* existing structures. This would simply reproduce the ontological positivism of state-centric social science on another level, e.g. the international system of states. We instead require a more flexible and abductive way of studying how practices of diaspora engagement are ordered in the social world without giving ontological priority to any one social structure (i.e. the state). In the next section I thus want to unravel the idea of state centrism in social research further and discuss how scholars of IR and Transnationalism Studies have attempted to overcome it.

## OVERCOMING STATE-CENTRISM AND METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM

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As I suggest in the literature review, one of the most often lamented shortcomings of existing approaches to the study of diaspora engagement is their state centrism. That there is a near-consensus regarding the need to include actors other than the state in order for analysis of diaspora engagement to be meaningful might seem commonsensical. However, it is crucial to look in more detail at the grounds upon which this need is articulated. This is because there is a crucial and consequential (ontological) difference between a) simply adding non-state actors to the scientific equation, b) historicising and/or decentering the state thus gnawing at the foundations of methodological nationalism and c) explicitly addressing the impasse that is intrinsic to methodological nationalism, which is its ontological positivism. I would argue that most of the existing calls to broaden the focus of study in political science and IR in particular have remained at stages a) and b). The following section will thus explore in more detail how and why scholars have argued for the need to de-centre the state in the analysis of transnational phenomena in the social sciences.

State-centrism in IR commonly describes the condition whereby the nation-state is understood as the primary unit of analysis in research. It follows that, in order to overcome this state-centrism, we simply need to include more actors in our analysis. This approach has been taken by various scholars in global governance research, following the broadening of the field of IR to include actors above and beyond the nation state. The development occurs as both liberal rationalists and constructivists begin to acknowledge that domestic, as well as trans- or supranational actors have a role to play in shaping state interests and the international environment. And yet, ontologically these actors then still exist only in relation to the state that they are influencing. This does not change the fundamental understanding that the world is oriented around the concept of the nation-state, with some additional actors operating below or above the national level and does nothing to actually address the scientific shortcomings of state-centrism in social research.

Unsurprisingly, some of the deeper and more refined critiques of state-centrism in the social sciences come from scholars of transnational migration processes. Accordingly, Wimmer and Glick Schiller<sup>41</sup> have explored the concept of methodological nationalism (MN),

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<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Loïc Wacquant, "Bourdieu Comes to Town: Pertinence, Principles, Applications," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 42, no.1 (2018): 90–105; Mike Savage, Laurie Hanquinet, Niall Cunningham, and Johs Hjellbrekke, "Emerging Cultural Capital in the City: Profiling London and Brussels," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 42, no. 1 (2018): 138–49.

<sup>41</sup> Andreas Wimmer, Nina Glick-Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology," *The International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003): 576–610.

which describes the “naturalization of a global regime of nation-states by the social sciences.” They identify three variants of MN, namely the lack of a problematisation of the importance of nationalism to the modern Western project, its naturalisation through institutional practice, and as territorial delimitation. The critique that underlies MN is that concepts of nation and state structure our perception of social reality but often disappear as objects of critical inquiry. Thus, MN limits the ability of social scientists and historians to perceive processes that are above or below the level of the nation-state, for example, transnational processes such as migration, but also processes of global public policy making such as diaspora engagement. This critique of MN goes much deeper than the call to diversify the group of actors that operate in IR. It aims to de-centre the state in order to empower these other actors who engage in processes that cross state borders and are consequently vilified and criminalised for it. Overcoming MN is seen then as an essential step towards conducting empirical research that does not reproduce and reifying those analytical categories that are reductive, structurally violent, or western-centric. While I am sympathetic to this scientific endeavour, I am skeptical that it can be achieved without truly confronting the ontological roots of the problem. Without doing so, the logic of state-centrism will simply manifest in social science via another dogmatic and reified concept, even if it is now no longer the state. This is because methodological nationalism stands in for a much deeper underlying problem inherent in all (Western) social theory (but IR in particular), produced by its emergence out of modernist/enlightenment thinking. With this claim I echo Daniel Chernilo<sup>42</sup>, who suggests that in order to transcend Methodological Nationalism we need to look at the foundational period of the (Western) social sciences. He argues that during its foundational period, all (Western) social theory strove towards universalism and the generalisability of ‘natural law’. Therefore, social theory as a search for natural law ultimately requires ontological positivism. So, even though much of social theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century has sought to shed its links to the notion of natural law (IR maybe less so), many of its presumptions are still deeply entrenched. For example, most post-modern or post-structuralist IR theory, even if it is able to challenge and historicise the nation-state, has largely failed to come up with alternative notions of how the contemporary world is structured. Thus, in order to offer a truly emancipatory analysis of the politics of diaspora engagement we need an alternative way of studying the social world, which does not rely on structuring it into preexisting categories, but is open to the fluidity, messiness and emergence of social structures. To summarise, if power resides in practices, in order to study the politics of global diaspora engagement we need to elevate the Bourdieusian field to a level beyond the state. However, we need to do this without reproducing the positivist ontology of other approaches that claim to address the issue of state-centrism. In the following, I will suggest that the concept of the assemblage as understood by critical realists, holds some promise in this regard.

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<sup>42</sup> Daniel Chernilo, “Social Theory’s Methodological Nationalism: Myth and Reality,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 1 (2006): 5–22.

## THE PROMISE OF ASSEMBLAGES: ACCESSING GLOBAL SOCIAL FIELDS

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Within critical realist theorising, assemblages have emerged as an important conceptual tool, one which has only recently been embraced by scholars of IR and Public Policy. In IR the concept has been applied by Rita Abrahamsen and Michael Williams in their study of global security assemblages.<sup>43</sup> They define assemblages as “disaggregated structures with both material and immaterial dimensions” that function as a sort of a system of relations between humans and non-humans. Further, Acuto and Curtis<sup>44</sup> argue that “this ontology can provide a valuable starting point for the analysis of various social actors, including transnational corporations, institutional networks, epistemic communities, nation-states, cities, and terrorist networks” because as assemblages these actors are no longer incommensurable. The most important feature of assemblage theory for the study of the politics of diaspora engagement is thus, arguably, that it presupposes a flat ontology meaning that all social actors (from the sub-individual to the global or transnational) are best studied as assemblages of their component parts, which are in themselves assemblages. The differentiation between levels of analysis becomes obsolete.

Assemblage theory lets us imagine the world as made up of complex configurations of human and non-human agents, in which the state becomes only one of many possible configurations. By casting the state as an assemblage we decenter its ontological primacy. This does not mean that the state is no longer a powerful agent. What it does mean is that, whether and how the state (as an assemblage) has power to act, is now an empirical question. With regard to our attempt at applying Bourdieusian practice theory to the study of diaspora engagement politics, assemblage theory thus suggests that anyone can be an agent engaged in practices; not just states.

Further to broadening the scope of actors that partake in practices, the assemblage concept allows us to look at global politics or global governance and see not just a collection of states and non-state actors but to see clusters or compounds of processes, actors, institutions, sites and policies, that all share a certain relationship or goal (or logic). This relationship can be characterised in a variety of ways by a common identity<sup>45</sup>, or common understandings of territory, authority and rights<sup>46</sup>, once firmly embedded in national institutional frames. In that sense an assemblage, much like a social field in the Bourdieusian sense, is held together by a shared structuring logic, be that a “common identity” or a “common understanding of territory, authority and rights”. If we translate these structuring logics into the language of Bourdieu, we can effortlessly recast them as the hierarchical distribution of capital within a field. In sum, assemblage theory offers a means to think about a global social field and thus of applying Bourdieusian practice theory to the study of the complex global politics of diaspora engagement. This is because it not only meaningfully

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<sup>43</sup> Rita Abrahamsen, Michael C. Williams, “Security Beyond the State: Global Security Assemblages in International Politics,” *International Political Sociology* 3, no.1 (2009): 1–17.

<sup>44</sup> Michele Acuto, Simon Curtis, “Assemblage Thinking and International Relations,” eds. Michele Acuto, Simon Curtis, *Reassembling International Theory*, (Palgrave Pivot 2014): 1–15.

<sup>45</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. 2nd edition, (University of Minnesota Press 1987).

<sup>46</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton University Press 2008).

expands the group of actors that we consider to be powerful agents in the world and places them on a flat ontological plane. But it also allows us to imagine and thus study a politics of diaspora engagement which operates across multiple assemblages and thus with multiple structuring logics and hierarchies of practices.

## CONCLUSION AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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In the preceding paragraphs, I have attempted to draw up a new theoretical framework for the study of the politics of diaspora engagement. After reviewing the state of the art literature on diaspora engagement by state and non-state actors, I concluded that these approaches could not shed adequate light on the politics and power struggles that characterise the diaspora engagement they describe. I suggested that this was the case for two reasons: first, because existing conceptualisation of power in diaspora engagement were caught in the aporia of the levels-of-analysis-problem, and second, because accounts of diaspora engagement overwhelmingly fell into the trap of methodological nationalism. I then suggested a two-pronged approach to address these issues. I proposed first a practice approach to the study of diaspora engagement, resting on the theoretical propositions of Pierre Bourdieu, which would overcome the levels-of-analysis-problem and also offer a critical reading of the power relations that characterised diaspora engagement practices. I then argued that, in order to apply Bourdieusian practice theory to the study of the (global) politics of diaspora engagement we need to reconceptualise two things a) the actors who were doing the practicing, and b) the spaces in which the practices were occurring. Ultimately, I concluded that, in order to even imagine powerful actors and spaces beyond the state, we needed to overcome the persistent ontological positivism of most mainstream but also much critical scholarship on diaspora engagement. In the final section, I discussed the ways in which assemblage theory could open up such avenues for post-positivist theorising and research and finally attempted to illustrate how assemblages could be combined with Bourdieusian practice theory to shed light on the politics of diaspora engagement, both theoretically and empirically.

While this paper has focused on ways in which to theoretically access and make visible the complex and multi-scalar/multi-actor phenomenon that is global diaspora engagement, I want to also briefly reflect on the promise that this theoretical model holds for empirical application. I have mentioned above that, far from being fixed and stable, assemblages (of states, of global governance, or of diaspora engagement) are always emerging. It follows that any analysis of them will only be a snapshot of a particular space in a particular time. Even though this means that assemblages do not fulfill the requirements for universal and generalisable research categories they make possible abductive theorising and rich empirical research. By not assuming the prior and unchanging existence of any social or natural facts, such as the primacy of states or the stability of state borders, they hold much promise for the study of the politics of diaspora engagement. And yet, this is easier said than done. Precisely because assemblages are abductively generated, we don't know what they look like until we have accessed them epistemologically. This has implications for empirical research. Rather than entering the field with preconceived analytical categories, which in the case of IR tend to be steeped in eurocentrism, post-positivist research requires fieldwork to be iterative and non-linear, to be able to take seriously alternative ways of knowing and thinking about the

world. And while this reflexivity is necessary for scholars seeking to combine realist ontologies with relativist epistemologies, it is also crucial that this catches on outside of niche philosophy of science debates.

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# CLASSING AUTONOMY: A REFUTATION THAT ‘...THERE REALLY IS NO ART MORE TRUE THAN ANY OTHER, AND THAT THERE IS NO ONE WAY ART HAS TO BE: ALL ART IS EQUALLY AND INDIFFERENTLY ART.’<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper seeks to highlight the presence of tacit institutional biases, entrenched in contemporary aesthetic theories, which allow validation of some art forms to the exclusion of others. Such biases, in their exclusive prioritization of autonomous art works, are not only aesthetic but moral in character, overlooking the importance of non-autonomous art forms and thus indicating a systemic presence of class prejudice. Traditions of working-class aesthetic experience are appropriated and recontextualised into frameworks of elite aesthetic evaluative criteria, which are frequently incompatible with the art works’ original intentions. Furthermore, while widely misunderstood to be a solely elite preserve, this piece explores the nature of aesthetic appreciation and connoisseurship outside of the institutional art world. The thesis begins with an exploration of contemporary understanding of Kant’s aesthetic theory that ‘disinterestedness’ is a necessary condition for fine art, before continuing to consider the class-based aesthetic analyses of Bourdieu. It is argued that his work ‘Distinction’ does not consider that the elite may not possess the cultural competence to understand working-class aesthetics, thus presenting the main argument of the present paper. Similar tacit evaluative assumptions can be noted in Danto’s writing, which ostensibly validates cultural forms only if they occur within gallery settings, the attendance of which, as demonstrated by the Great British Class Survey, is class-specific. Through a consideration of non-autonomous art forms such as tattooing, this work concludes with an exploration of some working-class evaluative aesthetic criteria and a wish that the covert biases of contemporary aesthetic study be recognized.

**Key words:** Aesthetics – art – class – Danto – Kant – prejudice

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Danto, “Three Decades After The End Of Art”, in *Bloomsbury Anthology of Aesthetics*, ed. J. J. Tanke & C. McQuillan, (London: Bloomsbury, 2002).

Philosopher Arthur Danto's work 'Three Decades After The End Of Art' posited that 'goodness and badness are not matters of belonging to the right style.' I refute his notion: entrenched within contemporary post-enlightenment culture and society, and Danto's own writing, are deeply-held institutional and public biases which allow validation of certain styles of art to the exclusion of others. I argue that this bias has roots in simplified readings of aesthetic theories articulated by Kant, and that contemporary manifestations of a formalist preoccupation with the exclusive importance of autonomy, or art-for-art's-sake, as a necessary condition for aesthetic experience, takes on a moral flavour and can indicate unchallenged class prejudice. I contend that the concept of autonomy is problematic, and that once-excluded non-autonomous cultural forms are appropriated into what we know as the art world only within an established institutional framework, which attempts to render the forms autonomous and thus comprehensible to the perceived normative class-defined aesthetic. Lastly, I argue that the existing taxonomies of aesthetic study need to be analysed as a culturally specific phenomenon; furthermore, despite their often-tacit exclusion, the activities of aesthetic appreciation and connoisseurship are not limited to cultural forms within the art world. In this piece I consider a variety of sources which demonstrate the institutional subjugation of social class within contemporary aesthetic theory in order to present an insight into how such modes of thought may be eventually decolonised.

Kant's aesthetic theory proposed that in order for something to be understood as fine art, the object must elicit 'free play' of the cognitive faculties: 'The description "agreeable art" applies where the end of the art is that the pleasure should accompany the representations considered as mere sensations, the description "fine art" where it is to accompany them considered as modes of cognition.'<sup>2</sup> In distinguishing between that which qualifies as fine art and that which does not, Kant conceptualises autonomy of the 'faculty of taste and productive imagination' and not, when interpreted superficially, the autonomy of art as an inherent formal quality: Kant uses the word 'autonomie' only in describing the effects of an art work upon mental faculties.<sup>3</sup> Fine art is not categorised thus because of inherent properties but because of its ability to engender a 'disinterested' aesthetic response.<sup>4</sup> A consideration of contemporary practical definitions of fine art as changeable and changing would support Kant's thesis: 'Genres we now accept unquestionably as art were once not part of the mainstream. [...] Tattoo art and computer art are waiting in the wings.'<sup>5</sup> Accordingly therefore, since the definitions of art can be practically demonstrated to change over time, that which can engender in an individual aesthetic response as described by Kant cannot be an inherent feature of a particular type of art work.

Bourdieu's 'Distinction' analysed reasons for the disparities between cultural forms appreciated by different socio-economic classes. Despite the great influence of his work, the

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<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Judgement", ed. Nicholas Walker, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 134.

<sup>3</sup> Casey Haskins, "Kant and the Autonomy of Art", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol 47, No. 1 (1989): 236

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Judgement", 134.

<sup>5</sup> Vera Zolberg and Joni Maya Cherbo, *Outsider Art: Contesting Boundaries in Contemporary Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

study nevertheless puts into use the aesthetics it aims to deconstruct.<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu argued that possessing the ability to appreciate 'legitimate' culture is what distinguishes classes apart:

Consumption is [...] a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code [...] A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.<sup>7</sup>

Taken out of context, Bourdieu's words could be seen to operate as a general description of the limitations of one's aesthetic experience while ignorant of the social contexts in which the experienced artwork is situated. However, Bourdieu does not consider that the elite may not possess the cultural competence to understand working-class aesthetics: he positions working-class aesthetic experience firmly within the framework and methodology of elite evaluative aesthetic criteria. It is equally possible that high art definitions are insufficient for the classification of working-class art forms.<sup>8</sup> The shortcomings of such a culturally-specific methodological approach is a problem acknowledged in subsequent sociological surveys on the relationship between taste and class.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, contemporary institutionally endorsed writings on aesthetics continue to take the view that appreciation of the 'finer arts', such as 'painting, literature and music', correlates with social privilege.<sup>10</sup> This sweepingly disregards the demonstrable presence of working-class traditions within these artistic categories. Furthermore, Goldman's emphasis on these stand-alone categories of art forms implies that autonomy is a necessary formal condition of art works for aesthetic experience,<sup>11</sup> rather than as Kant wrote, a necessary effect of the aesthetic experience itself.

Danto's 'Three Decades After The End Of Art' reveals similarly tacit evaluative assumptions, which contradict its commendable central argument against the irrelevance of defining art against non-art. Despite his explicit rejection of aesthetics and the formalism so central to the theories of critics such as Greenberg, Danto's ostensibly conceptual definition of art can nevertheless be engaged with on aesthetic grounds<sup>12</sup>: he writes that there is 'no interesting perceptual difference' between an object inside and outside of a gallery<sup>13</sup>, contrasting Andy Warhol's 'Brillo Box' sculptures with functional brillo boxes in a non-art context. While the formal appearance of the boxes may themselves indeed not alter between context, Danto is mistaken, given his intended argument, in equating this with 'perceptual'

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Loesberg, *A Return to Aesthetics: Autonomy, Indifference, and Postmodernism*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (London: Routledge, 1984), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel Cooper, *People's Art: Working Class Art from 1750 to the Present Day*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (London: Penguin, 2015), 7,11,19; Robert Young, "Can Neds (or Chavs) Be Non-delinquent, Educated or Even Middle Class? Contrasting Empirical Findings with Cultural Stereotypes", *Sociology*, Vol. 46, Issue 6 (2012): 1156.

<sup>10</sup> Alan H. Goldman, "Evaluating Art", in *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, ed. P. Kivy (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Alan H. Goldman, "Evaluating Art", 10.

<sup>12</sup> Clark Buckner, "Autonomy, Pluralism, Play: Danto, Greenberg, Kant, and the Philosophy of Art History", *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, Vol. 5, Issue 1 (2013)

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Danto, "Three Decades After The End Of Art", 7.

difference, as the act of perception requires an individual's sensory interpretation which will necessarily take into account the context into which the artwork is embedded.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the gallery's role in affecting viewers' perceptions of art works is overlooked even by Danto's critics, who uncritically agree that 'any kind of object whatsoever could be an artwork' if placed 'in the proper setting.'<sup>15</sup> In leaving unaddressed his resulting implicit definition, that a work of fine art is necessarily situated within a gallery context, Danto inadvertently creates a quasi-formalist manifesto like those 'philosophically indefensible' manifestos he argues against, invalidating by omission cultural forms as fine art if they occur outside of the gallery context, and thus failing to back up his claim that '...there really is no art more true than any other, and that there is no one way art has to be: all art is equally and indifferently art.'<sup>16</sup> As evidenced by 'The Great British Class Survey' (GBCS), gallery attendance is highly culturally and class-specific<sup>17</sup>: through not defining the scope of his argument, a further and vital implication of Danto's writing therefore is that working-class cultural forms are not to be considered, by the elite, as art.

In his analysis of the canonisation of 'high-art' forms and the institutional exclusion of 'low' cultural forms, Savage writes, 'it is not possible to take examinations in playing *Grand Theft Auto*'.<sup>18</sup> artslashgames.com, a website devoted to discourse surrounding the newly-emergent discipline of Computer Game Theory, writes: 'It's our belief that games are an art medium. They are complex, multi-faceted artistic objects enmeshed in a wider social and critical context. Taking games seriously, exploring their crossover with contemporary art practice, writing and cultural discourse, is essential to the development of all contemporary culture.' In isolation, gaming is a non-autonomous cultural form: one may play a game for any number of means to ends including a need for escapism as detailed previously, or among others to simulate social interaction, competition and cooperation.<sup>19</sup> Gaming, it seems, cannot be embraced by the canon without an accompanying intellectualisation of its social and formal properties: instead of playing computer games alone, there appears to be a need to root them within institutional language. This corroborates Danto's unintentional illustration that non-autonomous cultural forms may have aesthetic qualities worthy of appreciation, but that there does not exist the capacity within the art world to appreciate them in their original context. If we are to consider computer games as art, given that they are evidenced to be played by all sections of society, it would appear that something is lost in their appropriation into art world academia, a highly elite and professionalised arena: 'art does not retain its meaning away from the society in which it was made.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 26.

<sup>15</sup> David Carrier, "Danto and His Critics: Art History, Historiography and After the End of Art", *History and Theory*, Vol. 37, No. 4, Issue 37 (1998).

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Danto, "Three Decades After The End Of Art".

<sup>17</sup> Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 112.

<sup>18</sup> Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 96.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Scharkow, "Beyond the core-gamer": Genre preferences and gratifications in computer games", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 44 (2015).

<sup>20</sup> Emmanuel Cooper, *People's Art: Working Class Art from 1750 to the Present Day*.

The evaluative criteria of art work associated with the working class are frequently overlooked and dismissed<sup>21</sup>, both by institutions and members of the public, even though the employment of similar criteria is often required for the aesthetic appreciation of art works in elite contexts. In 'All In The Best Possible Taste', a 2012 popular television documentary examining the class-specificity of taste in the UK, a man from 'traditionally working-class'<sup>22</sup> Sunderland is interviewed about his tattoo collection, explaining that his tattoos are like souvenirs as they serve the purpose of reminding him of important personal beliefs and life events. Four years previously within the institutional arena, the artist Wim Delvoye sold the skin of a tattooed man to an art collector: the man agreed upon his death to have his skin displayed in a frame.<sup>23</sup> Stripping the tattoos of their personal social function is necessary for the creation of a recontextualised work which is comprehensible to an elite viewership, and simultaneously disregards the original working-class aesthetic evaluative criteria. This serves as a decontextualisation of what is a historically proletarian art tradition<sup>24</sup>, appropriating its visible form but essentially misappropriating the art work's perceptual intention. Positioning working-class aesthetics directly in opposition to Kantian 'disinterestedness',<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu explicitly argues that members of the working class expect art to have a function. He thereby appears to have no awareness of the ritual and political roles played by said autonomous art in museum contexts.<sup>26</sup> Denigration of working-class aesthetic criteria is once more apparent in the writing of Goldman, who dismisses a trend demonstrated by members of the working class towards preferring emotional engagement within cultural forms<sup>27</sup> as tacky and facile: 'We lap up melodrama and sentimentality in art...' and '...melodramatic and sentimental art engages us on an emotional level too easily' and are 'often trivial in their cognitive content.'<sup>28</sup> This is likewise prevalent in members of the public who express the need to 'work at' cultural forms in order to be sure of their aesthetic worth,<sup>29</sup> excusing personal transgressions of their own understandings of good taste thus:

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<sup>21</sup> A caveat here: working-class art forms are not reducible to the examples utilised in this piece, and working-class taste should not be understood as homogeneous. The examples of computer games and tattooing are not intended to imply ubiquitous taste within the working class but rather to demonstrate specific limitations of Danto's theory.

<sup>22</sup> Grayson Perry and Neil Crombie, *All In The Best Possible Taste*, Channel 4 TV recording, (2012) accessed 28 December 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Low, H., *The man who sold his back to an art dealer*, BBC World Service (2017), accessed 2 January 2018 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-38601603>>

<sup>24</sup> Mary Kosut, "The Artification of Tattoo: Transformations within a Cultural Field", *Cultural Sociology*, Vol 8, Issue 2, (2014).

<sup>25</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

<sup>26</sup> Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship" in *Exhibiting Cultures*, eds. I. Karp & S. D. Lavine, (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991); Ikem Stanley Okoye, "Tribe and Art History", *Art Bulletin*, Vol. 78, No. 4, (1996).

<sup>27</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*; Grayson Perry and Neil Crombie, *All In The Best Possible Taste*; Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 119.

<sup>28</sup> Alan H. Goldman "Evaluating Art", 106.

<sup>29</sup> Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 120.

'you're knackered and your energies are dissipated.'<sup>30</sup> A simple counter to such assertions is Perry's rhetorical question: 'Do you cry a more vintage kind of tears [sic] at Glyndebourne?'<sup>31</sup>

To avoid the hegemony of an elite notion of aesthetic discourse, and for all art indeed to be 'equally and indifferently art', it is necessary to consider fundamental alternatives to the methodologies which currently dominate contemporary aesthetics. It is not sufficient for working-class art works as physical forms to enter the domain of the elite. For the decolonisation of social class within aesthetic theory to take place, contemporary study must recognise its covert biases and seriously engage with not only working-class but also elite art works according to working-class evaluative criteria and perspectives. As a viable alternative to the gallery space the widely accessible, anonymised nature of social media platforms such as YouTube enable a collective engagement and criticism which is neither accountable to given cultural or class contexts, nor restricted to canonical art works or forms, within which lies the potential for cross-class criticism of art forms. Unfortunately, heterogeneous appreciation of art forms across class boundaries is a long way away, however evidence of the inherent potential of cross-class and cross-cultural pollination within YouTube is illustrated by a comment written by YouTube user Manuauto on a video of opera singer Montserrat Caballé singing 'O mio babbino caro': 'Grand Theft Auto 3 brought me here!'<sup>32</sup> In this context, in principle, the possibility for decolonised appreciation exists.

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<sup>30</sup> Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21st Century*, 120.

<sup>31</sup> Grayson Perry and Neil Crombie, *All In The Best Possible Taste*.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Roxy Minter is an artist, curator and current Masters student of History of Art and Archaeology at SOAS. Since studying Sculpture at Central Saint Martins, Roxy has been developing a multidisciplinary art practice while living in Burkina Faso and Haiti, working as a product designer with rural artisan groups. This led to particular interests in contemporary visual culture practices in the Caribbean and West Africa, and the role of class in decentering knowledge. Roxy is currently working on curating an exhibition to take place during London's Notting Hill Carnival, exploring the social contexts of carnival on both sides of the Atlantic.

## WHO IS AFRAID OF DECOLONISATION?

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### ABSTRACT

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This article is an opinion piece which examines the objections behind the press hostility towards the “decolonisation” campaign. The principal aims of this campaign are curriculum reform and improved equality of opportunity at British universities and university colleges, including SOAS. The article identifies conservative critiques of “cultural Marxism,” “cultural relativism” and “radical egalitarianism” and the perceived threat to “Western civilisation” by such perspectives as key drivers of the media hostility concerning this issue. To help understand such hostility I draw on the moral panic theory of Stuart Hall et al. espoused in the classic work, *Policing the Crisis*. This article also examines more moderate criticisms by two high profile journalists. My research is based on personal contact with journalists and academics at SOAS as well as critical examination of newspapers and broadcast materials.

**Key words:** Decolonisation – diversity – conservatism – curriculum – education – media

The face of Lola Olufemi stared out from the front page of *The Daily Telegraph* in newsagents and newsstands across the country on the morning of 25 October 2017. Emblazoned in pink above her picture was the headline: “Student forces Cambridge to drop white authors.”<sup>1</sup> Olufemi was an English undergraduate from Cambridge University. The cause of her notoriety was that her name was at the top of a letter as part of a campaign for changes to the curriculum of her course.<sup>2</sup> It is truly rare that a major British newspaper should make a previously unknown undergraduate the focus of hostile coverage on their front page or concern themselves with the details of course content on degree courses. Other newspapers swiftly picked up the story. A tirade of hate against her built up on social media.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently *The Telegraph* had to print corrections stating that she and the university had been seriously misrepresented and there were no plans to exclude any white authors from reading lists as suggested by this newspaper.<sup>4</sup>

This *Telegraph* article has been just one of a number of hostile articles on similar campaigns. An article by Jonathen Petre in *The Mail on Sunday* earlier in the year had specifically denounced proposals for curriculum changes at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) suggesting that student campaigners were trying to ban Plato, Kant and other such authors.<sup>5</sup> Dr Meera Sabaratnam, the Chair of the Decolonising SOAS Working Group stated that there was no truth in such a claim and no such *diktat* from students. She added:

...it’s not correct to say [curriculum changes are] being left to the students. What students and staff are engaged in at SOAS is a dialogue about how the curriculum should be organised. And this is informed by up-to-date research on racialised attainment gaps within universities as well as the freshest thinking of the scholarship in those areas.<sup>6</sup>

She summarised the aims of the campaign as being implemented at SOAS. According to Sabaratnam, its aim is to question “assumptions about the world” as well as “asking questions about the location and identity” of authors.<sup>7</sup> In addition, it aims at promoting better equal opportunities including measures to address the “attainment gap” between Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students and others.<sup>8</sup> SOAS’s Director, Baroness Amos, is fully in support of the campaign. She wrote on Linked In: “What I find difficult to understand is why there is so much resistance to looking at the wealth of history, scholarship

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<sup>1</sup> Front page, *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 October 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Camilla Turner, ‘Cambridge to ‘decolonise’ English literature’ in *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 October 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Jon Dunne & Anna Davis ‘I’ve faced a flood of abuse says Cambridge diversity campaigner’ in *Evening Standard*, 26 October 2017.

<sup>4</sup> The corrections appeared in 26 October and 13 December editions of the paper.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Petre, ‘They Kant be serious! PC students demand white philosophers including Plato and Descartes be dropped from university syllabus’ in the *The Mail on Sunday*, 8 January 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Meera Sabaratnam, ‘Decolonisation What’s All the Fuss?’ in SOAS Blog, 18 January 2017. <https://www.soas.ac.uk/blogs/study/decolonising-curriculum-whats-the-fuss/>.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Sabaratnam, ‘Decolonisation’.

and research from across the world to give depth to current knowledge and understanding.”<sup>9</sup> A key objective of my article is to try to find the basis for such objections.

I argue that opposition to the campaign is not simply a matter of misunderstandings but based on profound ideological objections to its aims.<sup>10</sup> It is these objections that appear to be fuelling a moral panic. I was struck by the pertinence of the moral panic theory relating to race and immigration espoused in the classic 1970s work by a group of authors including the late Professor Stuart Hall entitled *Policing the Crisis*.<sup>11</sup> The authors of this work argue that more often than not behind the journalists are authority figures and “primary definers” who set the terms of debate and fuel such panics. Most journalists act as “secondary definers” reproducing “the definitions of the powerful.”<sup>12</sup> The articles by British journalists referred to above frequently use such language as “snowflakes,” demonising students as intolerant and unstable, plus the term “political correctness.”<sup>13</sup> Such journalists frequently use but rarely explain what is meant by the latter term.

A clearer idea of what is meant by political correctness in this context can be found by examining the academics used as primary definers in the hostile media coverage of the campaign. These include the right wing philosopher, Professor Roger Scruton, who was promoted as an expert critic of the campaign in both the *Mail* and *Telegraph*, and the economist Dr Richard Wellings who was featured on *Russia Today*.<sup>14</sup> The arguments of such academics against political correctness encompass ideological critiques of cultural Marxism and cultural relativism as well as what they see as the distortion of equality of opportunity by trying to enforce “equality of outcomes.” I shall deal with each of these in turn.

## CONCERNS ABOUT CULTURAL MARXISM

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Professor Jérôme Jamin, a political scientist at the University of Liège, suggests that when used in a neutral way cultural Marxism refers specifically to the works of Frankfurt School who analysed the way culture works in society.<sup>15</sup> However, Jamin adds that the term’s use in

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<sup>9</sup> Valerie Amos, ‘Decolonising Knowledge: The Role Universities Can Play’ in Linked In: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/decolonising-knowledge-role-universities-can-play-valerie-amos>

<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this article my use of the term “ideology” is a relatively straightforward and neutral one. As Gramsci suggested the term “ideology” can simply mean a “specific system of ideas” that relates not only to politics but more broadly to such fields as culture. Acceptance of such a definition does not necessarily mean endorsement of the Marxist theory of economic determinism of ideology. Hoare & Smith ed., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971): 375-377.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd. 1978).

<sup>12</sup> Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*: 57-60 & 220-222.

<sup>13</sup> Turner, ‘Cambridge’, 2017; Petre, ‘They Kant be Serious!’, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Petre, ‘They Kant be Serious!’, 2017; Turner, ‘University students demand philosophers such as Plato and Kant are removed from syllabus because they are white’, *Daily Telegraph*, 8 January 2017; Debate on Decolonisation between Richard Wellings and Rahmaan Mohammadi, *Russia Today*, 26 October 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQVCqDPofMc> [last accessed 30 April 2018].

<sup>15</sup> Jérôme Jamin, ‘Cultural Marxism a Survey’ in *Religion Compass* 2018.12;e12258: 4. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/rec3.12258> [last accessed 30 April 2018].

a pejorative sense has been popularised in the 1990s by conservatives such as William S Lind and Pat Buchanan.<sup>16</sup> Such critics turn these authors into a focus for a conspiracy theory.<sup>17</sup> They link them with political correctness and claim that cultural Marxism is aimed at deliberately undermining the values of Western Christian civilisation and encouraging moral degeneracy.<sup>18</sup> The phrase has been taken up by some libertarian academics as part of their critique of the decolonisation campaign. I shall give two examples.

In response to one of *The Daily Telegraph* articles, a SOAS academic who describes himself as a libertarian asserted on social media that the campaign was an attempt to enforce cultural Marxism in universities. I drew to his attention the articles referred to above by both the Director of SOAS and Meera Sabaratnam clarifying the aims of the campaign.<sup>19</sup> However, he told me that: “For what it’s worth, my views on this topic have not changed in the slightest.”<sup>20</sup>

Another libertarian and academic critic of the campaign to express similar concerns was Dr Richard Wellings, the Deputy Research Director of the Institute of Economic Affairs. In October 2017, he asserted on *Russia Today*: “... what we are seeing at universities is increasingly the cultural Marxist wing of the hard left trying to impose their particular world view on students.” He added that this made “libertarians” and “conservatives” feel uncomfortable and excluded. He asserted that those exposed to such “cultural Marxist” ideas “then go on to senior positions in politics and the media.” He also asserted that lecturers even at the elite university of Cambridge have come under the influence of “hard left cultural Marxism.” A spokesperson for the National Union of Students (NUS), Rahmaan Mohammadi, appeared on the same programme. He felt that Wellings’s argument relating the campaign to a “divide” between political ideologies was “absolutely mad.” He emphasised that the campaign was “not about politics” but ensuring that students were not “narrow minded” and that both the history of and writers from BME communities were not undervalued.<sup>21</sup>

I discussed the issue of “cultural Marxism” with Dr Sabaratnam. She said she would not describe herself using that term. Judging by our discussion she seems to consider cultural Marxist works such as those of the Frankfurt School to be a worthy if somewhat dated genre. She denied that the decolonisation campaign is particularly concerned with the ideas of such works.<sup>22</sup> I agree with both Sabaratnam and Mohammadi that the fixation with cultural

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<sup>16</sup> Jamin, ‘Cultural Marxism’: 1 & 5.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*: 1-3.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*: 5-8.

<sup>19</sup> Sabaratnam, ‘Decolonisation’; Amos, ‘Decolonising Knowledge’

<sup>20</sup> Email from anonymous academic at SOAS to author, 29 April 2018. For perfectly good reasons that I cannot disclose as they would identify this individual I have chosen not to make his name public and he has not expressed a wish that I should do so.

<sup>21</sup> Debate on Decolonisation between Richard Wellings and Rahmaan Mohammadi, *Russia Today*, 26 October 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQVCqDPofMc> [last accessed 30 April 2018]. While giving airtime to both views in my opinion the questioning by the interviewer was biased in favour of Wellings, using a snide tone towards Mohammadi and such phrases as “political correctness gone mad.”

<sup>22</sup> Interview by author with Meera Sabaratnam, 27 April 2018.

Marxism by academic critics of the campaign such as Wellings is unwarranted. The campaign is concerned rather with broadening the perspectives of students, not indoctrinating them into any ideology. Moving on from cultural Marxism I shall now turn to consider other objections.

## CONCERNS ABOUT CULTURAL RELATIVISM & RADICAL EGALITARIANISM

A related concern is about “cultural relativism.” Prominent critics of the campaign accuse academics of making morality entirely relative by suggesting that all cultures are valid and that no one culture such as “Western civilisation” is superior. For instance, Jonathan Petre in his article denouncing the SOAS decolonisation campaign asserted that Western philosophers such as Plato and Kant were “names that underpin civilisation.”<sup>23</sup> By implication non-Western philosophers were sidelined as of marginal importance to the construction of “civilisation.” Professor Roger Scruton, a high profile right wing philosopher, was promoted by Petre as a primary definer in opposition to the decolonisation campaign. Scruton sees as key to such cultural relativism a number of New Left thinkers influenced by the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci although he does not focus exclusively on cultural Marxists but incorporates others such as Michel Foucault.<sup>24</sup> Dr Richard Wellings also criticises cultural relativism. He asserted that it is an “uncomfortable historical fact” that the “highest proportion of great authors” were “white males” even in the Middle Ages, when Europe was not dominant in the world culturally or otherwise.<sup>25</sup>

Sabaratnam refutes such claims, suggesting that they are based on ignorance of the contribution of literature outside of Europe. She also does not believe there is any such thing as absolute moral values. For instance, she believes that murder is never acceptable. She also regards “Western civilisation” as a dubious construct. She believes that behind such ideas are ideas of supremacism. As I discussed with her this can take different forms.<sup>26</sup> One notable example of Anglo- rather than Euro-Centrism is a work by Daniel Hannan, one of the principal ideologues behind the campaign to leave the European Union, entitled *How we Invented Freedom and Why it Matters*.<sup>27</sup> This takes the somewhat dubious historiographical position that England is the sole origin of genuine freedom and human rights. For instance, Hannan suggests that the *Magna Carta* (Great Charter) of the thirteenth century is the basis of the rule of and equality before the law.<sup>28</sup> However, as Professor David Carpenter pointed out in his recent study of this charter, the rights awarded were confined to the small minority of free citizens and not the 90% who were unfree.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Petre, ‘They Kant be serious!’, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015): 233 & 237-238.

<sup>25</sup> Wellings in *Russia Today*, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, Sabaratnam, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Hannan, *How We Invented Freedom & Why it Matters*. (Head of Zeus Ltd., 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Hannan, *Invented Freedom*: 111-112.

<sup>29</sup> David Carpenter, *Magna Carta* (London: Penguin Books, 2015): 107 & 110-111.

Finally, there are concerns about “radical egalitarianism” that is trying to impose “equality of outcomes.” Such concerns are shared by Roger Scruton.<sup>30</sup> One key influence in this way of thinking is Milton and Rose Friedman's book *Free to Choose*. However, the focus of the Friedmans is upon attempts to remedy such gaps relating to class and income rather than race, including in higher education.<sup>31</sup>

Sabaratnam is familiar with the argument that students are admitted solely on merit and that measures to rectify inequalities are unwarranted.<sup>32</sup> However, evidence about undergraduate admissions at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge show that such concerns need to be addressed. Data obtained by MP David Lammy showed that between 2010 and 2015 about a third or more of Oxford colleges fail to admit any black applicant for first degrees and that less than one in ten offered places to black applicants each year. Less than one percent of applicants of Pakistani descent were successful in gaining admission to Cambridge University. Nearly half of Cambridge colleges turned down all such applicants.<sup>33</sup> Sabaratnam is aware of a number of studies which prove that applicants with ethnic names are discriminated against by employers and that such discrimination can also take place in universities.<sup>34</sup>

## MODERATE CRITICISMS

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Some journalists are critical but sympathetic to the aims of the campaign. They neither buy into the above ideological positions nor any kind of “moral panic.” Kenan Malik, a prominent Marxist writer, was the only journalist to visit the campus and engage with campaigners. Most of his comments were positive but he still felt there was excessive focus on the racial identity of authors and an overly negative attitude towards the Enlightenment.<sup>35</sup> Malik told me though he still questions the wisdom of using the term “decolonisation” to describe the process of reform. He adds, “a broader, more diverse curriculum is a good [thing], but the issue is not as straightforward as simply creating a more diverse reading list or lecture series.”<sup>36</sup> Dr Amina Yaqin of the Decolonising SOAS Working Group made an address to a SOAS conference on “decolonisation” which critiqued Malik’s article. She was

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<sup>30</sup> Scruton, *New Left*, 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1980): 166-176 & 220-224.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, Sabaratnam, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> David Lammy, ‘Oxbridge Access Data’ <https://www.davidlammy.co.uk/single-post/2017/10/20/Oxbridge-access-data> [last accessed 30 April 2018].

<sup>34</sup> Interview, Sabaratnam, 2018. Rajeev Syal, ‘Undercover job hunters reveal huge race bias in Britain’s workplaces’ in *The Observer*, 18 October 2009; Kuheli Dutt, ‘Evidence of Unconscious Bias’ in web site of Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University: [https://www.ldeo.columbia.edu/ldeo/dir/academic-affairs-diversity/searchcommittees\\_files/Best%20Practices%20Bias%20Search%20Committees%20Sep2015%20.pdf](https://www.ldeo.columbia.edu/ldeo/dir/academic-affairs-diversity/searchcommittees_files/Best%20Practices%20Bias%20Search%20Committees%20Sep2015%20.pdf) [accessed 28 June 2018].

<sup>35</sup> Kenan Malik, ‘Are SOAS students right to ‘decolonise’ their minds from western philosophers?’ in *The Observer*, 19 February 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Email from Kenan Malik to author, 30 April 2018.

critical of his neglect of equal opportunities issues, including the treatment of BME staff. She spoke of her own bad experiences at SOAS in that respect.<sup>37</sup>

Another moderate critic was David Aaronovitch of *The Times* who took part in a debate in *Radio 4* with Sabaratnam. He told me that his concerns were twofold.<sup>38</sup> Firstly, it is perfectly legitimate for students to make criticisms of teaching quality. Both of us had experience of exceptionally bad teaching practices at Oxford among many lecturers and he does not defend them. However so far as course content is concerned he believes that is “best be decided by people who have some authority, not just anyone with an opinion.”<sup>39</sup> Sabaratnam told me that is certainly not going to be the case. Students will have input but the responsibility for designing curricula remains with academics.

Secondly Aaronovitch is concerned that “decolonisation” is a “politicisation” of courses. He adds, “I don't quite see why a curriculum should be “decolonised” any more than it should be “colonised” or “recolonised.” Aaronovitch add that his overall concern is exemplified by something he heard a young woman in the United States said when advocating the teaching of creationism as opposed to evolution in school: “It's my belief and I have a right to be taught what I believe.”<sup>40</sup> He made a similar point in his debate with Sabaratnam on *Radio 4*. Sabaratnam's response was firstly that knowledge had always been politicised to some extent. All what SOAS academics were trying to do was to deal with perspectives that had been “shut out and occluded.” Secondly, she felt that universities are “about challenging received wisdom.”<sup>41</sup> By implication this would mean thinking critically about the evidence for differing positions including both “creationism” and “evolution.” It would not mean the crude indoctrination into one position or the other even where the merits of one particular position seem to be clear.

My own view of the campaign is also very positive though I feel that the scope could be broadened. For instance, I asked Sabaratnam if some attention should not also be paid to the way Ireland is taught in this country, typically from an English perspective. She strongly agreed and said that it even had relevance to SOAS. It was Britain's first colony and had implications for colonialism in India. She also agreed that the issue of anti-Semitism at SOAS needs to be addressed despite the disputes about the meaning of anti-Semitism with respect to criticism of Israel.<sup>42</sup> Overall though I share her optimism that the decolonization process is an opportunity for SOAS to improve its courses for students and maybe even set a standard for others to follow.

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<sup>37</sup> Dr Amina Yaqin, 'Keynote Address' at 'Decolonising in Praxis' conference, SOAS, 7 June 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Email from David Aaronovitch to author, 24 April 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Email from Aaronovitch to author, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Debate between Meera Sabaratnam and David Aaronovitch on Today Programme BBC Radio 4, Broadcast 22 February 2018 [sound file no longer available].  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09rwt84?platform=hootsuite> [last accessed 30 April 2018].

<sup>42</sup> Interview, Sabaratnam, 2018.

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Simon Forbes's main interests are in the field of international and transnational history, including the arms trade and religious ideas on war and sexuality. He taught a short course on the international relations of the Pahlavi regime in Iran at SOAS for two years. His Birkbeck MA dissertation was on relations between Britain and Iran, 1973-78. He is currently completing a PhD at SOAS on missionaries and war in China, 1931-45.

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## THE URGENCY OF DECOLONIALITY

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### ABSTRACT

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The notion of decolonisation presupposes a colonial predicament in need of resolution, but what colonial situation exists, and what need is there for decolonisation when national liberation has already been accomplished throughout much of the globe half a century ago?

This paper has two aims. First, it seeks to highlight the political-economic, socio-cultural, and ecological conditions that undergird the crisis of contemporary modern civilisation. It argues that this civilizational crisis derives from a colonial logic that animates all relations of modern exploitation and expropriation. Following this, the paper's other aim is not only to argue for the desirability of de-colonisation, but to highlight its urgency as an existential imperative for life on earth. Moreover, the paper suggests that such a de-colonial move has to be undertaken as a personal everyday practice. Integral to this move is the conceptual distinction I make between colonisation and de-colonisation/de-Westernisation on the one hand, and coloniality and de-coloniality on the other. The paper concludes by considering some practical de-colonial options available to us.

**Key words:** Modernity – Eurocentrism – colonialism – coloniality – de-colonisation – de-Westernisation – de-coloniality – de-linking

## INTRODUCTION

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The prospect of decolonisation presupposes a colonial situation in need of resolution, but what colonial situation exists, and what need is there for decolonisation when movements of *de jure* de-colonisation and national liberation have already occurred and brought forth national independence across the globe following the end of World War Two? What would the praxis of decolonisation mean today?

The paper has two main objectives. First, it aims to draw attention to the severity of the overlapping socio-political, economic, and ecological crises that beset humanity today, which constitutes nothing less than a crisis of civilization. I will argue that this crisis of modern rational civilisation has obtained from a logic of coloniality, the *logos* that necessarily animates all relations of (colonial) exploitation and expropriation. Modernity, which is an ontological condition given by an adherence to instrumental rationality in all human affairs - with human others as well as non-human nature - is thus homologous with coloniality. This affirms the modernity/rationality/coloniality homology as per Quijano (2010). Second, the purpose of raising awareness about the unfolding civilizational crisis is meant to underscore not just the desirability of de-colonisation, but also its urgency. Contemporary climate science has revealed that our natural environment - our habitat - is in serious jeopardy in the face of drastic climate change. Yet, there is no indication that at the level of global diplomacy, ecologically meaningful solutions are being discussed, much less pursued. This paper features a discussion that concludes by signalling the various ways and different levels at which meaningful de-colonisation can occur. In the process, it will distinguish conceptually between coloniality and colonisation, and their respective responses, namely, de-coloniality and de-colonisation.

While this paper does not offer a step-by-step formula for de-colonisation, the discussion it initiates points in the general direction of a variety of de-colonial possibilities. Moreover, unlike the *de jure* national de-colonial movements that have tended to operate at the level of geo-political international relations, which in most instances are detached from the mundane concerns of our everyday lives, this paper highlights de-coloniality as a mode of liberation for which each of us has to be responsible, and can directly partake of. I argue that de-coloniality, which grapples with colonialism's underlying logic, represents a significant move. It is a mode of de-colonial praxis available to each of us.

## THE WHOLESALE CRISES OF (POST) MODERN CIVILISATION: POLITICAL-ECONOMIC, SOCIO-CULTURAL, ECOLOGICAL

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As the world spins and our lives are subsumed by the happy consciousness administered by our popular culture of techno-fetishism, consumerism, advertising, and its encompassing liberalist worldview, all seems well. The said fetishism involves the unquestioned faith in technological progress as the solution to all of humanity's problems. Meanwhile, information and communication technologies have enabled an advertising industry with the powers to create a homogenising global consumerist culture. Additionally, it would seem that the worldview of liberalism, which has truly become global today, tends to socialise us into conformity, if not also complacency. Our socialisation appears to induce conformity with the predominant social tendency to "live to work" rather than the converse, and the complacent

belief that continued economic and technological progress will spawn a glorious future. This complacency is hardly new. In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, Fukuyama (1992) triumphantly declared with that we had reached the “end of history”. With the collapse of Soviet socialism, there was naturally the hubris to think that the history of the West was also that of the world.

Such conceit is not easy to give up. Despite what has transpired in the thirty years in the West since, involving a dramatic increase of wealth and income inequality amongst its population, some still insist that the globalized world of today represents the best of all possible worlds (Easterbrook 2018, McCloskey 2016, Pinker 2011): we live longer, supposedly wage less war, while continued technological progress promises to deliver humanity from the bane of being human.

The proponents of technology continue to argue that its progress will liberate humans from the drudgery of work.<sup>1</sup> It would be a wonder if such arguments still had currency. After all, the West has over the past decade seen the future of its youth blighted by long-term unemployment. To illustrate, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for under-25 year olds in the Eurozone in March 2018 were highest in Greece, Spain, and Italy and stood at 42.3%, 35%, and 31.7% respectively.<sup>2</sup> Unemployment increased dramatically when the global financial meltdown of 2008 caused bankruptcy and financial trouble for many employers. Furthermore, the general economic crisis was exacerbated by the imposition of neoliberal austerity policies on Eurozone countries, ostensibly as a solution for the crisis. It is worth noting that labour-saving technology has often been deployed to enforce austerity. The situation is not without irony: the technologists and the captains of industry drone on about the benefits of “saving” labour, yet in the money-exchange economy, it is by way of labour that the masses must earn their bread. Who and what is being saved as the technologically-displaced and austerity-stricken go hungry?

The mass-media of the high-growth and hi-tech-dependent modern capitalist system seems inclined to convince us that we live in the best possible world, and that it only gets better. Wallerstein (1995) has referred to this liberal faith in the inevitability of progress as constituting the geo-culture of the modern world-system. Indeed, in this modern and increasingly postmodern capitalist world of make-believe, things hum along, so-called progress continues unabated, and the roseate future beckons. Technological optimism appears irrepressible and we are supposed to feel assuaged. In this feel-good context, it would not be amiss to ask: what need for decolonisation? Decolonisation of what, and from what?

Despite the general optimism about the ineluctability of progress, it would be evident to anyone keeping a relatively close eye on world affairs that post-World War Two declarations of national liberation notwithstanding, imperial machinations have never quite ceased, neither after World War Two nor after the collapse of Soviet state-socialism. In the past

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<sup>1</sup> See the following 24 April 2018 article in *The Economist*. The article’s heading reads that “a study finds nearly half of jobs are vulnerable to automation” before noting, without irony, that “that could free people to pursue more interesting careers.” <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/04/24/a-study-finds-nearly-half-of-jobs-are-vulnerable-to-automation>. Last accessed on 13 July 2018.

<sup>2</sup> These unemployment figures in the Eurozone are obtained from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268830/unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/>. Last accessed 11 July 2018.

seventeen years alone, we have witnessed a handful of countries in the Middle East bombed by the United States and its NATO allies: Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, and Pakistan.

The concept of national sovereignty, which was a notion accompanying the birth of nations following the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia has been reduced to mere platitude. Babones (2016) is unequivocal in declaring the Westphalian era over. He comes to such a conclusion by observing the frequency with which the United States and its allies, notably the United Kingdom and France, and to a lesser degree, their common rival, Russia, have waged war to settle the internal affairs of other states. In particular, they have tended to impose regime-change in states that have pursued policies of national political and economic independence. And interstate war is but only one way of undermining sovereignty. As Babones (2016) notes, "The United States employs a wide range of policy instruments to install and maintain constitutional orders that accord with its desires in countries around the world, often in conjunction with its (many) allies." Be that as it may, one cannot help but feel that in the present global political conjuncture, Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela and Cuba are considered to be rogue states in the eyes of the West in general, and its lead-nation, the United States, in particular.

In the meantime, while such geo-political machinations continue, climate change accelerates. Stassen observes that the "current rate of carbon emissions is unprecedented... (in) the ... past 66 million years." (Stassen 2016: 1-2). Since September 2016, the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide has surpassed 400 parts per million (ppm). Atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration of 400 ppm is the symbolic red line of global climate change, since it roughly translates to an increase of 2 degrees Celsius in average global temperature.

Although an increase of 2 degree Celsius is the target of the latest international climate treaty, the 2015 Paris Agreement, it has been contested for being set too high. Wasdell argues that in light of "advances in understanding of implicit sea-level raise and the dynamic response of global climate to small changes in average surface temperature", the temperature limit has to be set "below 1 degree Celsius if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change." (Wasdell 2015: v). This view is corroborated by Wadhams (2014), who notes that owing to climate sensitivity of the planet to CO<sub>2</sub>, and to the fact that the latter endures for so long in the atmosphere, our carbon budget has already been spent. He adds: "The carbon dioxide that we put into the atmosphere, which now exceeded 400 parts per million, is sufficient... to actually raise global temperatures in the end by about 4 degrees."<sup>3</sup>

Other researchers have meanwhile arrived at the conclusion that a 4 degree Celsius rise in global temperature saturates the earth's vegetation - in its capacity as a natural carbon sink - to sequester atmospheric carbon dioxide. This leads to the rapid release of carbon back into the atmosphere, which only adds to more global warming. It is owing to such projections that Smith et. al. (2015) suggest that we could be on the verge of "near-term acceleration in the rate of temperature change."

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<sup>3</sup> Wadhams, Peter. 2014. "Is it time to think about engineering our climate?". University of Cambridge, International Summer Schools Geoengineering Debate. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tvYRNPC3\\_A&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tvYRNPC3_A&feature=youtu.be). Last accessed 15 June 2018.

The prospect of accelerated and abrupt - rather than gradual - climate change has to be considered in the context of earth's ability to continue serving as habitat for humans and other forms of terrestrial life. One of the necessary conditions for earth to sustain life is its ability to grow food. On this score, it is important to mention Methane, another greenhouse gas with 20-25 times the climate-forcing potential of carbon dioxide. While the Arctic region is the source of much of the earth's Methane, with much of it trapped in the permafrost, the latter is rapidly thawing due to global warming, generating concerns about the precipitation of runaway climate-change. Accordingly, this led to a 2014 report in the Sydney Morning Herald to warn, "Let us be clear: if these methane escapes continue to grow, the risk is they could drive the planet into accelerated or 'runaway' global warming. The last time this happened, 50 million years ago, global temperatures rose by an estimated 9 or 10 degrees. In the present context, that would mean the end of the world's food supply."<sup>4</sup>

Such reports on the climate suggest rather bleak consequences for the human species, since the complex ecological systems needed for life on earth appear to be getting destroyed much more rapidly than their capacity for regeneration. In ecological terms, we have shot past the point of no-return, and the prospect of whether humanity can survive itself seems to be a reality we need to brace ourselves for. It appears that the question is no longer whether but when the cataclysm of species extinction, including that of humans, begins on a significant scale.

Scientists who are cognisant of the seriousness of global climate change and its consequences for the planet's ecological systems are giving us just decades before wholesale ecological collapse. It is a shuddering thought, yet many among us are either oblivious to the severity of the crisis or seem to be awaiting institutional solutions. The dominant institutions of the system, meanwhile, seem bent upon continuing with business as usual. The term "sustainability" has been co-opted as a marketable catchphrase that gives the appearance of corporate social responsibility for environmental sustainability, when the de facto concern seems, invariably, to be the sustainability of profits. Such is the law of (economic) value, the imperative of capitalism. I will clarify this relationship between the ecological crisis and colonisation in a moment.

Meanwhile, our technologically-mediated culture, which is infused with the liberal idea of constant progress, seriously militates against our ability to make sense of current realities. On this score, Marcuse (1964) has been vindicated in his observation about the diminished need for blatant forms of terror in the modern age, for there was now technology. Meanwhile, oppositional thinking hardly needs to be suppressed, for it barely happens.

In sum, humanity is today mired deep in the throes of a deep and escalating crisis of simultaneously political, economic, social, cultural, and ecological dimensions, and there are no signs of abatement. More importantly, there is little acknowledgement of the severity of the crisis, much less the pursuit of viable practices to resolve it. In fact, we seem to be collectively paralysed and merely awaiting its denouement. The question of whether humanity can survive itself has now ceased being a mere topic of philosophical reflection; it is now a rapidly unfolding reality.

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/beware-the-dragon-of-runaway-climate-change-20140814-1040cw.html>. Last accessed: 16 June 2018.

But what has the foregoing discussion about modern civilisation - notably, its political economic expressions and its ecological consequences - to do with colonial relations and colonisation? How have we arrived at this point, seemingly at the precipice of our collective demise? In particular, what connects modernity with the Western colonial project and with the ecological and political-economic crises of our time? I submit that it is against the backdrop of imminent ecological and civilisational collapse, and nothing less, that the urgency of immediate decolonisation needs to be appreciated.

In the following section, I will sketch in broad and somewhat schematic fashion the underlying causes for the situation that we find ourselves. This is a situation that I believe captures the essential meaning of “colonialism”, for it is undergirded by a colonial logic that implicates not only our relationships – with both human others and with non-human nature - but also our forms of knowledge as well as our subjectivities.

## MODERNITY, COLONIALITY, AND THE WEST

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I submit that “colonialism” is a process involving a dominant group’s exploitation of social and natural domains – colonies - that it has generally marked out to be racially as well as spatially and temporally different from itself. In the modern age, the West was the leading exemplar of such colonialism, allowing its exploitation of the non-West based on constructions of racial, temporal, and spatial differences. Such construction of difference was picked up by the Japanese thinker, Yoshimi Takeuchi, who noted that for Europe to be Europe it had to invade the East: “Only by breaking into the heterogeneous, was Europe able to confirm itself.” (cited in Muto 2010: 178). This view is echoed by Wang Hui, who observes, “Historically, Asia is not an Asian concept but a European concept.” (cited in Muto 2010: 178). It would appear that the symptoms described in the foregoing are the result of such a colonial process and its defining logic, which I refer to as “coloniality.”

The concept of “coloniality” is attributable to the Peruvian sociologist, Anibal Quijano (2000), and has been described as the “invisible and constitutive side” of modernity (Mignolo 2007: 451). According to Quijano (2010: 23), “coloniality” involves, in the first instance, a “colonisation of the imagination of the dominated.” It is because of such mental colonisation among the world’s postcolonial peoples that we can speak of the enduring effects of colonialism despite the occurrence of *de jure* de-colonisation - national liberation - worldwide. It is important to note, accordingly, that coloniality invokes not only economic, political, and military domination, but also their epistemic and mental consequences.

Quijano invokes coloniality also to describe a “matrix of power” through which, for roughly over the past four centuries, the West has manipulated and managed its control of global realities in four interrelated domains.<sup>5</sup> The elements of this matrix include the realms of material reproduction, encompassing the economy and its institutional governance,

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<sup>5</sup> I define the West broadly as being constituted historically by North America (the United States, Canada), Australia, New Zealand, and what would previously have been Western Europe. Essentially, I conceive of “the West” in terms of a cultural geography rather than a physical one. As such, I deploy the term to refer to the above entities who derive their cultural identity from the legacy of the European Enlightenment, or what Trouillot (2002) calls the “North Atlantic Universals”.

sociality,<sup>6</sup> and knowledge and subjective-formation. As Quijano (2010: 22) observes, “A relation of direct, political, social and cultural domination was established by the Europeans over the conquered of all continents.” This far-reaching domination was literally all-encompassing, for between 1492 and 1941, Europeans had conquered 84 per cent of the globe, establishing colonies and spreading their influence across every inhabited continent (Hoffman 2015).

The consequence of Western dominance meant that Eurocentrism, which was constituted by the general belief in the superiority and universality of Western experience, would become commonplace. This would be the case not only in the West but, gradually, in the non-West too (Kho 2009). According to Latouche (1996: 3), “Westernisation” entailed the “global uniformity of lifestyles” and the “standardisation of the mind”. Because it widely became associated with a way of life that was not only supposedly legitimate, but better, it would become a popular aspiration throughout the world, not least among its colonised populations. This essentially led to the widespread belief that the unique historical experience of the West should become the universal fate of humankind. As Muto (2010: 178) aptly puts it, “The West appropriates for itself the privilege of turning its private affairs and concerns into public affairs and concerns of the non-West.” Accordingly, Quijano (2010: 23) describes that, “cultural Europeanisation was transformed into an aspiration. It was a way of participating and later to reach the same material benefits and the same power as the Europeans: viz, to conquer nature – in short for ‘development’. European culture became a universal cultural model.”

With this development, Eurocentrism - involving Western ways of apprehending the world - was no longer simply another ethnocentrism, for it now took on the status of a universal perspective, akin to a god’s-eye-view of the world. In line with these features of Eurocentrism, typical Western readings of modernity tend to be unequivocal in their celebration of modernity as the high-point not only of the West, but of humanity more generally (Landes 1998; Pinker 2011; Ferguson 2011; McCloskey 2016; Toulmin 1990). Not surprisingly, such positive readings of modernity owe largely to the fact that they are based on accounts that are self-referential, what I would regard as “internal” accounts of modernity that are being offered by its beneficiaries and proponents.

In contrast, it can be said that Quijano, Mignolo et. al. (2010) evaluate modernity from the vantage-point of the colonies and those left out of modernity’s supposed success-story. They challenge the latter account of modernity by bringing to light the hidden story of “the people without history” (Wolf 1982) who have invariably had to bear the costs of those supposedly making history. As Mignolo (2007: 7) notes, the (intellectual) task then becomes one “of uncovering the origin of...‘the myth of modernity’ itself. Modernity includes a rational ‘concept’ of emancipation that we affirm and subsume. But, at the same time, it develops an irrational myth, a justification for genocidal violence.”

Quijano et. al. thus seek to draw our attention to coloniality, modernity’s other – darker – side, which implicates logics and practices of unremitting exploitation and predation. It is important to mention that the nature and severity of modernity’s violence have often

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<sup>6</sup> By “sociality”, I am referring to the dominant idealised social forms by which people establish and maintain relations. In this case, I am particularly thinking of contractual, *gessellschaft* social formations.

remained hidden because it is framed within a salvationist rhetoric of human freedom, individual rationality, and emancipation, not to mention the popular notions of *liberte*, *egalite*, *fraternite*, after the catchcry of the French Revolution. Such rhetoric has proven extremely effective propping up the progressivist ideology of liberalism, since it advertises the beneficence of modernity. It was unsurprising, as such, that modernity would have seemed appealing, for it did not just promise techno-material progress, its accomplishment putatively signified the salvation of the world too. Nevertheless, while this might have been the view of those seeking to celebrate modernity's achievements and emancipatory promise, those with a more complete and critical perspective would likely have been aware of its colonial propensities.

To be sure, then, coloniality is the *sin qua non* of modernity whose feted accomplishments are rendered possible only by the perniciousness of colonial domination. As world-systems analyses have shown, there is a Third World because there exists a First World, wealth in the metropolises because of expropriation in the periphery, rights in the one because there is repression in the other (see Magdoff 1978). Meanwhile, the relationship between modernity and coloniality – or more specifically, between rationality on the one hand and repression on the other – is obfuscated by the rhetoric of modernity, which takes on a salvationist garb. Be that as it may, many of us fail – or refuse – to see how the inextricable relationship between Western reason and repression is embedded in the modernist project. After all, seemingly unlike anything the non-West has been able to offer, the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity lays claim to a progressive social agenda that promises universal human emancipation. The monopoly of the West, therefore, was not simply confined to the “hard power” inherent in its telos of techno-material development, it appears to have had the last word on “soft power”, on the progressive ideology of social change too.

It is important here, in view of this apparent monopoly of Eurocentrism over our individual and collective imaginations, to reiterate why “coloniality” is conceptually useful for understanding contemporary global realities. In the first instance, it is pertinent to note that “coloniality” differs from and expands on the more limiting and limited concept of “colonialism”. Whereas the latter has a certain anachronistic ring to it insofar as it invokes classical colonialism as a form of military domination, or even its neo-colonial variant as economic subjugation, “coloniality” as per Quijano (2010), invokes an all-encompassing matrix of power that transcends the idea of colonisation as involving military and/or economic domination.

As noted, Western manipulation of this all-encompassing colonial matrix historically meant that it could more or less establish its control not only over the domains of economy, governance or sociality, but also subjectivity and knowledge on a global-scale. This has made Eurocentrism and its ontological expression qua modernisation/Westernisation an indubitable fact of modern life as they manifest across the above said domains. Consequently, although Quijano (2000) may not effectively be saying anything particularly new with regard to Western colonialism, it is to his credit to have synthesised the disparate observations of its many-sidedness and innovatively brought them within a single formulation under the rubric of “coloniality”. It needs to be recognised, moreover, that the success of this conceptual move is evidenced by the fact that it has greater purchase explaining contemporary realities.

Not only does Quijano's (2000) "coloniality of power" or "colonial matrix of power" account for the historical origins of Western modernity, thereby accepting and subsuming the traditional understanding of colonialism as a form of direct occupation, coercion, and surplus expropriation, it also accounts for Western monopoly in the realm of "soft power", pertaining to the latter's control over the production of knowledge and subjectivities. Therefore, "coloniality" accounts not only for colonialism as a political-economic phenomenon of domination and surplus expropriation, it accounts for such a process by elucidating its underlying *logos*. Significantly, the notion of coloniality as the "logic" of colonial domination allows us to explain Western hegemony in other realms of modern life, not least its forms of political governance, its forms of sociality, and its dominance in the production of modern subjectivity and knowledge. Elsewhere, I have documented how this logic extends to the attempted colonisation of nature by way of intellectual property claims on biological material (Kho 2012).

Understanding coloniality as an all-encompassing matrix framing virtually all aspects of modern life therefore allows us to make sense of the apparent paradox between rationality and colonial violence. It allows us to reconcile the evident contradiction between the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity and its violent actuality. Hence, while the discrepancy between modernity's rhetoric and reality can be observed to be paradoxical – with the West deploying discourses of emancipation at the same time it is gratuitously inflicting colonial violence, especially upon non-Western Others – there seems to be good reason, in light of its historically-enduring nature, to interpret this gap between word and deed to be deliberate and self-conscious on the part of those who have historically controlled the levers of global political power, namely, Western ruling elites. Arguably, the disparity between the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity and the actuality of coloniality is therefore not an aberration, which is how it tends often to be explained away. Rather, as the historical record reveals, and Quijano (1989) is correct to point out, this supposed paradox is not an inadvertent violation of the values suggested by its rhetoric, but is rather constitutive of modernity itself.

Modernity is, therefore, sustained by a paradox whereby its celebrated virtue of reason - Descartes' *ratio* - co-exists *pari passu* with the violence of colonial repression. For this reason, modernity's emancipatory rhetoric has become unconvincing on the basis of its historical record. It is this substantial empirical record that leads me to infer that modernity and coloniality - as much as their respective auxiliaries of reason and repression, freedom and unfreedom - are different sides of the same coin; they are inextricably linked and coeval with each other.

## COLONIALITY AND THE GEO-POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

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How one conceives of and evaluates modernity thus appears to be contingent on where and how one is physically, socially, and geo-politically placed in the historical production of the modern world. It is clear from this that knowledge does not emerge *ex nihilo*, but has a sociological basis, with the content of produced knowledge largely inflected by the historical, social, and physical location of the knower. This sociology of knowledge (Mannheim 1952) accounts for why what a Hobbes, Weber, Popper, or even a Marx or Foucault would say

about modernity would tend to differ from what a Gandhi, Fanon, du Bois, Anzaldua, or even a Mao, would have to offer about it.

Whereas the former group of European thinkers would have grappled with modernity as heirs of a cultural phenomenon they could rightfully claim to be theirs, the latter group of non-European thinkers have, in contrast, had to deal with modernity as an alien cultural phenomenon imposed by the West upon what were erstwhile autochthonous cultural and civilisational trajectories. In other words, by virtue of its foreign and Western provenance, modernity/rationality for the non-West has historically manifested as coloniality in the first instance; it only ceased to be recognised as such when colonialism, particularly of the mind (Nandy 1983), had succeeded on a global-scale. Accordingly, whereas the former group of named European intellectuals would have been afforded the self-assurance, capaciousness, and privilege to contemplate their own civilisational accomplishment of modernity, especially when speaking in praise of it, the latter group of named non-Western thinkers and activists has typically had to grapple with the colonial violence that modernity implied, often as a matter of the cultural life-and-death of their societies. Whereas undertaking a critique of modernity might have been an ethical option for one group, it was an existential imperative for the other.

Accordingly, it is because of the contrasting political and social locations of these two groups of thinkers that have resulted in their opposed experiences of modernity, in turn accounting for their different assessments of it. Dussel (1995) speaks about this asymmetry of epistemic privilege and its consequence as follows:

Modernity is, for many (for Jurgen Habermas or Charles Taylor) an essentially or exclusively European phenomenon. In these lectures, I will argue that modernity is, in fact, a *European phenomenon but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content*. Modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as the ‘center’ of a World History that it inaugurates: the ‘periphery’ that surrounds this center is consequently part of its self-definition. The occlusion of this periphery (and of the role of Spain and Portugal in the formation of the modern world system from the late fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries) leads the major contemporary thinkers of the ‘center’ into a Eurocentric fallacy in their understanding of modernity. If their understanding of the genealogy of modernity is thus partial and provincial, their attempts at a critique or a defense of it are likewise unilateral and, in part, false.

The importance of the thinker’s subjectivity in the production of knowledge is what Mignolo (2007: 6) refers to as “the geo- and body-politics of knowledge”, a notion which suggests that the knowledge produced in the metropolises would differ from that in the periphery because their contrasting geo-political milieus would afford their respective thinkers varying and even divergent corporeal and subjective experiences from which knowledge is necessarily produced.

It can immediately be seen that this insight about the geo- and body-politics of knowledge offers a ready corrective to Descartes’ erroneous syllogism, *cogito ergo sum* (“I think therefore I am”). Descartes’ *cogito* inaugurated modern philosophy by privileging the mind and the rationality it symbolised; but, more substantially, it initiated a specious epistemic claim about the nature of reality: that the mind (consciousness), necessarily of the individual, was

separate from body (matter) and the world. Despite being fallaciously reductionist, this epistemic reductionism involving the sundering of mind from body, would come to define modern Western cosmology. It would lay the ground for modern/Western understanding of all reality, encompassing the natural as well as the social worlds. As the old saw aptly puts it: What is Matter? Never Mind! What is Mind? No Matter!

Descartes' privileging of reason (rationality), therefore, involved a clear delineation of knowing from being, the knower from the known, and the ideational from the material. This is a dichotomy whose implications were far-reaching in engendering yet more dualities: not least, between the epistemic and the ontic, reason (of the mind) and passions (of the body), truth and falsehood, spirit and matter, subject and object, and, of course, also fact and value (or meaning). In the last case, the True (as given by scientific reason) and the Good (as given by ethics) were conceived of to exist independently of each other, giving rise to what can be understood as an amoral universe. Perhaps it is this very amorality that accounts for the blithe dismissal of the supposed paradox between the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity and its violent manifestation.

Summing, Descartes' *cogito* - "I think therefore I am" - first implies that mind is more certain than matter; and, second, that the exclusive emphasis on one's thinking is grounded in the belief that one can be certain only of the contents of one's mind. It can be seen that the Cartesian emphasis on mind - *one's* mind - and its thoughts implicates a certain subjective individualism. Indeed, as a mode of cognition, rationality had from the beginning been conceived of as an individualistic phenomenon. It is here that Descartes' reputation as the father of modern philosophy lies, held in place by the two characteristic pillars of modernity, namely, solipsistic reason and solitary individualism.

Yet these are also the two pillars of modernity that Mignolo's (2007) notion of the geo- and body-politics of knowledge tears down. In his discussion about the geo-politics of knowledge, it becomes clear that the mind is not in fact solipsistic, nor is the act of thinking individualistic. Instead, the celebration of modernity by Eurocentrists on the one hand and its condemnation by subalterns on the other, suggest that the reality is better captured by literally turning Descartes' syllogism on its head, hence: "I am therefore I think". And it is not just a matter of one's social conditions instigating the act of thought; social position determines its nature, too. This insight thus repudiates Descartes' conception of reason as individualistic, independent of the world as well as of others. Instead, it situates the bases of our thinking in the social and geo-political milieu that we live: thinking is and has always been inseparable from being, which is collective.

But Descartes' error has had other grave implications for the modernist project and the way it has constrained our way of life. While Cartesian-inspired cogitation involved an inward, subjective, turn, the material world was to be grasped as object to be treated mechanistically and functionally, in the same way that an uninvolved external observer would. In this fashion Descartes mechanized the world so that humans could become its "masters and possessors" (Taylor 1989: 149), in the process, introducing yet another duality: the divide between humanity and nature.

To be sure, this human-nature divide entailed relations between an individualized humanity governed by reason and the passive nature that would come under its control (Merchant 1980; Toulmin 1990). Here, Descartes' deployment of reason lay with seeking a

mathematical understanding of the natural world in order to establish man's mastery over it. It is in this regard that Cartesian reason (or Mind) can be understood as a disengaged reason: the rational individual Mind is sundered not only from Body, the individual is also conceptualised as existing independently from the natural and social worlds. Coloniality, the logos of *divide et impera*, was thus set afoot.

It can be seen that it was on the basis of Descartes' reductionist and exclusivist reason that the Western colonial project was founded. In particular, the human-nature dichotomy that it inspired has allowed those in the metropolises touting modernity's celebrated accomplishments to do so without having to be aware of, much less be concerned about, their costs. These costs, which are economic, political, cultural, as well as ecological, have so casually been disregarded because they have been externalised and borne by the colonies and its hapless denizens. The role of Cartesian rationality has been significant, since it is evident that the various forms of conceptual divisions instigated by Descartes' *cogito* – for instance, of mind from body, self from other, and humans from nature – have served to facilitate the blithe externalisation of modernity's costs from one realm to the other throughout the history of colonialism.

Furthermore, as the West relegated the colonised to an-other temporality (Fabian 1983), it effectively excluded them from humanity and defined them into "nature". A Eurocentred linear temporal scheme, with its accompanying ideology of developmentism and its corollaries of "backwardness" and "progress", thus emerged. Indeed, the proponents of modernity, especially of its Western prototype, have often placed indigenous peoples, people of colour, women, and peasants at the earlier stages of this temporality, thereby conceiving of them as "backward" and ontologically closer to "nature". And it was through the temporal and conceptual exclusion of these marginalised peoples from the category of "human" and their association with "nature" that have facilitated and actualised the process of colonial exploitation and expropriation (Werlhof 1988: 96).

Consequently, in the same way that the peripheries in the world-system have been analysed on the macro-level of global geo-politics to serve as colonies for metropolitan capitalist extraction (Wallerstein 2011, Frank 1966, Amin 1976), I am here extending the argument by submitting that the marginalised populations of coloured people, women, peasants and their milieus, have analogously served as colonies for expropriation so that modernity and its way of life can be reproduced and sustained.

An example of modernist expropriation is exemplified by the way value is produced in women's reproductive work and "transferred" to the formal economy *sans* compensation. The regenerative ecological processes of (non-human) nature that are similarly expropriated serves as another equivalent example. Although these vital, life-giving activities are conceptually considered to be of "zero" monetary value and dismissed as "non-work", it is evident that they are the *sin qua non* of the formal money-exchange economy and are indispensable for the latter's functioning.

Yet, because traditional women's work and the natural environment have conceptually been categorised into "nature", the tendency has been for reproductive domestic work and the ecologically regenerative processes of non-human nature to be taken for granted and exploited. Consequently, the life-nourishing values such activities generate are effectively expropriated without acknowledgement. Seen in another light, this is equivalent to

homemakers (primarily women) and the environment paying a subsidy to the formal money-exchange economy. This is a situation that still obtains, explaining why coloniality persists despite the *de jure* accomplishment of worldwide national liberation in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. Although colonial occupation may have ended, it is apparent that the structures of knowledge that the coloniser established during his tenure continue to exert undue influence on ways of thinking and being in the former colonies.

## DECOLONISATION, DECOLONIALITY, AND DE-LINKING IN PRAXIS

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Modernity, here, has been revealed to be a project whose cultural origins lay in the West. Owing to this, the project of modernity has involved the propagation of the Enlightenment ideas of rationality, freedom, equality, and emancipation. At the same time, the above has shown that the project of modernity paradoxically also consists of a “darker side” (Mignolo 2011), entailing gratuitous colonial violence and coercion on a global scale. This supposedly darker side of modernity resides in Western control and manipulation of what Quijano (2000) has termed, the “colonial matrix of power.” Because the elements of this colonial matrix include the mundane domains of economic re-production, political governance, sociality, as well as that of knowledge and subjectivity formation, it is reasonable to conclude that coloniality – the *logos* of colonisation – is pervasive across the gamut of social life on a global-scale. It is because of the perpetuation of such logics, not least via the “Westernisation of the world” (Latouche 1996, Kanth 2015), that the war on Others and non-human nature has continued, notwithstanding enduring anti-colonial resistance around the world till now.

Nonetheless, as already noted, since the severity of the ecological crisis threatens the future of our civilisation, de-linking from the matrix of coloniality would appear an urgent imperative. But, what prospect of this? How are we to de-link as an everyday, practical, matter? What would de-colonisation-as-praxis amount to?

While a lack of space prevents us from detailing how such a de-linking should proceed, it would be fitting here to lay out the (de-colonial) possibilities on offer. To begin with, our realising that modernity has a “darker” side in which most of us are implicated constitutes the first step in the process of de-linking, de-colonisation, and better yet, decoloniality.

It should be apparent that de-linking would involve breaking away from the matrix of coloniality. As the above has revealed, this may be pursued across different domains and at multiple levels. Given the elements of the colonial matrix, de-linking can occur in our relations of politics, economics, in sociality, and in the production of knowledge. And it can be pursued in any of these realms simultaneously: at the macro-international level of geo-politics, at the more intimate level of inter-subjectivity and sociality, as well as at that pertaining to the interiority of the individual person. The praxis of decolonisation and decoloniality therefore affords a variety of options to all who recognise the colonial logics (coloniality) that modernity implies, and who are looking for an exit.

Consequently, while the national liberation movements following World War Two represented a watershed in the history of colonial relations, it is clear from our contemporary predicament that they have been far from adequate. Today, as Western hegemony diminishes and China re-emerges into prominence on the global scene, we are witnessing a re-structuring of the international geo-political order. For example, primarily due to the

increasing political clout of China in international affairs, we have seen in the past few years a process of de-linking in general and de-Westernisation in particular, with the establishment of alternative global political-economic formations such as BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China), the Asian Infrastructural and Investment Bank (AIIB), and the Belt-Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>7</sup>

While the interpretations of these global developments vary, what is unarguable is that these Chinese state-led initiatives effectively amount to a shift away from the neo-liberal hegemony of the Washington Consensus – comprising the free-market fundamentalism of the World Bank, IMF, and the U.S. Treasury - while simultaneously charting the course of an alternative global political, economic, and trading order. And in light of the fact that the Washington Consensus has prevailed over the global economy since the collapse of state-socialism in the late-1980s, it would be reasonable to describe this Chinese state-led effort of de-linking as both “audacious” and “modest” simultaneously.

These China-led initiatives are “audacious” since they radically challenge the monopoly the West has maintained over the colonial matrix of power. On the other hand, describing Chinese de-linking via de-Westernisation as “modest” also seems apt, for they merely represent an attempt to shift away from the Western dominated capitalist world-order rather than a disavowal of capitalist relations per se. It is for this reason that I see a parallel between such relatively “modest” efforts at contemporary de-Westernisation and the movements of de-colonisation and national liberation of the post-WWII era: they aim only to break from the direct clutches of Western domination but not transcend its underlying logic. Still, it is a necessary first step whose relative modesty is matched by its boldness. This seemingly paradoxical evaluation of Chinese de-Westernisation can perhaps be explained by the “totality” of Western dominance that has been established over the past four-centuries. In the West’s stranglehold over the colonial matrix of power, any de-colonial move would be considered audacious while likely also being limited in its consequence.

To be sure, then, de-linking in the forms of de-colonisation and de-Westernisation *do not imply* de-coloniality; while the former are necessary, they are not sufficient for the accomplishment of the latter. Such de-colonial moves are limited, for they do not directly challenge the predatory logics of modernity as such. Hence, we witness China’s BRI and AIIB challenging Western dominance of global capitalism while leaving the logic of capitalism intact. The capitalist goal of profit-expansion still obtains but what is new is that the game is now played with the significant involvement of non-Western others; in this case, Chinese economic and political elites, who had previously been marginalised within the racialized hierarchy of the modern capitalist order.

A further point to note about the restricted nature of such de-linking via de-colonisation and de-Westernisation is that they tend to occur at the level of the macro-structural, at the official and institutional levels of the nation-state and its international relations. Apropos, the processes of de-linking here thus become the concerns of a nation-state’s international diplomacy, and are taken up by its ruling-elites, invariably, to the exclusion of the majority.

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<sup>7</sup> The latter is a globally ambitious infrastructural-development project aiming to link China to Europe by way of establishing greater co-operation and connectivity, especially between Eurasian countries and the PRC. The BRI is slated to eventuate in a land-based Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) on the one hand, and an ocean-based Maritime Silk Road (MSR) on the other, hence its appellation.

These processes of de-linking tend, therefore, to be somewhat removed from the popular practices of everyday life on the ground. Be that as it may, it is no wonder that colonial logics – coloniality – should persist despite the attainment of formal national political independence.

So, while China's Belt-Road Initiative might well signify a political and historic moment of de-linking via de-Westernisation, we should harbour no illusions about their potential to expunge colonial tendencies in any meaningful or comprehensive sense. Instead, we should expect the imperatives of capitalism to still govern the nature of the economy worldwide, and for its pernicious exploitation to continue on the backs of nature, women, and supposedly lesser Others, as the modernist pursuit of unlimited growth continues. It is indeed for this reason that some would consider China, with its investments around the world today, including its BRI project, to be at the forefront of a new wave of colonialism.<sup>8</sup> We are seeing the franchise of modernity expand to include other geographies and ethnicities, thereby making them – and us - all culturally Western (and modern) now. For this reason, it is important to re-iterate: de-Westernisation is necessary, but it is not sufficient to enable it to become a panacea for colonialism's predatory cultural logic.

While Chinese initiatives of de-Westernisation represent a de-colonial move of de-linking from the enduring Western matrix of coloniality, it should be recognised that they merely re-constitute relations within one element of it, notably the reconfiguration of Sino-Western political economic relations. That is, China's growing economic prowess has enabled it to break from its erstwhile dependence on Western capital, allowing it not only to circumvent pro-Western political economic institutions, but to establish institutions of its own while openly welcoming the participation of other countries. In this manner, Chinese ruling elites are re-building the capitalist world order to shift the global political economic equation in their favour. The AIIB and the BRI are just two examples of such a development in recent years. However, since the said initiatives merely challenge the Western monopoly of ostensibly global political and economic institutions rather than their exploitative nature, modernity continues to cast its long shadow. Coloniality is, thus, effectively left to perpetuate, with the continued economic exploitation of nature and others, and the expropriation of value they produce. Here, the distinction between colonisation and coloniality is once again made clear. Whereas classical colonialism involves explicit military domination, the notion of coloniality implicates its invisible cultural logic: economic expropriation continues via a colonization that occurs seemingly without colonies.

This distinction between colonisation and coloniality explains the persistence of exploitative relations even after the end of classical, settler-colonialism. After all, in being a cultural logic, coloniality can reproduce in time and place beyond the geo-cultural borders of its origins. Hence, while the West may have been the birthplace of modern colonialism, giving rise to a specific cultural consciousness governing human-nature and human-human relations that, in turn, spawned a specific kind of economy impelled by infinite growth, there

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<sup>8</sup> See: Manero, Elizabeth. 2017. "China's Investment in Africa: The New Colonialism?" In *Harvard Political Review*. February 3. See also: Wroe, David. 2018. "'How empires begin.' China has made its global move. This is Australia's Response" In *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 22 June. For the effects of China's investments in Central Asia, see: Lang, Johannes. 2018. "The Next Great Game: The Clash over Central Asia." In *Harvard Political Review*. June 13.

is no basis to expect its confinement to only the West as such. Cultural processes, as much as ideas and thought, are transmissible by virtue of being mental phenomena, capable of readily being taken up by others. The fact that such colonial phenomena are the expression of a specific consciousness, namely, a logic of coloniality that can be easily transmitted, implies that such phenomena can transcend time-space parameters and take root in other cultural, geographic, and temporal contexts. Coloniality is thus the logic of empire, implicating colonialism in its evisceration of the culture and minds of the colonised. (see Fanon 2007 (1961), Nandy 1983, and Memmi 1967). Coloniality thus refers to colonialism's intangible and often invisible dimension that most potently and perniciously (de)forms the minds and subjectivities of the colonised.

## CONCLUSION

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The discussion engendered by this paper highlights the necessity for radical decolonisation qua de-coloniality - a de-linking from colonialism's underlying logic - in order to resolve the civilizational crises that beset us. Accordingly, de-coloniality involves the decolonisation of our minds. De-coloniality is to the mind what de-colonisation is to the colonisation of political economic structures. It involves, foremost, a process of de-linking from the Western colonial matrix of power in the production of knowledge, subjectivity, and consciousness.

It follows that since the mind is a human endowment, de-coloniality is a process for which each of us can and has to be individually responsible. Indeed, because it entails the decolonisation of our minds and the extirpation of colonial logics from our practices, de-coloniality is an option we can choose, particularly when we have come to understand the exploitative nature of modernity and how we are all implicated in it today. Still, as noted, the first step towards de-coloniality involves our necessarily seeing the homology between modernity, rationality, and coloniality. This would be followed by attempts to break away from the colonial matrix that modern life implies.

There is no space here to examine the multifarious ways that concrete practices of de-coloniality can be undertaken, but the above discussion regarding the geo-politics of knowledge seems to offer a fitting point to begin. For a start, the insight about knowledge being a function of the thinker's social and geo-political location dispenses with the Eurocentric notion that Western knowledge is universal. A necessary step towards decolonising the mind would then require a deflation of the knowledge-claims of the West, a move I believe Chakrabarty (2000) invokes when he speaks of "provincializing Europe."

I have further argued that Western and modern ways of knowing and being have been developed on the epistemic and ontological foundations of Descartes' mind-body dichotomy. This, in turn, has spawned other divides, such as that existing between self and others and between humans and nature. While this has resulted in the accomplishment of modernity as a condition that is unsurpassed in the production of things, especially commodities, its singular and superlative material productivity has been predicated on the severe exploitation of "others" - human as well as non-human nature - that has within the span of roughly the past 100 years, contributed to drastic human-induced ecological change on a scale unforeseen in millennia. It has already been noted that earth, which serves as our habitat, is now seriously imperilled by the prospect of abrupt, runaway climate-change and that human extinction cannot be ruled out. As Bateson observed nearly five decades ago,

“The unit of survival or adaptation is organism plus environment. We are learning by bitter experience that the organism which destroys its environment destroys itself.” (Bateson 1972: 483).

It should be recognised, then, that while the condition of modernity has involved the ever-relentless development of the material forces of production, it has been woefully inadequate in producing meanings that give sense to life. These observations proffer de-colonial possibilities along three trajectories, which may be pursued concurrently. I now signal them by way of conclusion.

First, dealing with Descartes’ solipsistic *cogito* as a manoeuvre of de-coloniality requires that we re-discover more holistic, empathic, and aesthetic conceptions of being-in-the-world. This involves countering the exclusive celebration of individualist and instrumentalist reason by cultivating an aesthetic of moral feeling, which is always communal, shared, and inter-subjective. At another level, this may be understood as involving efforts to overcome individualist and contractual social forms - notably, *gesellschaft* (society) - in favour of affective and moral *gemeinschaft* (community). Drawing from my specialised field of Chinese studies, I am aware that the Confucian tradition, for one, has much to recommend in this regard. Ames commends as much, observing that the “Confucian project begins from a recognition of the wholeness of experience and the constitutive nature of relationality that is entailed by it.” (Ames 2011:71).

Second, our move of de-coloniality also requires that we reconceptualise our relations with nature. On this score, my experience in the field of Chinese studies again compels me to commend that classical Chinese cosmology has something useful to say. As Beinfield and Korngold have noted:

The ancient Chinese perceived human beings as a microcosm of the universe that that surrounded them, suffused with the same primeval forces that motivated the macrocosm. They imagined themselves as art of one unbroken wholeness, called Tao, a singular relational continuum within and without. This thinking predates the dissection of mind from body and man from nature that Western culture performed in the seventeenth century.” (Beinfield and Korngold 1992: 5).

Of course, the recognition of the integrity of humans and nature, of humans being a part of nature, is certainly not confined to the indigenous Chinese. Strang observes from her fieldwork in Far North Queensland, Australia, that “indigenous relations to land conflate concepts of Nature and the Self”, adding that “Aboriginal relations to land are therefore implicitly founded on interdependent precepts of social and environmental sustainability.” (Strang 2005: 26).

Third, and, finally, we need to pause and radically re-think what it is that makes a good life, away from modernist conceptions of it as being constituted by unlimited materialist growth.

Undoubtedly, all of the above is easier said than done. How could institutional change attempting to reverse four-plus centuries of colonial relational practices ever be easy? Yet, with abrupt climate-change threatening the destruction of our habitat, and possibly not long after, our very existence, what less can we do? Is the aim of life not the perpetuation of life itself? If so, pursuing de-coloniality in the ways suggested is urgent.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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I am a postcolonial subject who was born in Singapore, but who has lived in Australia, Europe, the United States, China, Hong Kong, and Thailand. My interests lie in re-discovering the possibilities of convivial existence and the good life. I have been conducting field research in China, especially in the southern city of Shenzhen, for the past several years. My scholarly interests span the cultural sciences, the natural sciences, and philosophy. Prior to becoming a scholar, I had a past-life as Singapore's national tennis champion and had a brief career as a fledgling professional. To ameliorate the mind-body antagonism endemic to modern civilisation, I am now beginning a postdoctoral research project investigating the effects of physical training on mental health, human subjectivity, childhood development, and community building.

## PAKANI: A GORWAA STORY

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### ABSTRACT

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Though formal linguistics may seem far removed from projects of decolonization, the materials with which linguists work are often rich with insights into other ways of knowing, other ways of living, and, for the purposes of this volume, other ways of navigating colonial power. *Pakani*, a story gathered within a larger project to understand the grammar of the Gorwaa language, is a vivid account of how the Gorwaa people responded to a mandatory military training programme in which every able-bodied young man was to be sent far away from the traditional homeland and incorporated into a national fighting force. For a descriptive linguist, *Pakani* is a useful source of grammatical structures. For a reader interested in learning about how one group of people engaged with the sweeping changes brought about by European colonization of East Africa, *Pakani* represents one of the few Gorwaa accounts available in English. This paper presents 134 lines of the *Pakani* story, transcribed, translated into English, along with a linguistic gloss of the words. Additionally, each line of text given may be resolved back to its original utterance in an open access audiovisual record available online through the Endangered Languages Archive at SOAS.

**Key words:** Gorwaa – South Cushitic – Afro-Asiatic – Language Documentation – Languages of Tanzania – Verbal Art

## INTRODUCTION

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As a descriptive linguist, much of my work revolves around grammatical structures: observing their distribution, describing their properties, and explaining the system underlying their instantiation. As highly removed from projects of decolonization as this may seem, the materials with which linguists work are often rich with insights into other ways of knowing, other ways of living, and, for the purpose of this current volume, other ways of navigating colonial power.

*Pakani*, a story gathered within a larger project to understand the grammar of the Gorwaa language, is a vivid account of how the Gorwaa people responded to a mandatory military training programme in which every able-bodied young man was to be sent far away from the traditional homeland and incorporated into a national fighting force. For a descriptive linguist, *Pakani* is a useful source of grammatical structures, laid out below in detail. For a reader interested in learning about how one group of people engaged with the sweeping changes brought about by European colonization of East Africa, *Pakani* represents one of the few Gorwaa accounts available in English.

Put differently, the current paper is an exercise in multi-use archiving. Collected by a linguist, the *Pakani* story -- a Gorwaa oral text translated into English as part of the process of linguistic analysis -- is now, with the informed consent of Aakó Bu'ú Saqwaré, openly available online, and accessible to virtually anyone with Internet access. As description of the Gorwaa language continues, so too will the volume and variety of Gorwaa materials (made by Gorwaa people and often, as with *Pakani*, with a Gorwaa audience in mind) increase. For linguists, this is valuable in that it increases the grammatical structures available for the analysis of an underdocumented language. For those engaged in projects of decolonization, this represents a growing body of insight and experience from a people who have experienced (and still do experience) colonialism, and who have come to engage with it in their own way.

## BACKGROUND

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The Gorwaa constitute a small ethnic group of the eastern branch of the Eastern Tanzanian Rift, and are concentrated primarily in Manyara region, especially in and around Babati and its nearby lake. At the time of recording, the Gorwaa were primarily farmers, but also keep small flocks of goats, sheep, and cattle (all three of which play an important role in Gorwaa culture and their pastoralist identity). The Gorwaa language itself is South Cushitic (phylum: Afro-Asiatic), therefore making it markedly different from the majority of languages in the country, which are Bantu. Recent changes to Gorwaa society, including increasing urbanization and a national government policy which all but bans local languages being used in public life has meant that fewer people are speaking Gorwaa, and fewer children are learning Gorwaa. As a result, the Gorwaa language is endangered, and will face significant challenges to remain spoken into the coming centuries (Harvey 2018: 37-46). Academic work about the Gorwaa people and language is scarce, but some sources include early accounts from explorers (Seidel (1910), Obst (1913), Reche (1914)), a traditional story transcribed and translated into German (Heepe (1930)), a pair of ethnographical accounts (Bagshawe (1930), Wada (1984)), a linguistic analysis in which some Gorwaa data is used in

comparison with another nearby Cushitic language, Iraqw (Whiteley (1958)), a detailed examination of forestry and land-use in and around Babati (Maganga (1995)), and a PhD dissertation on nominal morphosyntax including a sketch grammar (Harvey (2018)).

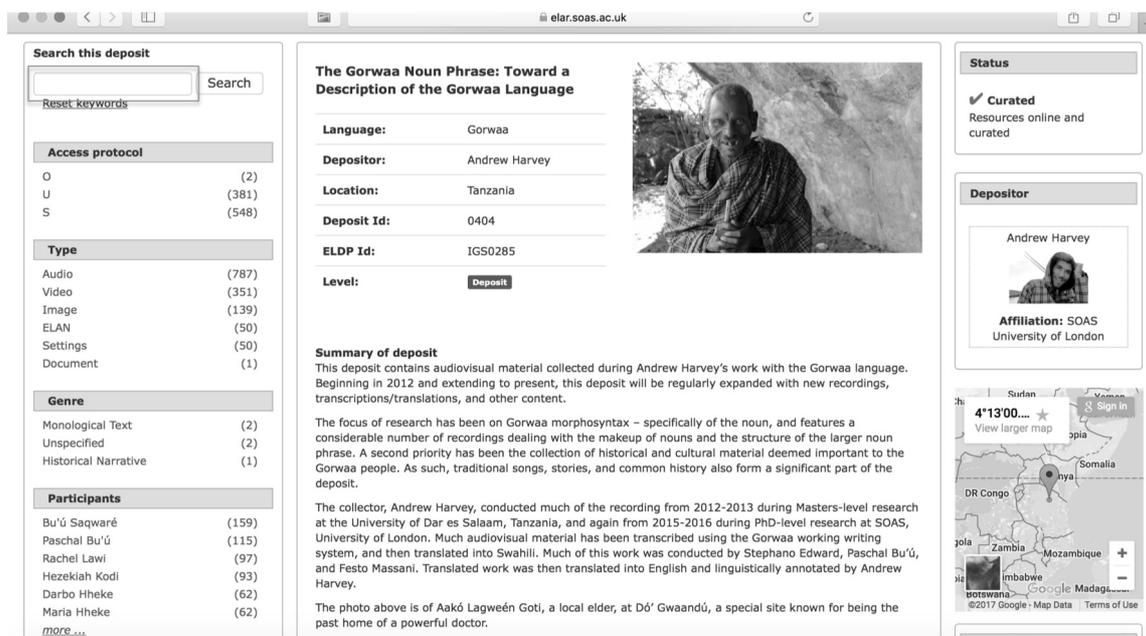
*Pakani* was recorded on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2015 in Yerotonik village, itself a small community in Manyara Region, north-central Tanzania. The storyteller is Aakó Bu'ú Saqwaré, a consummate singer and knowledge-holder. Born in 1954, Aakó Bu'ú was 61 years old at the time of telling and has spent all of his life in and around what may be construed as the traditional Gorwaa homeland.

*Pakani*, itself a word borrowed from Swahili, meaning 'borderland' is the story of a historical event which took place either before or shortly after Aakó Bu'ú's birth (that is, it is not told from his personal memory, but has been told to him either in whole or in parts). It happens during a time when the British colonial power exercised Indirect Rule over what is now Tanzania: a policy wherein ethnic groups were governed through chiefs and subchiefs, who in turn were compelled in various ways to carry out the agendas of the colonial administration (Cameron 1937, Ingham 1965, Graham 1976, and Iliffe 1979). In the Gorwaa context, this meant that the existing hereditary chieftom of the *Harna/aa* clan was given extraordinary new powers to levy taxes, execute colonial works projects such as forest-clearing, as well as punish those who did not comply (often through fines or corporal punishment). This particular story recalls the fallout from the imposition of mandatory military training: the ways and means employed by the paramount chief Dodó Uwo (also pronounced Dodoód) to ensure compliance from his people, and the resistance and defiance of those young men targeted.

The story begins in the miombo woodlands characteristic of the area: hilly forests of *bracystegia* within which the young men of Gorwaaland had withdrawn (ln.8-16), seeking safety in numbers from the *boyáy* (c.f. English 'boy'), low-level village headmen employed by Dodó to arrest the young men for transport to the Kenyan border in the north of the country for six months of dangerous military training. Having seen that physical force alone would not work in achieving the desired number of recruits, Dodó turns to the help of the traditional doctors Barandi Kulee and Leeli Tumla, and together they create a powerful medicine to compel the recalcitrant youth to lay down their weapons and to go to the recruiting station of their own accord (ln.17-34). At Babati, the largest community in the area, the youth were weighed (ln.35-47). If an individual was deemed fit, they would be put on a lorry and brought north to the Kenyan border (*pakani*). Images of desperation are evoked here: fathers pleading with Dodó to spare their sons, going so far as to offer prized cattle in exchange for their freedom. The fear and anger of the recruits is also evident once they board the transport vehicles (ln.48-61), where Dodó's medicine seems to wear off and they begin cursing him for selling them to a foreign land full of danger and uncertainty. Dodó isn't, however, the unscrupulous profiteer the youth see him as. During the military training, the Gorwaa traditional doctors under Dodó's employ are all busy preparing protective medicine to keep the young trainees safe while far from home (ln.62-72). They go so far as to bewitch a bird to fly to the borderland and bring back news of their plight. Upon their return, however (ln.73-100), the youth lambast Dodó in a defiant song, calling the paramount chief and his co-conspirators liars. Enraged at the thankless youth (ln.101-120), Dodó visits the rainmakers, powerful men and women with whom he has traditionally acted as an intermediary for his people. Once there, he conducts rituals which disrupt the seasonal

rains on which his people rely for their food, delivering a devastating multi-year famine as retribution for their contempt. Following three years of famine (ln.121-124), the customary Gorwaa elders gather to mediate a solution. The youth, no doubt ruined by the lack of harvest, ask forgiveness from their leader and administrator Dodó, cattle are brought as ritual atonement, and the rains return once again.

This is, of course, one reading of a complex text, and the reader is challenged to come up with their own. This is facilitated by the provision of the transcription, free translation, and linguistic gloss below. Additionally, the audio and video associated with this story are openly available as part of the Gorwaa deposit at SOAS' Endangered Languages Archive (Harvey 2017). Below, the title of the story has been given along with an alphanumeric code ([20151202e]): the unique identifying number of the recording which allows the reader to locate the recording within the archive. This can be done by visiting the deposit page (<https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI1014224>) and entering the unique identifying number into the box titled 'Search this deposit' in the upper left corner, as shown in Figure 1. This will lead to the contents of the specific bundle, which can be viewed and downloaded.



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [elar.soas.ac.uk](https://elar.soas.ac.uk). The page layout includes a search bar in the top left, a main content area with a title and metadata, a summary of the deposit, and a map in the bottom right.

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Settings	(50)
Document	(1)

**Genre**

Monological Text	(2)
Unspecified	(2)
Historical Narrative	(1)

**Participants**

Bu'ú Saqwaré	(159)
Paschal Bu'ú	(115)
Rachel Lawi	(97)
Hezekiah Kodi	(93)
Darbo Hheke	(62)
Maria Hheke	(62)
<a href="#">more ...</a>	

**The Gorwaa Noun Phrase: Toward a Description of the Gorwaa Language**

**Language:** Gorwaa  
**Depositor:** Andrew Harvey  
**Location:** Tanzania  
**Deposit Id:** 0404  
**ELDP Id:** IGS0285  
**Level:** [Deposit](#)

**Summary of deposit**  
This deposit contains audiovisual material collected during Andrew Harvey's work with the Gorwaa language. Beginning in 2012 and extending to present, this deposit will be regularly expanded with new recordings, transcriptions/translations, and other content.

The focus of research has been on Gorwaa morphosyntax – specifically of the noun, and features a considerable number of recordings dealing with the makeup of nouns and the structure of the larger noun phrase. A second priority has been the collection of historical and cultural material deemed important to the Gorwaa people. As such, traditional songs, stories, and common history also form a significant part of the deposit.

The collector, Andrew Harvey, conducted much of the recording from 2012-2013 during Masters-level research at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and again from 2015-2016 during PhD-level research at SOAS, University of London. Much audiovisual material has been transcribed using the Gorwaa working writing system, and then translated into Swahili. Much of this work was conducted by Stephano Edward, Paschal Bu'ú, and Festo Massani. Translated work was then translated into English and linguistically annotated by Andrew Harvey.

The photo above is of Aakó Lagweén Goti, a local elder, at Dó' Gwaandú, a special site known for being the past home of a powerful doctor.

**Status**  
✓ **Curated**  
Resources online and curated

**Depositor**  
Andrew Harvey  
  
Affiliation: SOAS  
University of London

**Map**  
4°13'00...  
View larger map  
Somalia, Mozambique, Zambia, DR Congo, Zimbabwe, Madagascar

Figure 1: Deposit page with 'Search this deposit' in the upper left

The number given to each line of text corresponds to the number of the phrase segment in the ELAN (.eaf) file. Once the reader has accessed the bundle from the deposit page, they may download its contents (.wav and/or .mp4, and .eaf), and simply search within the ELAN file to the exact number cited (as shown in Figure 2) in order to listen to and view the exact moment in the recording in which the utterance of choice was produced.

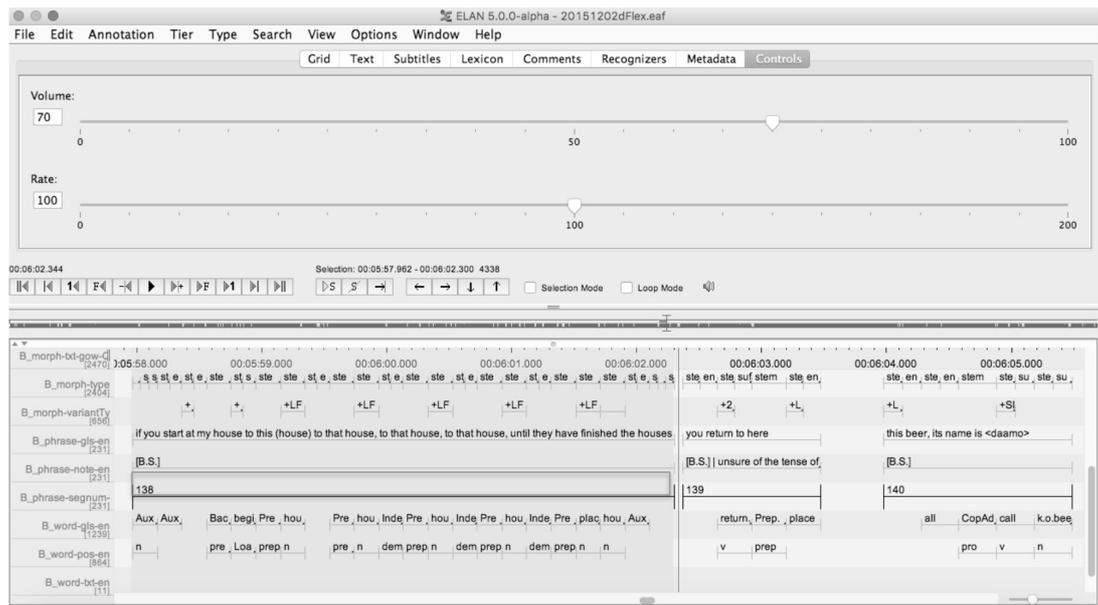


Figure 2: ELAN file with 'phrase segment number' as the fourth tier from the bottom

## THE STORY

### PAKANI [20151202E]<sup>1,2</sup>

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | <i>aree</i> <i>ya</i><br><i>ár</i> -ee <i>ya</i><br><i>see</i> -Imp.Sg.O <i>thus</i><br><b>look here</b>                                       |
| 2 | <i>aáng</i> <i>pakani</i><br><i>aáng</i> <i>pakani</i> -r'<br><i>in.the.past</i> <i>borderland</i> -L.Fr<br><b>in the past, the borderland</b> |

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence between special characters in the Gorwaa orthography and pronunciation (IPA symbol): ny [ɲ], ng [ŋ], ' [ʔ], q [qʰ], sh [ʃ], x [x], hh [h], / [ʕ], y [j], sl [+], ch [tʃ], j [dʒ], ts [tsʰ], tl [tʰ], kw [kw], gw [gw], ngw [ŋw], qw [qʰw], xw [xw]. A single vowel is short in length (e.g. o [o]), and a double vowel is long in length (e.g. oo [o:]). Vowels without an accent diacritic are level pitch-accent. Vowels with an acute diacritic are rising pitch accent. Vowels with a grave diacritic are falling pitch-accent. Vowels with a circumflex diacritic are rising-falling pitch accent.

<sup>2</sup> Glossing generally follows the Leipzig Glossing Conventions. Abbreviations: A = agent of transitive clause; Abl = ablative; Ana = anaphoric pronoun; Aux = auxiliary; Bac = background 'tense'; Consec = consecutive 'tense'; Dem1 = demonstrative, first degree deixis; Dem2 = demonstrative, second degree deixis, Dem3 = demonstrative, third degree deixis, Dem4 = demonstrative, fourth degree deixis; Emph = emphasis; Expect = expectative aspect; F = feminine gender; Fr = feminine r-type subgender; Ft = feminine t-type subgender; Imp = imperative mood; Imprf = imperfective aspect; L = linker; Lat = lative; LPA = level pitch accent; M = masculine gender; Mk = masculine k-type subgender; Mo = masculine o-type subgender; MP = mediopassive voice; N = neuter gender; Na = neuter a-type subgender; N<sup>∅</sup> = neuter ∅-type subgender; Neg = negative; P = patient of transitive clause, or speech act participant; Poss = possessive determiner; Prep = preposition; Prf = perfect aspect; Pro = pronoun; Prohib = prohibitive mood; Pst = past tense; Q = question; Reas = reason; Red = reduplication; S = sole argument of intransitive clause; Temp = temporal; Top = topic; Vent = ventive; 1 = 1st person; 2 = 2nd person; 3 = 3rd person

- 3 *bará Gorwaawoo*  
*bará Gorwaawoo*  
*in Gorwaaland*  
**in Gorwaaland**
- 4 *Gorwaa* *kina* *ohín*  
 Gorwaa -' t- ng- i- Ø -na óh -ín ~'~  
 Gorwaa.people -L.NØ MP- A.3- P.N- Aux -Imprf catch -Ext ~Pst~  
**Gorwaa were arrested**
- 5 *masoombár* *Gorwaa*  
 masoomba -r' Gorwaa -'  
 youth -L.Fr Gorwaa.people -L.NØ  
**Gorwaa youth**
- 6 *kan* *hubin* *bará*  
 t- ng- a- Ø -n húw -íím ~LPA~ *bará*  
 MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Expect bring -Ext Subj in  
*pakani* *kan*  
 pakani -r' t- ng- a- Ø -n  
 borderland -L.Fr MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Expect  
*/eetimiis* *pakanír* *eer*  
 /eét -m- -iís ~LPA~ pakani -r' áw ~LPA~  
 go.down -Ext- -Ext ~Subj~ borderland -L.Fr go ~Subj~  
**they would be brought to the borderland, they were put down in the borderland**
- 7 *kan* *fundimisó* *ay*  
 t- ng- a- Ø -n fundimis -ó ay ~LPA~  
 MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Expect teaching -L.Mo go ~Subj~  
*idór* *askarír* *wa ale*  
 ido -r' askari -r' wa.ale  
 manner -L.Fr soldier -L.Fr Res.Pro  
**they would get lessons on being a soldier**
- 8 *Gorwaa* *na* *si'íí*  
 Gorwaa -' ni -(g)a si'í.N  
 Gorwaa.people -L.NØ Vent -Prf refuse  
**the Gorwaa refused**
- 9 *masoomba* *na* *si'*  
 masoomba -r' ni -(g)a si'.F ~'~  
 youth -L.Fr Vent -Prf refuse Pst  
**the youth refused**

- 10 *masoombár* *ar* *dirí* *Yerotoni sleemeroo*  
*masoomba -r'* *ar* *di* *-r'* *-í* *Yerotóní sleemeroo*  
 youth -L.Fr Ana.F place -L.Fr -Dem1 Yerotóní entirely  
*in* *burumburit* *dirqá'*  
*i- Ø -n* *burumburiít* *~LPA~* *di* *-r'* *-qá'*  
 S.3- Aux -Expect gather.together.(intrans) ~Subj~ place -L.Fr -Dem3  
*ar* *idór* *dirí* *kitaangwí*  
*ar* *ido* *-r'* *di* *-r'* *-í* *kitaangw* *-ó* *-í*  
 Ana.F manner -L.Fr place -L.Fr -Dem1 chair -L.Mo -Dem1  
*in* *burumburit* *gawá*  
*i- Ø -n* *burumburiít* *~LPA~* *gawá*  
 S.3- Aux -Expect gather.together.(intrans) ~Subj~ on  
*tloomaà*  
*tloomaa -r'* *~`~*  
 mountain -L.Fr ~Emph~  
**the youth of here, Yerotoni, all of them withdrew to there where I sat, they withdrew to the hill**
- 11 *ar bartaqá'* *aqo* *in*  
*ar* *bara -tá* *-qá'* *Ø* *-qo* *i- Ø -n*  
 Ana.F side -L.Ft -Dem3 Aux -Emph S.3- Aux -Expect  
*burumburit* *dir'in* *gawá*  
*burumburiít* *~LPA~* *di* *-r'* *-'ín* *gawá*  
 gather.together.(intrans) ~Subj~ place -L.Fr -Poss.3Pl on  
*tloomaà* *toqá'* *dir'in* *neer*  
*tloomaa -r'* *~`~* *tí* *-qá'* *di* *-r'* *-'ín* *neer*  
 mountain -L.Fr Emph DemF -Dem3 place -L.Fr -Poss.3Pl with  
*lawulu'in*  
*lawulu -' -'ín*  
 spears -L.NØ -Poss.3Pl  
**there they withdrew together in their place in the hill, there in their place with their spears**
- 12 *alafu*  
*alafu*  
 then  
**then**



- 16 *hee i silahár kon muukú*  
 hee -ó i- Ø silahá -r' koóm ~LPA~ muu -kú  
 person -L.Mo MP.S.3- Aux weapon -L.Fr have.M ~Subj~ people -L.Mk  
*silahár kon heé*  
 silahá -r' koóm ~LPA~ hee -ó  
 weapon -L.Fr be.together ~Subj~ person -L.Mo  
*ngu harahi'iit*  
 ng- u- Ø harahi'iit ~^~  
 A.3- P.M- Aux move ~Q~  
**a person with weapons, people (with) weapons, who will move them?**
- 17 *gár tawa slahhaá qeeru*  
 ga -r' t- Ø -wa slahhaá ~'~ qeeru -ó  
 thing -L.Fr MP- Aux -Back hurt.(intrans) ~Pst~ intelligence -L.Mo  
*kuna warqeés*  
 t- ng- u- Ø -na warqeés ~'~  
 MP- A.3- P.M- Aux -Imprf turn.around.(trans.) ~Pst~  
*hee ta bay Dodoód a wawitumó*  
 hee -ó t- Ø báy ~LPA~ Dodoód Ø wawitumo -ó  
 person -L.Mo MP- Aux call ~Subj~ Dodoód Aux chief -L.Mo  
*Gorwaa*  
 Gorwaa -'  
 Gorwaa.people -L.NØ  
**when the thing tired them [the leaders], they changed their philosophy. a person called Dodoód was the leader of the Gorwaa.**
- 18 *wawitumó gadaee a milá ge*  
 wawitumo -ó ga -r' -dá' -oo Ø milá ge  
 chief -L.Mo thing -L.Fr -Dem4 -Top Aux what Emph  
**the leader of that is what? [i.e. trying to remember the colonial title for chief]**
- 19 *wawitumó Gorwaa*  
 wawitumo -ó Gorwaa -'  
 chief -L.Mo Gorwaa.people -L.NØ  
**leader of the Gorwaa**
- 20 *wawitumó Gorwaa ta kahi aáng*  
 wawitumo -ó Gorwaa -' t- Ø káh -i aáng  
 chief -L.Mo Gorwaa -L.NØ MP- Aux say -N in.the.past  
**Gorwaa said wawutumo in the past**

- 21 *a wawitumò Gorwaa taqo*  
 Ø wawitumo -ó ~`~ Gorwaa -' t- Ø -qo  
 Aux chief -L.Mo ~Emph~ Gorwaa.people -L.NØ MP- Aux -Emph  
*kahi a wawitumò*  
 káh -i Ø wawitumo -ó ~`~  
 say -3.Subj Aux chief -L.Mo ~Emph~  
**wawutumo, Gorwaa said wawutumo**
- 22 *ee Dodó aáng ta kahi a*  
 ee Dodó aáng t- Ø káh -i Ø  
 yes Dodó in.the.past MP- Aux say -3.Subj Aux  
*wawitumò*  
 wawitumo -ó ~`~  
 chief -L.Mo ~Emph~  
**yes, in the past, they said Dodó was the wawutumo**
- 23 *a boyimowoká boyimo a heé*  
 Ø boyimó -ó -oo -aká boyimo -ó Ø hee -ó  
 Aux grunt -L.Mo -Top -Neg.Pres grunt -L.Mo Aux person -L.Mo  
*amaohin*  
 seize  
**he wasn't a grunt, a grunt is a person who arrests people**
- 24 *ga/awusmo a heé ta kitaangwi*  
 ga/awusmo -ó Ø hee -ó t- Ø kitaangw -ó -i  
 official -L.Mo Aux person -L.Mo MP- Aux chair -L.Mo -Ill  
*ay*  
 áw ~LPA~  
 go ~Subj~  
**a ga/awusmo is an official [lit. a person who goes to the chair]**
- 25 *adór hindí bilí tawa kahi a*  
 Ø ido -r' hindí bilí t- Ø -wa káh -i Ø  
 Aux manner -L.Fr now today MP- Aux -Back say -3.Subj Aux  
*katibu kata*  
 katibu.kata  
 chairman  
**like today they are called katibu kata [i.e. chairman of the quarter]**
- 26 *alafu tawa sií'*  
 alafu t- Ø -wa sií' ~'~  
 then MP- Aux -Back refuse ~Pst~  
**so they refused**

- 27 *heesí* *kuna*  
 hee -ó -sí t- ng- u- Ø -na  
 person -L.Mo -Dem2 MP- A.3- P.M- Aux -Imprf  
*leleéhh ta bay Barandí Kulee*  
 Red- leéhh ~~~ t- Ø báy ~LPA~ Barandí -ó Kulee -ó  
 Plur- look.for Pst MP- Aux call ~Subj~ Barandí -L.Mo Kulee -L.Mo  
**this person who was sought was called Barandi Kulee**
- 28 *nee Leelí oo dó' Tumla*  
 nee Leelí oo do' -ó Tumla -ó  
 and Leelí Ana.M house -L.Mo Tumla -L.Mo  
**and Leelí of the house of Tumla**
- 29 *muukusí kina leleéhh*  
 muu -kú -sí t- ng- i- Ø -na Red- leéhh ~~~  
 people -L.Mk -Dem2 MP- A.3- P.N- Aux -Imprf Plur- look.for ~Pst~  
*kina sláy*  
 t- ng- i- Ø -na sláy ~~~  
 MP- A.3- P.N- Aux -Imprf get ~Pst~  
**these people were sought, they were got**
- 30 *amama'ó kana óh*  
 amama'ó -r' t- ng- a- Ø -na óh ~~~  
 bird.sp. -L.Fr MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Imprf catch ~Pst~  
*kay huw*  
 t- ng- a- Ø -ay húw ~LPA~  
 MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Consec bring ~Subj~  
**an amama'o [fork-tailed drongo] was caught, it was brought**
- 31 *ma'aay kina alatleéhh*  
 ma'aay -' t- ng- i- Ø -na alatleéhh ~~~  
 water -L.NØ MP- A.3- P.N- Aux -Imprf make.together ~Pst~  
**medicine was made together**
- 32 *ma'aay kawa tleéhh muukusí*  
 ma'aay -' t- ng- a- Ø -wa tleéhh ~~~ muu -kú -sí  
 water -L.NØ MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Back make ~Pst~ people -L.Mk -Dem2  
*masoombár gawá tloomaa sleeme nina*  
 masoomba -r' gawá tloomaa -r' sleeme ni -na  
 youth -L.Fr on mountain -L.Fr all Vent -Imprf  
*wátl*  
 wátl ~~~  
 return.(intrans.).F ~Pst~  
**medicine was made, those young men in the hill all returned home**

- 33 *lawulu kina qaás*  
 lawulu -' t- ng- i- Ø -na qaás ~'~  
 spears -L.NØ MP- A.3- P.N- Aux -Imprf put ~Pst~  
**they put their spears [in the soil]**
- 34 *kilo'in tina arxayé' amodi*  
 kilo'in t- i- Ø -na arxáy -iyé' amo -r' -dá' -i  
 themselves MP- S.3- Aux -Imprf go -N.Pst place -L.Fr -Dem4 -Ill  
*kiwa sla'i'*  
 t- ng- i- Ø -wa slaá' -i'  
 MP- A.3- P.3.Pl Aux -Back want -3.Subj  
**they went themselves to the place where they were wanted**
- 35 *amodá' kilò kiwa*  
 amo -r' -dá' kilo -r' ~'~ t- ng- i- Ø -wa  
 place -L.Fr -Dem4 weight -L.Fr ~Emph~ MP- A.3- P.3Pl Aux -Back  
*sla'i' kiwa pimimín*  
 slaá' -i' t- ng- i- Ø -wa pimiím -m- ~'~  
 want -3.Subj MP- A.3- P.3Pl- Aux -Back measure -Ext- ~Pst~  
*a Babati*  
 Ø Babati -r' ~'~  
 Aux Babati -L.Fr ~Emph~  
**the place where their weight was wanted, they were weighed was Babati**
- 36 *kina pimamín pimamín*  
 t- ng- i- Ø -na pimiím -m- ~'~ pimiím -Ext- ~'~  
 MP- A.3- P.3Pl- Aux -Imprf measure -Ext- ~Pst~ measure -Ext- ~Pst~  
*wa Babati kilo kuúng*  
 wa Babati -r' ~'~ kilo -r' kuúng  
 Prep.Abl Babati -L.Fr ~Emph~ weight -L.Fr ProPers.2Sg.M  
*bura sii' tun*  
 bar- u- Ø -(g)a síí' ~'~ t- u- Ø -n  
 if- P.2Sg.M- Aux -Prf refuse ~Pst~ MP- P.2Sg.M- Aux -Expect  
*bay amorqá'*  
 báy ~LPA~ amo -r' -qá'  
 call ~Subj~ place -L.Fr -Dem3  
**they were weighed they were weighed down in Babati, if your weight refused you were told “over there”**

- 37 *kodá'* *kilo* *a* *ya/án*  
 ko -dá' kilo -r' i- Ø -(g)a ya/aám ~'~  
 Indef.M -Dem4 weight -L.Fr S.3- Aux -Prf agree ~Pst~  
**he whose weight was accepted**
- 38 *kun* *bay* *tša/aám* *gawà*  
 t- ng- u- Ø -n báy ~LPA~ tša/aám -Ø gawà ~'~  
 MP- A.3- P.M- Aux -Expect call ~Subj~ climb -Imp.Sg on ~Emph~  
*gawá gaari*  
*gawá gaari -r' ~'~*  
 on car -L.Fr ~Emph~  
**was told “climb up” into the vehicle**
- 39 *tana* *idosi* *lawawín* *lawawín*  
 t- Ø -na ido -r' -sí Red- lawiím ~'~ Red- lawiím ~'~  
 MP- Aux -Imprf manner -L.Fr -Dem2 Plur- go.on ~Pst~ Plur- go.on ~Pst~  
*lawawín* *koko* *ta* *slukún* *ta*  
 Red- lawiím ~'~ koko t- Ø sluúk -uúm ~'~ t- Ø  
 Plur- go.on ~Pst~ Indef.M MP- Aux bribe -Ext ~Pst~ MP- Aux  
*kahi* *kilo* *a* *sii'*  
 káh -i kilo -r' i- Ø -(g)a sii' ~'~  
 say -3.Subj weight -L.Fr S.3 Aux -Prf refuse ~Pst~  
**they continued in this way, some bribed, they said “your weight refuses”**
- 40 *slukumaqá'* *ar* *kuungá'* *ar* *bilihee* *koko*  
 slukuma -r' -qá' ar kuungá' ar bilí -oo koko  
 bribery -L.Fr -Dem3 Ana.F ProPers.2Pl Ana.F today -Top Indef.N  
*aqo* *slukún* *na/ay* *ma*  
 Ø -qo sluúk -uúm ~'~ na/ay -ó m- i- Ø -(g)a  
 Aux -Emph bribe -Ext ~Pst~ child -L.Mo Prohib- S.3- Aux -Prf  
*daqáy* *neer* *awù*  
 daqay ~'~ neer awu -ó ~'~  
 attend ~Pst~ with bull -L.Mo ~Emph~  
**that corruption is of you(pl.) of today only! some bribed that their child not go with a bull**

41 *gitláy aree ge wawitumo awu ngu*  
 gitláy ár -ee ge wawitumo -ó awu -ó ng- u- Ø  
 hey see -Imp.Sg.O Emph chief -L.Mo bull -L.Mo A.3- P.M- Aux  
*hariís na/ay'é' ma*  
 hariís ~'~ na/ay -ó -'é' m- i- Ø -(g)a  
 bring ~Pst~ child -L.Mo -Poss.1Sg Prohib- S.3- Aux -Prf  
*daqay*  
 daqay ~LPA~  
 attend ~Subj~  
**“look, wawitumo, I will bring you a bull (that) my child doesn't go”**

42 *tan oo'i isa' kilo*  
 t- Ø -n oó' -i isa' kilo -r'  
 MP- Aux -Expect say -3.Subj so-and-so weight -L.Fr  
*ngwa sii' ge*  
 ng- u- Ø -wa sii' ~'~ ge  
 A.3- P.M- Aux -Back refuse ~Pst~ Emph  
**they would say “so-and-so, his weight refused”**

43 *he'e kuungá' a xu'á*  
 hee kuungá' Ø- Ø xuú' -a ~^~  
 hey! ProPers.2Pl S.P- Aux know -Inf.Pres ~Q~  
**why, you(pl.) knew?**

44 *kina idosír lalee lalee*  
 t- ng- i- Ø -na ido -r' -sí -r laleé laleé  
 MP- A.3- P.3Pl- Aux -Imprf manner -L.Fr -Dem2 -Instr continue continue  
*laleé laleé laleé lalee lalee lalee lalee lalee*  
 laleé laleé laleé laleé laleé laleé laleé laleé  
 continue continue continue continue continue continue continue continue  
**they continued in this way**

45 *muu kilo'in ina daqáy asma*  
 muu -kú kilo'in i- Ø -na daqay ~'~ asma  
 people -L.Mk themselves S.3- Aux -Imprf attend ~Pst~ because  
*kwa tsuínq kwa*  
 t- ng- u- Ø -wa tsuínq ~'~ t- ng- u- Ø -wa  
 MP- A.3- P.M- Aux -Back bewitch ~Pst~ MP- A.3- P.M- Aux -Back  
*tsanguús*  
 tsanguús ~'~  
 lure ~Pst~  
**people went themselves because they were bewitched, they were drawn**

- 46 *gár ta tleehh a tsangusa*  
 ga -r' t- Ø -(g)a tleéhh ~LPA~ Ø tsangusa -r'  
 thing -L.Fr MP- Aux -Prf make ~Subj~ Aux lure -L.Fr  
*muu kuna tsanguís*  
 muu -kú t- ng- u- Ø -na tsanguús ~'~  
 people -L.Mk MP- A.3- P.M- Aux -Imprf lure ~Pst~  
*iwa ya/àn*  
 i- Ø -wa ya/án ~'~ ~`~  
 S.3- Aux -Back be.possible ~Pst~ ~Emph~  
**they made something to draw people, people were drawn, they agreed**
- 47 *gasi kana laleé laleé*  
 ga -r' -sí t- ng- a- Ø -na laleé laleé  
 thing -L.Fr -Dem2 MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Imprf continue continue  
*laleé*  
 laleé  
 continue  
**this thing continued**
- 48 *tawa bu'uút ya*  
 ta- Ø -wa bu'uút ~'~ ya  
 Temp- Aux -Back be.enough ~Pst~ thus  
**when it was enough, it was thus:**
- 49 *iimi tawa bu'uút tawa*  
 iimi -r' ta- Ø -wa bu'uút ~'~ ta- Ø -wa  
 people -L.Fr Temp- Aux -Back be.enough ~Pst~ Temp- Aux -Back  
*hhe'eés*  
 hhe'eés ~'~  
 finish ~Pst~  
**when the people were enough, when they finished**
- 50 *hardodá' ta slay tawa*  
 harda -ó -dá' ta- Ø sláy ~LPA~ ta- Ø -wa  
 quota -L.Mo -Dem4 Temp- Aux get ~Subj~ Temp- Aux -Back  
*haáts hesabudá'*  
 haáts ~'~ hesabu -dá'  
 be.full ~Pst~ figure -Dem4  
**when they got their amount, when the figure was filled**
- 51 *hesabudá' tawa haáts*  
 hesabu -dá' ta- Ø -wa haáts ~'~  
 figure -Dem4 Temp- Aux -Back be.full ~Pst~  
**when that figure was filled**

- 52 *tawa* *tlatláy* *alkwi gaaridú*  
 t- Ø -wa Red- tláw alkwi gaaridu -'  
 MP- Aux -Back Plur- go now cars -L.NØ  
*kiwa* *asloo- qaasi*  
 t- ng- i- Ø -wa asloo qaas -i  
 MP- A.3- P.N- Aux -Back fires put -N  
**now they were going, the vehicles were fired up**
- 53 *gaaridú* *kiwa* *asloo-qaasi*  
 gaaridu -' t- ng- i- Ø -wa asloo- qaas -i  
 cars -L.NØ MP- A.3- P.N- Aux -Back fires- put -N  
*tana* *firín*  
 t- Ø -na firiím ~'~  
 MP- Aux -Imprf pray ~Pst~  
**the vehicles were fired up, they cursed**
- 54 *tana* *oó'* *Dodoód* *atén*  
 t- Ø -na oó' ~'~ Dodoód -ó atén  
 MP- Aux -Imprf say ~Pst~ Dodoód -L.Mo ProPers.1Pl  
*kuúng*  
 kuúng  
 ProPers.2Sg.M  
**they said “you - Dodoód! we...**
- 55 *gitláy mita* *alu-/aayimaar* *ge*  
 gitláy m- t- Ø -(g)a alu- /aay -ím -aar ge  
 hey Prohib- MP- Aux -Prf rear eat -Ext -Imp.Neg Emph  
**don't (you) betray us!”**
- 56 *tana* *firín* *wa* *gawá gaaridù*  
 t- Ø -na firiím ~'~ wa gawá gaaridu -' ~'~  
 MP- Aux -Imprf pray ~Pst~ Prep.Abl on cars -L.NØ ~Emph~  
**they cursed from the vehicles**
- 57 *gidabá* *atén* *aga* *qaro* *bará hoomaa*  
 gidabá atén Ø- Ø -(g)a qaro bará hoomaa -r'  
 that ProPers.1Pl A.P- Aux -Prf already in foreigners -L.Fr  
*kawaán* *agaqo* *qwanáy* *awaán*  
 káw -aán ~'~ Ø- Ø -(g)a -qo qwanay -ó áw -aán ~'~  
 go -1.Pl ~Pst~ S.P- Aux -Prf -Emph loss -L.Mo go -1.Pl ~Pst~  
*timtindin* *tsuu/*  
 t- m- tindi- Ø -n tsuú/ ~LPA~  
 MP- Q- P.1Pl- Aux -Expect kill ~Subj~  
**“that we have already gone among strangers, we are going to be lost,**

**aren't we going to be killed?"**

- 58 *tam milá tam mareerén na/arén*  
 tam milá tam maree -' -rén na/a' -' -rén  
 Concess what Concess houses -L.NØ -Poss.1Pl children -L.NØ -Poss.1Pl
- tam inqo araán tam*  
 tam Ø- i- Ø -n -qo ár -aán ~'~ tam  
 Concess A.P- P.N- Aux -Expect -Emph see -1.Pl ~Pst~ Concess
- an ki/aan amór*  
 Ø- Ø -n kí/ -aán ~LPA~ amo -r'  
 A.P- Aux -Expect return.(intr.) -1.Pl ~Subj~ place -L.Fr
- na/aarén xu'aanaká*  
 na/a' -' -rén xuú' -aán -akáng  
 children -L.NØ -Poss.1Pl know -1.Pl -Neg.Pres  
**"even our houses, our children, we don't know if we will see them, we don't even know if we shall return to our children"**
- 59 *kuú sleeme mit*  
 kuúng sleeme m- t- Ø  
 ProPers.2Sg.M also Prohib- MP- Aux
- alu-/aayimaar*  
 alu- /aay -ím -aar  
 rear- eat -Ext.2 -Imp.Neg  
**"you - don't betray us!"**
- 60 *Dodó kuna firín*  
 Dodó -ó t- ng- u- Ø -na firiím ~'~  
 Dodó -L.Mo MP- A.3- P.M- Aux -Imprf pray ~Pst~  
**Dodó was cursed at**
- 61 *iimi ina /ét*  
 iimi -r' i- Ø -na /ét ~'~  
 people -L.Fr S.3- Aux -Imprf go.down.F ~Pst~  
**people had already gone down [i.e. at the borderland]**

- 62 *pakani kana tlehahhiit*  
 pakani -r' t- ng- a- Ø -na Red- tleéhh -iít ~'~  
 borderland -L.Fr MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Imprf Plur- make -Ext ~Pst~  
*tlehahhiit tlehahhiit kina*  
 Red- tleéhh -iít ~'~ Red- tleéhh -iít ~'~ t- ng- i- Ø -na  
 Plur- make -Ext ~Pst~ Plur- make -Ext ~Pst~ MP- A.3- P.N- Aux -Imprf  
*fundumamiis fundumamiis fundumamiis*  
 fundiís -m- ~'~ fundiís -m- ~'~ fundiís -m- ~'~  
 teach -Ext- ~Pst~ teach -Ext- ~Pst~ teach -Ext- ~Pst~  
*ay slehheeri lehhó*  
 ay slehheeri -' lehhó  
 Prep.Ill months -L.NØ six  
**at the borderland they worked and worked and were taught and taught for six months**
- 63 *slehheeri lehhó ki /aay*  
 slehheeri -' lehhó t- ng- i- Ø /aáy ~LPA~  
 month -L.NØ six MP- A.3- P.N- Aux eat ~Subj~  
*baradee*  
 bará -dá' -oo  
 in -Dem4 -Top  
**six months were finished down there**
- 64 *slehheeri lehhó birna faaki' iimi*  
 slehheeri -' lehhó bar- i- Ø -na faák -í' iimi -r'  
 month -L.NØ six if- S.3- Aux -Imprf finish -N.Subj people -L.Fr  
*nina wátl*  
 ni -na wátl ~'~  
 Vent -Imprf go.home.F ~Pst~  
**when six months had ended, the people returned**
- 65 *ka qaro fundiís*  
 t- ng- a- Ø qaro fundiís ~'~  
 MP- A.3- P.F- Aux already teach ~Pst~  
**they had already been taught**
- 66 *ga aqo askari*  
 ga -r' Ø -qo askari -r'  
 thing -L.Fr Aux -Emph soldier -L.Fr  
**they were soldiers**

- 67 *gár ta askari káhh ar*  
 ga -r' t- Ø askari -r' kaáhh ~'~ ar  
 thing -L.Fr MP- Aux soldier -L.Fr be.absent ~Pst~ Ana.F  
*ta xu'iká káhh*  
 t- Ø xuú' -ikáng kaáhh ~`~  
 MP- Aux know -Neg.Pst be.absent ~Emph~  
**there was nothing of being a soldier that they didn't know**
- 68 *umó garoo Keengereesa iimi*  
 umó ga -r' -oo Keengereesa -r' iimi -r'  
 every thing -L.Fr -Top English -L.Fr people -L.Fr  
*kan xuu'*  
 t- ng- a- Ø -n xuú' ~LPA~  
 MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Expect know ~Subj~  
**everything - people knew English**
- 69 *lakini heé ta gaas kaahh tam oo*  
 lakini hee -ó t- Ø gaás ~LPA~ kaáhh tam oo  
 but person -L.Mo MP- Aux kill ~Subj~ be.absent Concess Ana.M  
*wák asma ma'aaydá' ta tleéhh*  
 wák asma ma'aay -' -dá' t- Ø tleéhh ~'~  
 one because water -L.NØ -Dem4 MP- Aux make ~Pst~  
**but there were no casualties, not even one, because medicine had been made**
- 70 *aáng ka tsuúinq*  
 aáng t- ng- a- Ø -(g)a tsuúinq ~'~  
 in.the.past MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Prf bewitch ~Pst~  
**they had been blessed**
- 71 *a tsir/idá' ta tsuúinq wa*  
 Ø tsir/i -r' -dá' t- Ø tsuúinq ~'~ wa  
 Aux bird -L.Fr -Dem4 MP- Aux bewitch ~Pst~ Prep.Abl  
*diri amama'o a tleér*  
 di -r' -í amama'ó -r' i- Ø -(g)a tláw ~'~  
 place -L.Fr -Dem1 bird.sp. -L.Fr S.3- Aux -Prf go ~Pst~  
*ay baraqá'*  
 ay bará -ó -qá'  
 Prep.Vent side -L.Mo -Dem3  
**it was that bird that had been bewitched here, the amama'o [fork-tailed drongo] had gone there**



- 78 *ta kahi' Dodó haylee he Dodó he*  
 t- Ø káh -iyí' Dodó -ó haylee he Dodó -ó he  
 MP- Aux say -N.Pst Dodó -L.Mo haylee hey Dodó -L.Mo hey  
**they sang “Dodó haylee he Dodó he**
- 79 *dó' Uwo he*  
 do' -ó Uwo -ó he  
 house -L.Mo Uwo -L.Mo hey  
**“of the house of Uwo he**
- 80 *dó' Dodó Uwo kuí kura*  
 do' -ó Dodó -ó Uwo -ó kuúng kura -tá  
 house -L.Mo Dodó -L.Mo Uwo -L.Mo ProPers.2Sg.M anus -L.Ft  
*mahhee Dodó atén na*  
 maáhh -ee Dodó -ó atén ni -(g)a  
 lick -Imp.Sg.O Dodó -L.Mo ProPers.1Pl Vent -Prf  
*watlaán*  
 waátl -aán ~'~  
 return.(intrans.) -1.Pl ~Pst~  
**“the house of Dodó Uwo, lick our arses Dodó, we have returned**
- 81 *Dodó he*  
 Dodó -ó he  
 Dodó -L.Mo hey  
**“Dodó he**
- 82 *dó' Uwo atén na*  
 do' -ó Uwo -ó atén ni -(g)a  
 house -L.Mo Uwo -L.Mo ProPers.1Pl Vent -Prf  
*watlaán*  
 waátl -aán ~'~  
 return.(intrans.) -1.Pl ~Pst~  
**“of the house of Uwo, we have returned**
- 83 *kuí Dodó kura mahhee*  
 kuúng Dodó -ó kura -tá maáhh -ee  
 ProPers.2Sg.M Dodó -L.Mo anus -L.Ft lick -Imp.Sg.O  
**“you Dodó lick (our) arses**
- 84 *Tsoxolí hayle Tsoxolí*  
 Tsoxolí -ó hayle Tsoxolí -ó  
 Tsoxolí -L.Mo hayle Tsoxolí -L.Mo  
**“Tsoxoli hayle Tsoxoli**

- 78 *ta kahi' Dodó haylee he Dodó he*  
 t- Ø káh -iyí' Dodó -ó haylee he Dodó -ó he  
 MP- Aux say -N.Pst Dodó -L.Mo haylee hey Dodó -L.Mo hey  
**they sang “Dodó haylee he Dodó he**
- 79 *dó' Uwo he*  
 do' -ó Uwo -ó he  
 house -L.Mo Uwo -L.Mo hey  
**“of the house of Uwo he**
- 80 *dó' Dodó Uwo kuú kura*  
 do' -ó Dodó -ó Uwo -ó kuúng kura -tá  
 house -L.Mo Dodó -L.Mo Uwo -L.Mo ProPers.2Sg.M anus -L.Ft  
*mahhee Dodó atén na*  
 maáhh -ee Dodó -ó atén ni -(g)a  
 lick -Imp.Sg.O Dodó -L.Mo ProPers.1Pl Vent -Prf  
*watlaán*  
 waátl -aán ~'~  
 return.(intrans.) -1.Pl ~Pst~  
**“the house of Dodó Uwo, lick our arses Dodó, we have returned**
- 81 *Dodó he*  
 Dodó -ó he  
 Dodó -L.Mo hey  
**“Dodó he**
- 82 *dó' Uwo atén na*  
 do' -ó Uwo -ó atén ni -(g)a  
 house -L.Mo Uwo -L.Mo ProPers.1Pl Vent -Prf  
*watlaán*  
 waátl -aán ~'~  
 return.(intrans.) -1.Pl ~Pst~  
**“of the house of Uwo, we have returned**
- 83 *kuú Dodó kura mahhee*  
 kuúng Dodó -ó kura -tá maáhh -ee  
 ProPers.2Sg.M Dodó -L.Mo anus -L.Ft lick -Imp.Sg.O  
**“you Dodó lick (our) arses**
- 84 *Tsoxolí hayle Tsoxolí*  
 Tsoxolí -ó hayle Tsoxolí -ó  
 Tsoxolí -L.Mo hayle Tsoxolí -L.Mo  
**“Tsoxoli hayle Tsoxoli**

- 85 *dó'* *Nyumba* *heé* *lama*  
do' -ó Nyumba -ó hee -ó lama -tá  
house -L.Mo Nyumba -L.Mo person -L.Mo lies -L.Ft  
**“of the house of Nyumba, a man of lies**
- 86 *Tsoxolí* *heé* *lama*  
Tsoxolí -ó hee -ó lama -tá  
Tsoxolí -L.Mo person -L.Mo lies -L.Ft  
**“Tsoxoli a man of lies**
- 87 *Tsoxolí* *heé* *lama* *dó'* *Nyumba*  
Tsoxolí -ó hee -ó lama -tá do' -ó Nyumba -ó  
Tsoxolí -L.Mo person -L.Mo lies -L.Ft house -L.Mo Nyumba -L.Mo  
*heé* *lama*  
hee -ó lama -tá  
person -L.Mo lies -L.Ft  
**“Tsoxoli a man of lies of the house of Nyumba a man of lies**
- 88 *Tsoxolí* *heé* *dó'* *Dodó* *Uwo*  
Tsoxolí -ó hee -ó do' -ó Dodó -ó Uwo -ó  
Tsoxolí -L.Mo person -L.Mo house -L.Mo Dodó -L.Mo Uwo -L.Mo  
*kuú* *kura* *mahheek*  
kuúng kura -tá maáhh -ee  
ProPers.2Sg.M anus -L.Ft lick -Imp.Sg.O  
**“Tsoxoli a person of the house of Dodó Uwo, lick (our) arses**
- 89 *Dodó* *atén* *na* *watlaán*  
Dodó -ó atén ni -(g)a waátl -aán ~'~  
Dodó -L.Mo ProPers.1Pl Vent -Prf return.(intrans.) -1.Pl ~Pst~  
**“Dodó we have returned**
- 90 *Dodó* *he*  
Dodó -ó he  
Dodó -L.Mo hey  
**“Dodó hey**
- 91 *heelo* *hayle* *he* *Dodó* *Uwo* *hayle* *he*  
heelo hayle he Dodó -ó Uwo -ó hayle he  
heelo hayle hey Dodó -L.Mo Uwo -L.Mo hayle hey  
**“heelo hayle he Dodó Uwo hayle he**

- 92 *Tsoxolí he Tsoxolí dó' Nyumba*  
 Tsoxolí -ó he Tsoxolí -ó do' -ó Nyumba -ó  
 Tsoxolí -L.Mo hey Tsoxolí -L.Mo house -L.Mo Nyumba -L.Mo  
*hayle motloo*  
 hayle motloo  
 hayle tomorrow  
**“Tsoxoli he Tsoxoli of the house of Nyumba hayle tomorrow**
- 93 *orojo he he*  
 orojo he he  
 hey.everyone hey hey  
**“hey countrymen he he**
- 94 *Dodó kuúng kura mahhee*  
 Dodó -ó kuúng kura -tá maáhh -ee  
 Dodó -L.Mo ProPers.2Sg.M anus -L.Ft lick -Imp.Sg.O  
**“Dodó lick (our) arses**
- 95 *dó' Uwo he*  
 do' -ó Uwo -ó he  
 house -L.Mo Uwo -L.Mo hey  
**“of the house of Uwo he**
- 96 *Dodó atén na watlaán*  
 Dodó -ó atén ni -(g)a waátl -aán ~'~  
 Dodó -L.Mo ProPers.1Pl Vent -Prf return.(intrans.) -1.Pl ~Pst~  
**“Dodó we have returned**
- 97 *Tsoxolí hayle Tsoxolí*  
 Tsoxolí -ó hayle Tsoxolí -ó  
 Tsoxolí -L.Mo hayle Tsoxolí -L.Mo  
**“Tsoxoli hayle Tsoxoli**
- 98 *dó' Nyumba hayle motloo*  
 do' -ó Nyumba -ó hayle motloo  
 house -L.Mo Nyumba -L.Mo hayle tomorrow  
**“of the house of Nyumba hayle tomorrow**
- 99 *Tsoxolí kwa heé lama dó'*  
 Tsoxolí -ó kuú Ø hee -ó lama -tá do' -ó  
 Tsoxolí -L.Mo ProPers.2Sg.M Aux person -L.Mo lies -L.Ft house -L.Mo  
*Nyumba he*  
 Nyumba -ó he  
 Nyumba -L.Mo hey  
**“Tsoxoli you are a liar of the house of Nyumba hey**

- 100 *orojo he*  
orojo he  
hey.everyone hey  
**“hey countrymen he”**
- 101 *aluwo ya*  
aluwo ya  
then thus  
**then**
- 102 *Dodoód*  
Dodoód -ó  
Dodoód -L.Mo  
**Dodoód**
- 103 *ina tláy*  
i- Ø -na tláw ~'~  
S.3- Aux -Imprf go ~Pst~  
**he went**
- 104 *ina dir muukudá' oo tluway*  
i- Ø -na di -r' muu -kú -dá' oo tluway -ó  
S.3- Aux -Imprf place -L.Fr people -L.Mk -Dem4 Ana.M rain -L.Mo  
*káy*  
káy ~'~  
go ~Pst~  
**he went to the place of the rainmakers**
- 105 *dó' Ngawdá' nguna káy*  
do' -ó Ngawdá' -ó ng- u- Ø -na káy ~'~  
house -L.Mo Ngawdá' -L.Mo A.3- P.M- Aux -Imprf go ~Pst~  
**he went to the house of Ngawdá'**
- 106 *xay*  
xay  
Emph  
**hey**

- 107 *giyeeé* *ngina* *leéhh* *dír*  
 giyeeé -r' ng- a- Ø -na leéhh ~'~ di -r'  
 famine -L.Fr A.3- P.F- Aux -Imprf look.for ~Pst~ place -L.Fr
- a* *káy* *tam* *an* *dó'*  
 i- Ø -(g)a káy ~'~ tam Ø -n do' -ó  
 MP.S.3- Aux -Prf go.M ~Pst~ Concess Aux -Expect house -L.Mo
- Ngawdá'* *tam* *an* *dá'* *Alawa*  
 Ngawdá' -ó tam Ø -n dá' Alawa -ó  
 Ngawdá' -L.Mo Concess Aux -Expect hey Alawa -L.Mo
- do'oko* *ngwa* *káy*  
 do' -ó -ko ng- u- Ø -wa káy ~'~  
 house -L.Mo -Indef.M A.3- P.M- Aux -Back go ~Pst~
- he went looking for famine, the place he went I don't know, Ngawdá' or Alawa, he went to one of those houses**
- 108 *do'dá'* *hindí aní* *uga* *slawikáng*  
 do' -ó -dá' hindí aní Ø- u- Ø -(g)a sláw -ikáng  
 house -L.Mo -Dem4 now ProPers.1Sg A.P- P.M- Aux -Prf get -Neg.Pst
- I'm not getting (i.e. I can't remember) that house now**
- 109 *dosi* *ngwa* *káy* *giyee*  
 do' -ó -sí ng- u- Ø -wa káy ~'~ giyeeé -r'  
 house -L.Mo -Dem2 A.3- P.M- Aux -Back go ~Pst~ famine -L.Fr
- na* *tleér*  
 ni -(g)a tleer ~'~  
 Vent -Prf go.F ~Pst~
- he went to that house and famine came**
- 110 *xay*  
 xay  
 Emph  
**hey**
- 111 *giyeeé* *na* *tleér* *kureeri* *tám*  
 giyeeé -r' ni -(g)a tleer ~'~ kureeri -' tám  
 famine -L.Fr Vent -Prf go.F ~Pst~ years -L.NØ three
- famine came for three years**
- 112 *ar* *Gorwaa* *qwari*  
 ar Gorwaa -' qwari -kú  
 Ana.F Gorwaa.people -L.NØ hunger -L.Mk
- for the Gorwaa - hunger**

- 113 *giyee na tleér asma Dodó*  
 giyéé -r' ni -(g)a tleér ~'~ asma Dodó -ó  
 famine -L.Fr Vent -Prf go.F ~Pst~ because Dodó -L.Mo
- kuwa firín*  
 t- ng- u- Ø -wa firín ~'~  
 MP- A.3- P.M- Aux -Back pray.M ~Pst~  
**the famine came because Dodó was disrespected [lit. prayed for]**
- 114 *i kah ihii ahheè kuungá' aní*  
 i- Ø káh -i ihii ahheè kuungá' aní  
 S.3- Aux say -3.Subj Exclam. Exclam. ProPers.2Pl ProPers.1Sg
- burtunduna /etiís aní*  
 bar- tundu- Ø -na /eét -iís ~'~ aní  
 if- P.2.Pl- Aux -Imprf go.down -Ext ~Pst~ ProPers.1Sg
- misa firindé'*  
 m- i- Ø -s -(g)a firiím -é' ~'~  
 Q- P.1Sg- Aux -Reason -Prf pray -2Pl ~Pst~
- aní kuungá' tundun hhamís-slaa'*  
 aní kuungá' tundu- Ø -n hhamís- slaá' ~LPA~  
 ProPers.1Sg ProPers.2Pl P.2.Pl- Aux -Expect defeat- love ~Subj~
- aní tundun gwa'arár slaa'*  
 aní tundu- Ø -n gwa'ara -r' slaá' ~LPA~  
 ProPers.1Sg P.2.Pl- Aux -Expect death -L.Fr want ~Subj~  
**such that he [Dodó] said “ah, harrumph, those who were sent, why are they disrespecting me? I want you(pl.) to die!”**
- 115 *idodá' kwa firín giyee*  
 ido -r' -dá' t- ng- u- Ø -wa firín ~'~ giyéé -r'  
 manner -L.Fr -Dem4 MP- A.3- P.M- Aux -Back pray ~Pst~ famine -L.Fr
- ngina leéhh*  
 ng- a- Ø -na leéhh ~'~  
 A.3- P.F- Aux -Imprf look.for ~Pst~  
**in that way he was cursed, famine was brought**
- 116 *tsee/amá nina paá/ kureeri*  
 tsee/amá -' ni -na paá/ ~'~ kureeri -'  
 sunshine -L.NØ Vent -Imprf shine.(of.sun) ~Pst~ years -L.NØ
- aree*  
 ár -ee  
 see -Imp.Sg.O  
**the sun shone harshly for - look [gestures 'three'] years**

- 117 *iimi na qwarít*  
*iimi -r' ni -(g)a qwarít ~'~*  
 people -L.Fr Vent -Prf hunger.F ~Pst~  
**people went hungry**
- 118 *tluway kaàhh*  
*tluway -ó kaáhh ~`~*  
 rain -L.Mo be.absent ~Emph~  
**there was no rain**
- 119 *tluway bira thuíw aluwo in*  
*tluway -ó bar- i- Ø -(g)a tluúw ~'~ aluwo i- Ø -n*  
 rain -L.Mo if- S.3- Aux -Prf rain ~Pst~ then S.3- Aux -Expect
- tsatiit balaangw'in tawa*  
*tsaát -iít ~'~ balaangw -ó -'ín t- Ø -wa*  
 cut -Ext ~Pst~ millet -L.Mo -Poss.3Pl MP- Aux -Back
- kaàhh*  
*kaáhh ~`~*  
 be.absent ~Emph~  
**if it rained, it soon stopped, their millet went to nothing**
- 120 *hamarikáng*  
*hamaár -ikáng*  
 ripen. -Neg.Pst  
**it didn't ripen**
- 121 *bare tawa babáy tawa*  
*bare t- Ø -wa babáy ~'~ t- Ø -wa*  
 whenever MP- Aux -Back continue ~Pst~ MP- Aux -Back
- babáy tawa babáy*  
*babáy ~'~ t- Ø -wa babáy ~'~*  
 continue ~Pst~ MP- Aux -Back continue ~Pst~
- tawa slahhahhá*  
*t- Ø -wa Red- slahhá ~'~*  
 MP- Aux -Back Plur hurt.(intrans) ~Pst~  
**so they continued, when they were hurt**
- 122 *tare axweés barisee ire*  
*t- Ø -re axweés ~'~ barisee -r' i- Ø -re*  
 MP- Aux -Consec speak ~Pst~ old.men -L.Fr S.3- Aux -Consec
- iwít yaamù*  
*iwiít ~'~ yaamú ~`~*  
 sit ~Pst~ down ~Emph~  
**they spoke, the elders sat down**

- 123 *bariseér mila ina iwít yaamù*  
 barisee -r' mila i- Ø -na iwít ~'~ yaamù ~`~  
 old.men -L.Fr custom S.3- Aux -Imprf sit.F ~Pst~ down ~Emph~  
*tare axwemamiís axwemamiís*  
 t- Ø -re axweés -m- -iís ~'~ axweés -m- -iís ~'~  
 MP- Aux -Consec speak -Ext- -Ext ~Pst~ speak -Ext- -Ext ~Pst~  
**the customary elders sat down, they talked and talked**
- 124 *gasi kare sláy tare*  
 ga -r' -sí t- ng- a- Ø -re sláy ~'~ t- Ø -re  
 thing -L.Fr -Dem2 MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Consec get ~Pst~ MP- Aux -Consec  
*yiikwá huw*  
 yiikwa -' húw ~LPA~  
 cattle -L.NØ bring ~Subj~  
**they settled up [lit. got] this, they sent a cow**
- 125 *yiikwa kare huw dó'*  
 yiikwa -' t- ng- a- Ø -re húw ~LPA~ do' -ó  
 cattle -L.NØ MP- A.3- P.F- Aux -Consec bring ~Subj~ house -L.Mo  
*Dodoód*  
 Dodoód -ó  
 Dodoód -L.Mo  
**a cow was brought to the house of Dodoód**
- 126 *ta nanahaángw ay gidabá gitláy kar*  
 t- Ø nanahaangw -ó ay ~LPA~ gidabá gitláy kara  
 MP- Aux begging -L.Mo go ~Subj~ that hey so  
*na'as gitláy thuway i thuuwi*  
 na'as gitláy tluway -ó i- Ø tluuw -i  
 please hey rain -L.Mo S.3- Aux rain -3.Subj  
**they begged him that "please, that it rains**
- 127 *gitláy na'as*  
 gitláy na'as  
 hey please  
**"please**
- 128 *gár afkudá' ya a afkudá'*  
 ga -r' afa -kú -dá' ya Ø afa -kú -dá'  
 thing -L.Fr mouth -L.Mk -Dem4 thus Aux mouth -L.Mk -Dem4  
*ya tawa loori-huw*  
 ya t- Ø -wa loori húw ~'~  
 thus MP- Aux -Back lorry bring ~Pst~  
**"if it is about the language when the vehicles carried (us)**

- 129 *afkudá'* *amór* *hhoo*  
 afa -kú -dá' amo -r' hhoo  
 mouth -L.Mk -Dem4 place -L.Fr good.F  
**“we take back those words**
- 130 *afkudá'* *amór* *hhoo*  
 afa -kú -dá' amo -r' hhoo  
 mouth -L.Mk -Dem4 place -L.Fr good.F  
**“we take back those words”**
- 131 *yiikwa* *kina* *hariís*  
 yiikwa -' t- ng- i- Ø -na hariís ~'~  
 cattle -L.NØ MP- A.3- P.N- Aux -Imprf give ~Pst~  
**they brought cows**
- 132 *yiikwa* *kiwa* *hariís* *tluwáy*  
 yiikwa -' t- ng- i- Ø -wa hariís ~'~ tluway -'  
 cattle -L.NØ MP- A.3- P.N- Aux -Back give ~Pst~ rain -L.NØ  
*iimi* *ire* *thuíw* *iimi*  
 iimi -r' i- Ø -re tluúw ~'~ iimi -r'  
 people -L.Fr S.3- Aux -Consec rain ~Pst~ people -L.Fr  
*ire* */aayínd*  
 i- Ø -re /aáy -índ ~'~  
 S.3- Aux -Consec eat -Ext.F ~Pst~  
**they brought cows, the people's rain came, the people ate**
- 133 *shiida* *ire* *dirí* *alkwí*  
 shiida -r' i- Ø -re di -r' -í alkwí  
 problem -L.Fr S.3- Aux -Consec place -L.Fr -Dem1 now  
*axweesani* *a* *fák*  
 axweesani -tá i- Ø -(g)a fák ~'~  
 utterance -L.Ft S.3- Aux -Prf finish.F ~Pst~  
**the problems of this place now, (and) the discussions had ended**
- 134 *iimi* *ire* */aayínd* *tare*  
 iimi -r' i- Ø -re /aáy -índ ~'~ t- Ø -re  
 people -L.Fr S.3- Aux -Consec eat -Ext.F ~Pst~ MP- Aux -Consec  
*kii/ bará axama bará qwala/u*  
 kii/ bará axama -kú bará qwala/u -ó  
 return in satiety -L.Mk in happiness -L.Mo  
**and the people ate and they returned to satiety, to happiness**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# UNDERSTANDING THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF OPEN ACCESS PUBLISHING FOR DECOLONISING KNOWLEDGE-MAKING AND DISSEMINATION

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## ABSTRACT

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The final contribution of this Journal volume is a written version of the panel discussion that took place at the 'Decolonisation in Praxis' conference held at SOAS on 7 June 2018. The purpose of the panel was to discuss the implications of Open Access publishing for the decolonisation debate within academic institutions. The speakers offered some exploratory thoughts, each from her unique position at SOAS, in order to encourage listeners to consider critically Open Access publishing and how they might navigate the ever-changing landscape of research production and dissemination. Some references have been included in the written version to direct readers to other resources where they can find more information.

**Key words:** Open Access publishing – conventional journals – epistemological hierarchies – decolonisation of knowledge – Global South – Global North – predatory journals

## INTRODUCTION

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In recent years Open Access publishing has come to the forefront with an increasing number of universities and research funders requesting their affiliated researchers to ensure that they take appropriate steps to make their research available under Open Access principles. SOAS University has also introduced concrete policies that encourage its research staff to make their work available on SOAS Research Online, the institutional repository. In addition, over the past year the university implemented for the first time the SOAS Open Research Champions scheme, which aims to train a group of both academic and professional services staff at SOAS in three key areas of Open Research: ORCID IDs, Research Data Management and Open Access. These Champions are encouraged to train colleagues in their disciplines or departments on a peer-to-peer level, as well as acting as internal advocates for Open Research. In the first presentation of this panel, Romina Istratii, who is a current PhD candidate and serves as one of the Open Research Champions at SOAS, offers some thoughts about the opportunities and risks involved in Open Access publishing in view of the objective to democratise knowledge-making and to decentre west-centric epistemological systems of thinking. In the second presentation, Helen Porter provides a response to Romina's thoughts by drawing from three years' working experience in the SOAS library, supporting researchers with publications and research data. Helen's first-hand experience with the introduction of national Open Access policies, the responses of publishers and the practical implications for researchers grant her an informed position from which to discuss these matters. The aim of the panel is to motivate critical dialogue in view of post-colonial needs to diversify the knowledge-making process and of concerns that arise with the steady proliferation of this new technology within academia.

## ROMINA ISTRATII: "OPEN ACCESS PUBLISHING: A STEP TOWARD THE DECOLONISATION OF KNOWLEDGE-MAKING?"

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I would like to start by recognising that the praxis (action, enacting) of decolonisation is contingent to no particular technology, method or science, and that to decentre knowledge-making and to diversify the global epistemological repertoire the essential element is first and foremost researcher reflexivity and humility. Nonetheless, I think that it is important to consider carefully the implications of Open Access, especially as pertinent to the objective of epistemological decolonisation. I see this discussion with Helen as an opportunity to contemplate together the strengths and limitations of this new technology for publishing and disseminating knowledge with the hope that this will benefit the audience and will spark a dialogue afterwards.

Open Access publishing is a rapidly expanding publication mode whereby resources are published online without restrictions so that they can be made accessible universally and permanently without any cost. Under these principles, widely used platforms for research-sharing such as Academia.edu or ResearchGate do not constitute Open Access publishing

since they are commercial endeavours requiring at least an account to be accessed.<sup>1</sup> Open Access can be conceptualised with variations according to discipline and to the stage of the research production. For instance, in the positive sciences Open Access is usually taken to mean sharing primary data, software or technological infrastructure with other researchers. Within the humanities, the concept of Open Notebooks might be more pertinent, such as in the form of an ethnographer sharing a fieldwork diary.

The positive impact of Open Access can be profound and merits to be considered by researchers across the world. Open Access publishing, under ideal conditions, means that research output is made universally and permanently available so that any reader with internet connection can access this resource without incurring a cost. This must have tremendous implications in view of the fact that journals have conventionally required subscriptions or other 'toll-fees' to be fully accessed. As a result, the majority of people not affiliated with a library/university paying subscription to these journals, or individuals unable to cover the fee independently to access the print or online journals have been excluded from all or some of their specialised knowledge. Coming from a low-income family, I am acutely aware of the fact that even the minimum fee for subscription can be prohibitive to families who struggle to make a living and to educate their children with basic salaries. Such socio-economic inequalities mean that some students cannot access information that is essential both for furthering their research interests and for staying up-to-date with advancements in the fields that interest them. Not having this information at the earlier stages of formulating research interests, some may choose not to pursue academic careers. But, even if they do, they may not be as equipped as their more privileged peers to engage rigorously with and to influence knowledge paradigms. As a result, insights reflecting the unique socio-cultural conditions and understandings of more disadvantaged segments will more rarely be accounted for in mainstream knowledge production, and theory and science will remain disproportionately attuned to the worldviews and conditions of the relatively privileged.

Moving toward a paradigm where all research is published Open Access could start to alleviate inequalities in knowledge access and further knowledge production emanating from different economic and social classes. While it may sound overused, I truly believe that knowledge is powerful and grants the individual confidence and the conviction that they can make an impact on the world. This emanates from my own experience as someone who dedicated their early life to excel as an immigrant student in their host country, in order to be granted the privilege and opportunities of a US education and what I imagined would be unlimited access to information, knowledge and possibilities. I also recollect the example of Tapoka Mkandawire, an Open Research advocate from the University of Cambridge who came at one of our trainings and referred to her personal story. Tapoka explained that the Open Access resources she was able to access at the Hanari libraries in Malawi (south east Africa) when she was a student allowed her to cultivate her curiosity for science. This is also

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<sup>1</sup> The debate about commercial platforms for research-sharing has been long and is on-going. It should be recognised that while commercial endeavours raise ethical and practical questions, platforms such as Academia.edu can provide access to non-expert or less privileged global communities that would not otherwise be able to access more specialised databases used by informed researchers and academic communities. Even though they are not Open Access, they have to some degree made higher-quality research accessible for public consumption.

a practical example of how Open Access library schemes can make research more globally available, enlarging the possibilities for learning and career advancement.

So, there are benefits in terms of Open Access publishing, but it should have become obvious that these benefits are conditioned on parameters such as access to a computer or a phone that supports accessing the net, and connectivity, both of which may be unattainable for the less economically affluent populations. It is also predicated on the ability of societies to provide these services, many of which might lack the infrastructure or the commitment to do so in view of other priorities or interests. Similarly, the benefits of Open Access are conditioned by socio-cultural and political realities that determine girls and boys' ability to pursue an education in the first place or nurture their curiosity for information. It is then important to recognise that Open Access publishing *per se* cannot reverse deeper socio-economic disparities between people and nations that have historically contributed to constrain the advancement of the underprivileged in academia, favouring the perspective of the relatively privileged in the domain of scholarship production.

Furthermore, the benefits of Open Access publishing are counterpoised by what have become increasingly visible disadvantages emanating from the profit-making opportunities that this technology offers. Most journals that publish Open Access will not do so *gratis* and will try to recover the administrative and publication cost through different business models. The most preferred among publishers seems to be the Gold Open Access option which means that the article is immediately published, usually under a Creative Commons License that enables wide dissemination. However, the costs for this need to be covered by the author/researcher (not the publisher), or where it is applicable, by their funding body, academic institution or research society. One will find that publishing under a Gold Open Access publication license at a high-quality academic journal might require paying a fee of £1800. Such charges appear to be not only economically unjustifiable for covering the publication and administrative costs involved, but they are also ethically problematic and often practically prohibitive for many authors.

My own experience as a PhD student might be instructive here. Due to various circumstances, my research has only partially been supported by external funders and I have had to work part-time to meet its implementation cost. The research is a study of conjugal violence in Northern Ethiopia and aims to contribute to a better understanding of its complex realities. My hope is to make this study available as soon as possible to be used as a resource by local practitioners and institutions. In view of the fact that I do not have funding support which would cover Open Access publication fees, I am currently called to consider how I can make my work immediately and universally available, while also publishing in the most specialised and high-impact journals to engage with, and feed back to, current understandings in my fields. Publishing Open Access could meet both needs, but the cost that some of these specialised journals require are prohibitive for someone of my material circumstances. And while fee waivers are sometimes granted, it is not always easy to prove one's eligibility for these in view of internal bureaucratic procedures. One's position must be considered particularly precarious when one contributes a critique of established knowledge paradigms, which not all Editorial Boards in Open Access journals might be willing to engage with in view of their various ideological directions.

Open Access publishing displays another problematic aspect which needs acknowledgement. Various authors have problematised the rapid multiplication of

'predatory' Open Access journals and publishers with highly questionable marketing and peer-review practices, motivated essentially by the desire for monetary gain.<sup>2</sup> While these journals provide a quick way to disseminate research, they can result in lower-quality publications due to a weak or non-existent review process. Such journals essentially leverage on early career researchers' need to improve their publication record or the sense of urgency and helplessness for those who have no other conduit to publish. It is often stated that researchers from non-western countries who are not familiar with the publishing world in the West might be more susceptible to these journals' predatory tactics. This needs to be appraised concomitantly with the fact that non-English speakers may feel overwhelmed by the publication standards (and ideological positions) of established high-impact journals, which could be another factor making journals without these characteristics more appealing.

Published articles in these low-impact journals are not likely to influence paradigms in their respective fields because of the lack of robustness in their publications, but they can influence more underprivileged researchers who cannot access the expensive quality journals, or less specialised readers in the public who do not have the knowledge to differentiate between high- and low-quality journals in fields they have little familiarity with. The risk here is that this creates a sort of marginalised or lower-quality knowledge domain that is more easily accessible to the less privileged or less specialised audiences. This not only propagates socio-economic and epistemological inequalities, but also fosters a less rigorous understanding of the world among some segments of the global population with implications for their material lives and standards of living.

Another risk that I discern and needs to be mentioned concerns funders' Open Access policies. Increasingly, funding bodies require their grantees to ensure that their research is published under Open Access principles. As important as this request might be, it is not without risks. When funders select to fund research that meets some ideological objective (implicit or explicit), the stipulation for Open Access publishing can turn into a tool for more effective propaganda and the dissemination of ideological research. Both this and the previous limitation highlight essentially that the possibilities of this technology are conditioned on human nature itself and on the interests and drivers behind its usage: as long as there are people who are motivated strictly by self-interest and profit-making, Open Access cannot meet the visionary ideal of serving society uniformly.

Having considered the more practical benefits and shortfalls of Open Access, it is important to consider the prospects of Open Access to promote a decentring and diversification of knowledge. It can be agreed that the first step for historically marginalised audiences (usually non-western, but also 'silenced' segments within the West) to speak back to the prevalent epistemological framework is first to gain more access to influential western

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<sup>2</sup> J. Sanchez, "Predatory Publishers Are Corrupting Open Access," *Nature* 489, no. 179, September 12, 2012, <https://www.nature.com/news/predatory-publishers-are-corrupting-open-access-1.11385>; Robert Watson, "Hijackers on the Open Access Highway", *Nursing Open* 2, no.3 (November 2015): 95–96, doi: 10.1002/nop2.36; Gina Kolata, "Scientific Articles Accepted (Personal Checks, Too)", *The New York Times*, April 7, 2013, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/2013/04/08/health/for-scientists-an-exploding-world-of-pseudo-academia.html> ; Yondell Masten and Alyce Ashcraft, "The Dark Side of Dissemination: Traditional and Open Access Versus Predatory Journals", *Nursing Education Perspectives* 37, no. 5 (September/October 2016): 275-277, doi: 10.1097/01.NEP.0000000000000064; Thomas K. Grose, "The Dark Side of 'Open Access'", *PRISM*, February 2017, <http://www.asee-prism.org/the-dark-side-of-open-access/>.

publications. This provides such groups with the necessary exposure to the progression of western knowledge paradigms vis-à-vis historical political realities (not least being colonial histories). The increased awareness regarding historical biases or colonial underpinnings in knowledge production can produce more informed and critical responses from the so-called periphery, thus diversifying perspectives.

The challenge here is that those who speak from other knowledge centres will most likely speak in different media of communication. It must then be an important limitation that most Open Access journals have generally been English publications, with many offering abstracts in other languages but only a few accepting papers for review in a language that is not Western European. This means that those who have not been immersed in and mastered these languages can neither fully comprehend the tacit connotations in English publications, nor be sufficiently equipped to have their publications accepted by rigorous journals. A post-colonial Open Access publishing landscape would need to be more accommodating to linguistic plurality. Ideally, authors would be able to opt to submit their manuscript in their native language, languages which they would be able to twist and manoeuvre in the way English native speakers have done historically with English.<sup>3</sup>

However, it must be understood that even when non-English speakers master English or other European languages (which they frequently do), this does not suffice to ensure that their pronouncements eschew becoming as elitist as some western pronouncements have been. The difference is that those who speak now reflect the views of a peripheral elite. Moreover, even if their pronouncements are coming from the underprivileged, this is no guarantee that they will be understood by the other side. Understanding does not rely only on speaking the same language, but also on being able and willing to access each other's cosmologies and socio-cultural particularities. While Open Access might create a much-needed platform for more interaction across boundaries, it does not ensure that the dialogue will happen and that the different 'voices' will be made intelligible to each other. This lack of understanding may be unintended and result from differentials in cultural upbringing that make it difficult for people to access other worldviews, or may be deliberately motivated by deeply entrenched colonial attitudes that refuse to consider other perspectives on the world.

My sense is that the precondition for Open Access to serve toward a decolonisation of epistemologies is primarily attitudinal and depends less on the technology itself. Open Access publishing cannot be a remedy *per se* to lack of personal reflexivity and presumptuous attitudes hindering cross-cultural understanding. While researchers are encouraged to work toward publishing their research Open Access, it would appear to be equally or more urgent to focus on cultivating self-awareness and reflexivity about one's own epistemological situatedness as a means to enable a more tolerant and critical engagement with diverse knowledge systems in the world.

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<sup>3</sup> It is not proposed here that non-natives cannot master or speak English as well as the native speakers. I have no doubt that they can and they do, often with higher eloquence. The point that is made here is rather that for fairness, nobody should need to be asked to master a foreign language in order to be able to contribute to the global bank of knowledge. A common medium may be a pragmatic compromise, but one must question why this common medium still needs to follow the strictures of the historically potent western knowledge centre.

## HELEN PORTER: “OPEN ACCESS: PRACTICAL BARRIERS TO, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR, THE DECOLONIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE”

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Firstly, I would like to say thank you to Katharina and Romina for inviting me to be involved today. For much of my working time at SOAS I am incredibly busy dealing with the logistics and practical implementation of Open Access, some of which I will come onto in a moment. But one thing I feel very strongly about is that Open Research developments have a place in the academic debates and activism that take place at SOAS both amongst the student and academic community so I am delighted that this topic has been included today.

I have picked out a few points that Romina highlighted in the debates and developments around Open Access that I would like to speak about regarding the following areas: technology; research funder policies and initiatives; the publishing model and commercialisation of research; and finally research perceptions and practice. I will briefly highlight a selection of limitations that I have observed and which I think are relevant in the debates about decolonisation of knowledge-making. I will then round up with some opportunities that I think researchers can take to address some of these limitations.

As Romina mentioned, Open Access is a product of the technological developments that have made it possible for alternative routes for dissemination of knowledge e.g. through institutional databases, such as SOAS Research Online which make a variety of digital versions of articles available as PDFs, or through the new publishing models which have emerged online such as full Open Access journals.<sup>4</sup> However if we look further back in the cycle of knowledge production, colleagues in the fields of sciences are acutely aware that for researchers in some countries the quality of technology and equipment is a limiting factor for them in producing research. Studies have shown that a disproportionately high number of researchers in the Global South publish in predatory journals and I think it is possible that the routes of this begin early on in the research life-cycle.<sup>5</sup> So, as Romina mentioned, the predatory journal industry which is thriving in the digital era is a problem relevant to the production, dissemination of and access to knowledge.

I recently returned from a workshop in Myanmar which was run at a local research centre partnered with SOAS. The research centre has a wealth of papers, photographs and data which are held only on paper with limited resources and technological equipment for digitisation. This knowledge is largely undiscovered and undiscoverable. Likewise, last year I was on a panel at the SOAS Africa Conference on knowledge production and a co-speaker highlighted local publishing industries whose circulation is regional and in print and offered a wealth of new research and academic debates; this again is hidden from the internet.<sup>6</sup> I think we need to remember that when we are talking about Open Access we are often

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<sup>4</sup> For a summary of the development of Open Access see ‘A Brief History of Open Access’ Open Access 101: Unlocking Knowledge: <http://blogs.harvard.edu/openaccess101/what-is-open-access/what-is-open-access/>

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller discussion see: McKenna, Sioux ‘Why developing countries are particularly vulnerable to predatory journals’ The Conversation, Nov 7, 2017. Available from: <http://theconversation.com/why-developing-countries-are-particularly-vulnerable-to-predatory-journals-86704>

<sup>6</sup> To view the full panel discussion on ‘Knowledge production, media and access in African studies’ at the SOAS Africa Conference 2017 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwzxn8OJ6E>

talking about providing access to research generated in the Global North by western scholars.

Despite the fact that a huge amount of research has been made Open Access—a key aggregator of Open Access researcher, a database called Core, has over 70 million articles—the search engines of Open Access repositories cannot compare to commercial databases. We speak a lot about researchers not having access to full-texts but without access to commercial databases, which we enjoy at SOAS, researchers may not be able to run full-literature reviews. The licences and access rules put in place by commercial publishers and database providers can mean that research partners and colleagues outside of well-funded institutions cannot benefit from these services. For Open Access texts to be truly accessible we need to look at the technology that supports them and to build better indexing and discovery tools.

This brings me to the second area I would like to pick out in response to Romina’s talk: publishing models and the commercialisation of research. Romina highlighted the issue of Academia.edu, which is a commercial enterprise and is increasingly charging fees for added services such as metrics and mentions<sup>7</sup>. Librarians like myself have slowly watched as the foundations of Open Access provision have been taken over by large commercial publishers. The Social Science Research Network (SSRN) was recently acquired by Elsevier, as has Mendeley and Bepress. The Open Access landscape seems to have become a prime target for commercialisation with uncertainty about what this will mean in the long term.<sup>8</sup> Romina mentioned that Open Access can come at a cost for authors, but there are other costs associated with publishing which may be increasing. Another trend I have noticed is that publishers, to cover production costs, often expect authors to produce their own indexes or do their own copy-editing. This comes at a cost of time and money for authors and could become a barrier for any researcher with limited resources.

I am not a researcher so I am afraid I can’t fully understand the pressure to publish in ‘high-impact’ journals but I can tell you a bit about impact factors and their place in this debate. Metrics (citations and impact factors) are most usually provided by two large companies: Thomson Reuters and Elsevier. For citations to be indexed and impact factors calculated the journals first need to be indexed and tracked by these services. The criteria for a journal to be included in Scopus include: a publicly available description of the peer-review process and publication ethics standards; articles must have references in Roman script and English language abstracts and titles. Inclusion in Scopus has become a mark of quality and esteem and institutions are measured on the number of journal articles

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<sup>7</sup> For more on this topic see ‘Why are we not boycotting academia.edu’ #DISRUPTIVEMEDIA. Centre for Disruptive Media: <http://disruptivemedia.org.uk/why-are-we-not-boycotting-academia-edu/> and ‘What is Academia Premium? Academia Help Centre: <http://support.academia.edu/customer/en/portal/articles/2405880-what-is-academia-premium->

<sup>8</sup> For more information about commercial purchase of Open Access platforms see Schonfeld, Roger C. ‘Elsevier Acquires SSRN’ The Scholarly Kitchen, May 17 2016: <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2016/05/17/elsevier-acquires-ssrn/> and Shaw, Claire ‘Elsevier buys Mendeley: your reaction’ The Guardian Higher Education Network Blog: <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/apr/10/elsevier-buys-mendeley-academic-reaction> and Schonfeld, Roger C. ‘Elsevier Acquires bepress’ The Scholarly Kitchen, Aug 2 2017: <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/08/02/elsevier-acquires-bepress/>

published each year, with that number coming from Scopus.<sup>9</sup> This leaves authors at SOAS and other institutions who have supported small and regional publishers with a difficult choice for publication routes.

I am fully behind funder support of Open Access and will continue to be—the introduction of the Open Access policy for the REF has seen full-texts of journal articles in SOAS Research Online increase from 30% to 90% in a matter of two years. This simply wouldn't have happened, despite my best efforts in promoting Open Access, without the strict rules introduced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), now Research England. However, there are problems with these policies; many funders favour Gold Open Access for funded research and provide money to help authors do this. This can lead to money going directly from the funder to the large publishers, simply bolstering existing models of commercial publishing. Additionally, smaller, niche and regional journals are also excluded as a route to publication as they have neither a Gold Open Access option nor a policy for Green Open Access that meets the funder's strict policies. The result can be that by default researchers are driven to submit articles to large journals published in the West in English. Likewise, new requirements for data archiving and sharing see researchers depositing data collected across the world in European databases.

I realise I have painted a rather bleak picture of Open Access so far, but I think it is vital for researchers to be aware of the intricacies and limitations in this area in order to fully engage with the opportunities. It is not my intention to dictate where you publish and you should seek advice from academic colleagues, but I would thoroughly investigate your publishing agreements since publisher policies can be confusing: Will they let you share your article freely online and when? Can you repurpose your research without a future cost? If your publishing agreement lets you share your research Open Access, then do it. Promote Open Access to the students you teach and introduce them to the debates. Technology is doing great things with Open Access and I hope this will continue—a plugin for Chrome lets you move from a paywalled article to an Open Access version, if it exists, at a click of a button.<sup>10</sup> German universities recently stopped their subscription payments for Elsevier entirely and they found that researchers had alternative routes to accessing articles.<sup>11</sup>

If you find yourself at an institution or in a country which is thinking about such changes, as a researcher you can support debate and negotiations. When you are applying for funding or are involved in funded projects, wherever you can, build in costs to support your local research partners with equipment or software that can help them make their research outputs and data more discoverable. Support small or regional journals you know or work with them to meet Scopus requirements. If you collect research data, can you leave it with local researchers and communities, or deposit it in local data archives? Translate abstracts of full articles into regional languages and include them with your Open Access text.

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<sup>9</sup> See Bibliometrics in the REF and University Rankings, Durham University Library: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/library/research/evaluate/rankings/> and Scopus Content Policy and Selection : <https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus/how-scopus-works/content/content-policy-and-selection>

<sup>10</sup> Refers to unpaywall via: <https://unpaywall.org/>

<sup>11</sup> See Schiermeier, Quirin 'Germany vs Elsevier: universities win temporary journal access after refusing to pay fees' Nature News 4 Jan 2018: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-00093-7>

Finally, as researchers, be open to new models of dissemination, share more of your research and get credit for it. Research funders are currently looking to assess working papers in development, not just published articles, in the funding application process, conscious of the fact that a lot of early career researchers' innovative ideas are being locked up in the peer-review process and undiscovered for as much as two years.<sup>12</sup> The Open Research landscape will continue to develop rapidly and offers a wealth of opportunities for individuals and for decolonisation of knowledge more broadly, but these need to be considered critically, and I hope debates like this one will continue.

## ROMINA ISTRATII: SUMMARY POINTS

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Thank you, Helen, for your deeply informed presentation and for your guidance on to how we might navigate the complex landscape. Your presentation demonstrates how vital it is for all researchers to understand the current changes occurring in the domain of publishing and research dissemination technologies to be able to see the opportunities (and dangers) that lie ahead of us. As researchers we have to build a skill-set not only to be able to conduct rigorous research, but also to navigate an increasingly predatory, competitive and prohibitive environment to disseminate our research in terms that can still agree somehow with our decolonial priorities.

I will reiterate the importance of looking for alternative paths that centre on leveraging the local resources available in communities of research, which can result not only in disseminating the research promptly, but also in strengthening smaller publishers struggling to acquire a legitimate presence in the world of publishing. I happened to publish twice in an Open Access (cost-free) academic journal started by the initiative of a single department at a local university in India, for which I now serve also as a Reviewer. What attracted me to it (since I have an in-existent relationship with the country) was its commitment to support early career researchers and to create a respectful ambiance for sharing different opinions. Certainly, publishing in a peripheral or emerging journal has its limitations; however, it also has the advantage that the work becomes immediately published *gratis* and that in publishing with them you are indirectly strengthening other centres of knowledge-production.<sup>13</sup>

In conclusion, I think we can retain your point that Open Access publication is as powerful as any technology when it is used critically and creatively. It also must not be limited to an effort to make western academics' research universally available to the world, but also non-western research to western academics and the wider public. Only such a reciprocal application of the technology can start to diversify the knowledge landscape and perhaps start to reverse deeply entrenched epistemological hierarchies.

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<sup>12</sup> See: 'Preprints' Medical Research Council: <https://mrc.ukri.org/research/policies-and-guidance-for-researchers/preprints/>

<sup>13</sup> Although, it should be clear that the location of the initiative is of lesser important than how committed the journal is to support and to disseminate non-mainstream views and approaches that counter and diversify established paradigms.



