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Editorial

This is the third issue of the *East West Journal of Humanities*, a publication of EWU Center for Research and Training. The Center now publishes two journals: this one and the *East West Journal of the Social Sciences and Business*.

We welcome your contributions and invite suggestions for future issues. We intend to make ours the leading journal on the liberal arts in this region and look forward to your participation in our venture.

I would like to conclude by thanking Dr. Rafiqul Huda Chowdhury, Chairperson, EWUCRT, for advice and guidence, my Teaching Assistant Asif Nawaz for his help, and Aynun Nahar, Research Officer, and Shahla Sharmin, Departmental Secretary of EWUCRT for their assistance.

Fakrul Alam

Editor
East West Journal of Humanities

CONTENTS

Globalization, Democracy and English Studies

Syed Manzoorul Islam
University of Dhaka

1. Globalization has been seen by both its promoters and detractors primarily as an expansion of global capital and money and commodity markets across national and regional borders, driving both capitalized and capital poor economies towards consumer-oriented production whose backward and forward linkages are determined – indeed manipulated – by developed economies of the West. In the process, traditional modes of production of weaker economies are neglected, which, in the end, lose out to high value production processes and products backed up by sophisticated technology and financial instruments. The deceptive investment portfolios from the West, described rather quizzically as "footloose capital," gain control of weaker economies and threaten to withdraw in the event of a government taking measures to protect its domestic business. The promotion of supply side and transnational economies has the ultimate goal of a market-led integration of global society. As Jurgen Habermas points out, "a state enmeshed in the transnational economic system would abandon its citizens to the legally secured negative freedoms of global competition, while essentially confining itself to providing, in business-like fashion, infrastructures that promote entrepreneurial activity and make national economic conditions attractive from the point of view of profitability" (78,79-80). Those opposed to globalization see in the power of the runaway markets -- and the involvement of the United States in World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations with governments to pursue

market-friendly policies – the inevitability of the loss of autonomy of national states, and an erosion of their decision-making abilities. Indeed globalization's war cry now is "more market, less state interventions;" its aim is to see a free market society along with a minimal state. In countries that are variously described as third world, less developed or of weak economies, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and their less well-off but equally high-handed cousin, the Asian Development Bank, work as allies of the forces of hegemonic globalization.

The word hegemony brings us to a consideration of how globalization impacts on a broad range of areas on a daily basis, such as migration and travel, the media, information technology, education, culture and lifestyle, and cultural economy. Education for example, is increasingly valued in a global context, to the extent that individual states, either by force of necessity or by the lure of finding a place in the global system, now pursue American models in their higher education. Private universities in Bangladesh, for example, have a Fall semester conducted during a season when leaves turn a bit brownish at best, but don't fall en masse. Call it a name game, but it speaks volumes of the kind of US educational hegemony we are witnessing around the globe. This errant example apart, however, one has to recognize the dominance of US-led educational enterprises in setting qualifying standards for English language proficiency (TOEFL, for example), designing models of tertiary level curricula, making available doctoral and post-doctoral studies and research opportunities, and even authenticating style manuals for research for a global constituency. As in the economic and technological aspects of globalization, this dominance is leading to homogenization and marginalization – homogenization of local educational practices into a global model, and where local practices are resistant, their marginalization and disempowerment. According to Arjun Appadurai, "globalization involves the use of a variety of instruments of homogenization (armaments, advertising technologies, language hegemonies, clothing styles and the like) which are absorbed in local political and cultural economies" (303). Appadurai, however, maintains that "globalization of culture is not the same as its homogenization," (303) and offers to read globalization's complex interface with local cultures in terms of a tension that releases different "scapes"– ethnoscape, mediascape, etc – that continuously add variety within and outside national boundaries. It is difficult, however, to see such scapes interacting outside of their usual binary constraints (for example, US vs. Bangladeshi mediascapes, or, the first world vs. third world ethnoscapes where the first party of the binary is always privileged).

Appadurai's mention of language hegemony will be relevant to my discussion of the state of English Studies in the post 9/11 world. But before going into that, I'd like to look at a related issue that is providing globalization a new momentum: the New World Order (NWO) and the various configurations of power relations that it has put into place. An understanding of these configurations will also help us locate the nexus between power and knowledge that increasingly defines NWO and add to changes and transformations in cultural and academic discourses including English Studies. In this paper, I'll consider NWO in geo-political and economic terms, avoiding the conspiracy theories such as the one put forward by Takis Fotopoulos who, in his essay, "`Democracy` in the New World Order" maintains that the transnational elite – the *Illuminanti* of the conspiracy theorists – are trying to "implant western models of democracy in vulnerable countries against resistance solely for their own gain" (5). This elite group, he believes, has both power and control over the instruments of international trade and capital, multinational corporations, digital and information technology, various international organizations and even some UN agencies. These are strongly supported by the military-industrial complexes of stronger nations and blocks (G8, for example) and are constantly redefining not only systems of governance e.g., democracy, but also economy, and the market (e.g., unbridled consumerism) culture (the influx of western visual culture and the dominance of western media) and education in countries that are now under their sway. Fotopoulos believes that "the transnational elite does not hesitate now to proceed to the next step: to rewrite History and, in the process, to condemn (and tomorrow to penalize) every anti-systemic ideology." (5)

Ever since the term New World Order became a geopolitical reality after the cessation of cold war and the rise of the US-centric unipolar world, it has also become a part of US political rhetoric. Starting with the senior George Bush, political leaders, political analysts and media pundits – all have had their own take on NWO that has ranged from idealism to opportunism to caution. What has been commonly recognized though, is the unipolar nature of NWO, and, along with it, new realities such as the birth of new nation states (after the breakdown of the Soviet Republic and Yugoslavia); ethnic conflicts and the emergence of new flashpoints in the world; the rise of religious fundamentalism and, of course, the threat of what Habermas describes as "spontaneous border crossings" (for example, security risks connected with sophisticated and large-scale technologies, organized crime, arms trafficking etc.) (77). On the economic front, footloose capital rushed to fill the void left by the expiring centrally planned economies in the erstwhile Soviet Russia, and also sought newer grounds, such as

China and India which promised ample return. Broadly speaking, some of the issues that underpin any discussion of globalization and democracy today are: the dominance of market philosophy and an ever increasing global capital flow influencing a whole range of things – from national economic decisions and monetary policies to lifestyle; a proliferation of visual culture and the increasing impact of the media, accelerated migration from Asia and Eastern Europe to USA, UK and the European Union countries, and a mobile positioning of the various diasporas, a local/global interface that has created grounds for newer hybridization of culture and lifestyle, a reconfiguration of some older binaries such as metropolis/periphery, north/south, accompanied by both a strengthening of privileged parties of the binaries, as well as the phenomenon of striking back by the disprivileged parties that also calls for resistance to globalization's homogenizing logic.

Although the economic aspect of globalization and NWO has been much commented upon there have also been strong misgivings amongst multiculturists about their totalizing and homogenizing logic. George Bush's "Us vs. them" stand after 9/11 seems to have put all ethnic, racial, class and cultural differences into a largely US (and by association, Euro) ethnoracial mix which on the one hand, would fuse all differences for a happy Americanism, and on the other, create spurious multiulturism along paradigm maps charted by power agencies (state cultural bodies, the media and academia). In a bid to give such fake multiculturalism a politically correct stand, supporters of NWO began to call it "globally local multiculturism" or "strategic multiculturism." Multiculturists battling the demons of monoculturism consider this new multiculturism oppressive and warn against the many faces such oppression can take. Indeed, resistance against such oppression in the heyday of globalization is seen not just in the so-called third world countries, but in the big powers' home territories as well. This is amply demonstarted in massive, and often violent, protests every time the WTO (which now appears to be the flagship of new international monetary and trade order) meets, and, in more recent "Occupy Wall Street" and "Occupy Everything" movements. Americans also had to lose or compromise on many of their civil rights after Bush's war against terror took a decisive turn in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq. The media, particularly newspapers and TV channels pursuing the kind of embedded journalism CNN practiced during the Iraq war, have been persuaded to play the patriotic card in reporting on the war, and on terrorism in general. This is continuing even today, with little substantive change during a supposedly more benign Obama administration.

Resistance in cultural fields however, is less spectacular than in areas of political activism; it is also, to some extent, uncertain. Such resistance has taken the form of avoidance (of things that clash with local culture), revivalism (of traditional cultural forms to counter cross-border "sub-cultural" production) or restitution (an increasing interest in mother languages, local literatures and forms of culture as a way of recovering the ground lost to dominant global literatures and cultures). But the important thing is, such resistance continues even as opposition from the establishment mounts.

The confrontation-resistance debate centering on globalization has spilled into many areas, such as culture, where the fear of a strong visual culture emanating from the west cannibalizing global diversity remains a persistent fear. In English Studies, too, the confrontation-resistance dialectic has added new dimensions to its already mutating landscape. But before I take a close look at the landscape, it remains for me to cover the one remaining concept - democracy - forming the discursive frame of the paper. Democracy, by the very definitional parameters attached to it, is essentially pluralistic, liberal, non-coercive, accountable and hence transparent, secular, and oriented towards public good. Advocates of democracy such as Jermy Bentham (1748-1832) and James Mill (1773-1836) considered liberal democracy "nothing but a logical requirement for the governance of a society, freed from absolute power and tradition, in which individuals have endless desires…" (Held: 25). However, for democracy to function according to the ideals mentioned above, there are certain instrumental requirements that every democratic polity agrees upon. Habermas sets out four such instruments which he describes as "preconditions" for an "association of citizens …… to regulate their coexistence democratically and to shape social conditions by political means:"

> an "effective political apparatus" through which to implement binding decisions;"
>
> "a clearly defined 'self' for 'political self-determination and self transformation…."
>
> A willing citizenry who "can be mobilized for participation in political opinion-formation and will-formation oriented to the common good," and
>
> "an economic and social milieu" for a "dramatically programmed administration" to organize itself and enhance its legitimacy. (76)

The reason I have picked up Habermas from among scores of commentators on democracy is that he takes a cautionary view of the modern state's capacity to sustain its three essential prerogatives – its capacity for control, its legitimacy and its organizational functions – in the face of global capitalism. The four preconditions that Habermas spells out for politics and society to coexist for an effective realization of democratic prerogatives are constantly under threat from forces of globalization. Such a situation problematizes the basic assumptions of democracy and raises a number of questions: How free is an individual in democracy? Do all citizens equally enjoy the broad cluster of rights a democratic society offers? How much freedom does an economically backward democratic country itself enjoy? Indeed, one may even posit that in many democracies, the state itself is responsible for producing and maintaining inequalities of everyday life. Democracy as a form of governance may be a logical choice, as Bentham and Mill maintained, but whether it delivers its promises depends a great deal on how it views itself, and what the dynamics are that provide its guiding force. Bentham and Mill themselves excluded women and the labouring class from democratic franchise, as did Jean Jacues Rousseau (1712-78), although in his case it was the poor rather than the labouring class which got the axe. More recently, questions have been raised about the agency of state institutions and even citizens themselves in articulating and controlling outcomes towards public good: should there be limits on the power of the *demos* to change and alter political circumstance? Should the nature and scope of liberty of individuals and minorities be left to democratic decision?"(Held: 179) Just as globalization is seen to be creating new inequalities everywhere – as it also empowers certain new regions to emerge as subsidiary power blocks (Asia Pacific, for example)– democracy is also seen to be skewed more towards the rich and the powerful in formal governance and material and distributional matters (social justice, for example) than the poor. This, in turn, consolidates the power of the elite, and creates subsidiary power bases for a collective manipulation of policies and programmes. And again, like the forces of globalization, democracy both unites and divides the people by keeping them eternally within a conflictual mould. The multi-party system of democracy – considered one of its pillars – is a formal arrangement of such a conflictual ethics.

When a democracy – particularly liberal democracy – distributes its fruits unevenly among the people, it exposes its various biases. A democratic polity has a dominant male and class bias; it is aligned towards the market and capital, and, of course, power. Even a country like India, considered the largest democracy in the world, there are obvious linguistic and religious biases that no government has

been able, or tried, to hide. In most democracies, there is often an intolerance of free press and a desire to use force in silencing dissent. These biases usually dictate governments' approach to social justice, education, culture and their policy regarding gender and ethnicity.

2. I have briefly attended to the widely debated issues of globalization, and along with the complex and contested notion of democracy in the hope that these will form a conceptual and historical background against which a mapping of English Studies can be done. Such an exercise will be both meaningful and practical since the discipline of English studies now embraces an expanding number of interrelated subjects, such as Cultural, Media and Communication Studies, all of which relate closely to the changing landscapes of economy and culture – both local and global. As if the language-literature divide within English Studies were not contentious enough, the introduction of this broad range of studies has brought newer uncertainties about the continuation of literature studies – as the subject was known until even three decades ago. The questions that become inevitable now are: will literature be displaced by a plethora of new disciplines that have thrived after the introduction of theory, which itself has been necessitated by a shift towards deconstruction and away from the essentialism that marked the general mood of the intellectually rebellious 1960s and 1970s? Will English Studies subsume other subjects as it continues to give pride of place to literature? Will literature lead the way towards an expanding interdisciplinary study, broader than English Studies, incorporating newly emerging fields of culture and society? While there are no clear answers to these questions, some hints and clues can be deciphered in reviewing the changing nature of English studies over the decades, its embracing of cultural and media studies at a juncture of history which also saw the rise of globalization, the end of the cold war era, and the beginning of global transformation weakening nation states. It is important therefore to relate English studies to the tensions, confrontations and fissures, as well as energies, and dynamics that have characterized the global scene in the last four decades.

3. English Studies locates itself in this critical juncture as a ground where shocks from global transformations can be absorbed and new configurations of our experience can be articulated. It is also a ground that offers newer opportunities of assimilation, adjustment, innovation and change in keeping with emerging aspirations and needs. There was a time when English Studies was accused of complicity with colonial forces in their efforts to intellectually subjugate the colonized people. Such suspicion remained long after territorial decolonization was achieved. One remembers Ngugi wa Thiong'o's strong stand against English

and some European languages for destroying African linguistic traditions and his branding of English departments in the universities of his native Kenya, as in other decolonized countries, as colonial outposts. But there was also an equally passionate defense of English from a whole range of writers and scholars including Nirad C. Chaudhuri and Chinua Achebe. Negotiating these opposing stands is a middle view, which considers English and English studies as what they stand for, and the possibilities of communication and creative engagement they offer. Even before the rise of the new generation of Indo-Anglican writers led by Salman Rushdie who initiated a move for the Empire to write back to the Centre which, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, is "a process by which the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has been wrested far from the dominant European culture" (8), there were misgivings about the politics of English language and its colonial association. It is generally agreed that beginning in the 1960s, English was losing its institutional authority and power. As Rivkin and Ryan put it, English could no longer "present itself as a repository of good values or of appropriate style if those values were connected to …Imperial violence" (852). However, they also maintain that, "Scholars began to take note of the fact that many great works of English literature promoted beliefs and assumptions regarding other geographic regions and ethnic groups" (852). Indeed, reading English Literature postcolonially has enabled many to discover in some classical writers and texts a pattern of questioning certain colonial ideologies, institutions and power relations. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is one such example where he even critiques the colonial episteme. Such postcolonial undertakings have opened up areas of intellectual debate, where questions of identify, marginality, hybridity, representation, race, domination and resistance – the substance of post colonial theory, in short – are discussed, and from where the Empire is also continuously writing back to the Centre in the very language of the Centre. Roberto Fernandez Retamar, a noted cultural activist of post-revolutionary Cuba maintains, in one of his passionate essays, that the Calibans the colonizers had left behind are now writing back to them in their own language in what appears to be an ironic inversion of canonical overtures by the colonizers. In an evocative passage of his essay, "Caliban: Notes towards a Discussion of Culture in Our Americas" Retamar writes: "Prospero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, enslaved Caliban, and taught him his language to make himself understood. What else can Caliban do but use that same language – today he has no other – to curse him, to wish that the 'red plague' would fall on him?" (24). But Caliban's cursing today can take many shapes – it has indeed created a space for protest literatures of various kinds, but also a whole literature industry based on other Englishes. As other Englishes come to prominence in

different parts of the world, English as the language of the colonialists has to undergo profound changes, divesting itself of a large part of its colonial cultural luggage. English is also the language for many Asian and African diasporic writers which they use to articulate their experience of displacement, marginalization and their in-betweenness, although they have to deal with – and often use to their advantage – the general perception of foreignness of their English. Thus English Studies today is a location for transnational and transcultural dialogue, and is assuming an essentially multicultural and multiethnic character. Bob Pope in *The English Studies Book* lists a number of developments showing the difference between, what he calls 'traditional' and 'progressive' uses of the language. A few of the differences he mentions are:

'Traditional'	'Progressive'
English for employment	English for 'life'
Promotion of single standard language	Recognition of varieties
Emphasis on writing	Emphasis on speech
Canon of 'great works'	Open or no canon
Single dominant cultural	Multicultural differences (31).

In the 1960s English literature was still concerned primarily with canonical texts, and the dominant ideology it pursued was monocultural and Eurocentric, although it did have a radical vision influenced by leftist views of the time, and a Sartrean commitment to freedom. But soon, 'progressive' notions of literary studies began to replace older paradigms, due largely to the "'cannon debates' and 'culture wars'" (Pope 15), of 1970s and beyond, pressure from the market (which enlarged the English language teaching front) and the politics of English language which involved recasting of the Englishness of English studies "by economic, political, military and cultural deference to the United States" (Sinfield: 225). Another powerful agent of change was theory, and Alan Sinfield tells us how, as theory ruled, "Many prized texts, inspected in the earnest light of multiculturism, feminism and gay liberation appeared racist, misogynist and homophobic. Furthermore, many texts were suddenly perceived as embedded in an essentialist, redemptionist vision, in which 'man' figured as a central but fixed entity" (xvii-xviii). The essentially deconstructive bent of theory was instrumental in encouraging a poststructuralist and, eventually, postmodern engagement with texts – both within and outside the canon. This also led to an interface between literature and culture that multiculturists particularly welcomed. Although

supporters of the great canonical tradition still remain (Harold Bloom is a case in point), the general shift is noticeably towards an interdisciplinary approach within English studies. As Brian Doyle wrote in *English and Englishness* in 1989, "The study of English will…provide a creative base for active experiments with cultural production (verbal, visual and aural) which enhance, improve and diversify rather than narrow and homogenize our cultural life"(142).

My own experience of teaching, and designing syllabus for a number of public and private universities tells me that English Studies, without losing its central focus – which is English literature and language – is slowly but surely moving towards cultural and media studies, theory and post-theory – in the sense of theory in practice. The English department of Dhaka University introduced theory in the late 1980s and postmodern literature only about ten years ago. Brac University, where I have taught postmodern American, Latin American and French literature (in translation) courses at the Masters level, also offers courses on Visual Culture, World Englishes and Feminism. Undergraduate students there have a choice between literature, culture and media studies and linguistics. But despite the variety and wide range of courses at Brac University, and to some extent in Dhaka University, classics haven't yet lost out to texts that one or the other contemporary theory prefers or which have a contemporary appeal. Whether this preference for classics remains in the future depends on a number of factors: how other universities here and abroad fare in their curriculum design; how the marketplace values the current courses; or the state of intellectual and creative impulses that shape our choices and our priorities.

4. It now remains for me to discuss the importance English language studies and linguistics have assumed in the last few decades. When the department of English of Dhaka University was launched in 1921, it was customary to see literature and language as complementary and mutually supportive branches of the same discipline. It was generally agreed that learning literature was only meaningful when one had a grasp of language, and, similarly, learning language was only meaningful when one had a grasp of literature. The interdependence of literature and language was seen necessary for a balanced learning and teaching programme, but in reality, literature remained the dominant subject, with language playing a supportive role. It was only in the mid-1980s that Linguistics was introduced as a separate subject with ELT forming an important part. The progress of ELT in particular and Linguistics in general since then has been phenomenal, although English Literature has shown a decline. In Dhaka University, students can opt for literature or linguistics at the 4th year of undergraduate studies, and most go for

linguistics – that is, ELT. And after the private university boom began in the 1990s, which saw a preference for market-savvy subjects such as business and computer rather than a liberal education framework, English language also became a must-read subject. All private universities have English language as part of their undergraduate curriculum, but few offer literature courses. And literature courses, to be 'viable,' have been geared toward the market which means introducing a mix of subjects, including linguistics and business English, and excluding authors presumed to be 'difficult' or 'uninteresting.' Such load-shedding has seen the end of many canonical authors such as Spenser, Milton and Byron in private university curriculum, but in public universities too, they now exist in much truncated form. And with the introduction of semester system, which deals with literature in piecemeal fashion (four to five texts by four to five authors, or in rare cases, such as Shakespeare, four to five texts by one author), public universities might replicate private university philosophy, although without the danger of English literature being altogether taken off the academic packages they offer. The existing strength of English literature programmes, and an increasing demand for raising the number of seats in all the departments of all public universities will probably stave off such a move.

5. ELT, and, along with it, linguistics, will see further expansion as a huge market exists for it which is expanding phenomenally around the globe. A recent study points out to the emergence of new geolinguistic regions, in addition to the existic ones, where English enjoys the status of a privileged media and cultural language. The homogeneity in terms of English language use is bound to expand rather phenomenally, the study maintains, expanding the size of the English language market. (Sinclair, Jacka, Cunninghman, 1996). Besides USA, Great Britain, Canada, and Australia, India is an expanding geolinguistic region where English is a strong second language, while China and Japan are fast becoming major markets for English language. Besides, economies of scale and scope will always create newer demands, and some of these are already being met even in Bangladesh: a private university has started offering undergraduate degree in Business English (which also contains a course on Hospitality English), and courses on Call Centre English are being offered by many private language training centers. ELT enjoys hefty support from the British Council – which itself offers "English for Life" courses that are, by Bangladeshi standard, quite expensive. The British Overseas Development Agency, DFID, has also come up with a well funded programme to promote ELT and the "English for Life" concept in Bangladesh. I am sure ELT curriculum and teaching methodology will undergo significant changes in keeping with emerging demands. But so far, the

standard in both cases appear to have set by British and American Universities, and if there have been changes in the last few years, these have been mediated or supported by the British Council. ELT and linguistics curricula and teaching methodology will need some fundamental changes in view of the educational, and more particularly English language teaching realities, of Bangladesh, some of which the discipline will also share with literature. The English language proficiency of the entry level students in pubic universities is generally poor to dismal. My own assessment over the last few years is that as many as 8 out of 10-12 students I meet in my first year tutorials cannot write a paragraph without one or more mistakes in every sentence. Most of them cannot carry out a meaningful conversation in English, let alone give their opinions on an issue. They improve somewhat over the years, but not significantly. What, may I ask, is the use of teaching them discourse analysis when they cannot even come up with an elementary discourse in the language, even on a perfectly ordinary matter? Or, what, for that matter, is the use of teaching them Shakespeare, when most of his plays have to be understood via Cliff notes or Indian bazaar notes? But since ELT is basically about teaching (and learning English), the burden falls on ELT practitioners to come up with some research (not following American or British models, but those set by our own researchers based on ground realities here) to find out where the problems lie, and once these have been identified, to design a new curriculum effectively addressing them. In my opinion, we need to concentrate on writing – composition – reading and speaking. Reading books from beginning to end – not scanning and skimming should be taught patiently and over time. I believe scanning and skimming are meant for societies having an advanced reading culture, but not certainly for one like ours which is increasingly shying away from reading. And, above all, something should be done to avoid encouraging rote learning. Also, contact with students' own mother language – overwhelmingly Bangla here but also others that exist – should be encouraged. One good thing that has happened in English Studies over the last few years has been a re-evaluation of local languages in terms of their ability to develop linguistic and cultural instincts of the users which they can transfer to a secong language situation and learn that language more effectively. I hope that English departments here take up the challenge. Some years ago, I read Mary Louise Pratt's "Linguistic Utopias," where she describes the attempt by Black English Vernacular to create "a speech community along…utopian lines," and by "some early feminist work in linguistics" seeking to "lay out an entity called 'women's language.'" And, after describing the work of critical linguists such as Roger Fowler as "extraordinarily empowering," Pratt writes that such work "indeed does challenge the normative force of standard grammar, insisting on heterogeneity, on

the existence and legitimacy of lifeways other than those of dominant groups" (56). I believe such work can be done here too, and in keeping with local sensibilities and realities. ELT has a huge potential, but to fully develop that the English departments here have to reorganize priorities and develop an application based-methodology.

The same also applies to English literature studies. When theory was introduced in the curriculum, it did help in the interpretation of literary texts, and expanded the boundaries of literature across cultures. But now that the days of high theory are over, more application-based theoretical approaches should be developed. Students have easily related to postcolonialism, feminism and postmodernism because there is an empirical ground that the students can locate from their own experience. Similarly, the need to include media studies and some emerging areas such as visual culture and communication may be adjusted without sacrificing too much of the canon. I for one do not want to see classics giving way to video texts, no matter what the imperatives of visual culture are. Video texts, if and when they become part of English Studies syllabus, may exist side by side with classics. There is no harm in that. And finally, literature courses should reintroduce the accent on composition that characterized the syllabus in the early years of the English department of Dhaka University.

6. As English Studies adjusts to the needs of the changing times, there may be criticism of its openness to everything. As Peter Widdowson once ruefully remarked, "Clearly the proper study of literature is – everything else" (Coyle *et al, 1228*), too much openness would rid the discipline of its focus – its proper study. It is important to realize that the structure of English has always been open, and as Derrida maintains, "always already in process" (quoted by Pope 26). There will be border crossings – and border disputes (e.g. should visual culture be considered an English studies subject?), but in the end, changes and adjustments have to be made without fundamentally disturbing the discipline's central focus if it has to be a prominent discourse of our time, exploring and giving voice to a whole range of human experience.

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Capitalism, "Hybrid Wars" and Confiscated Narratives: The Classico-Postmodernist Imperialism of Our Time

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Abstract

From the classical maxim that "empires are forged by war" to the notion of "hybrid wars", "aestheticization of war," exploitation of nation states, corporatization and commodification, imperialist powers with globalizing missions and *mission civilisatrice* have always resorted to means that the expansion of capital has sought. Though Hardt and Negri contend that "Empire", their terminology for global imperialism/capitalism, is a phantasmal, autonomous network of power where global flows of people, information, and wealth can hardly be monitored or controlled from a single metropolitan center, the reality is that the discourse and politics of neoliberal hegemony, coupled with unique exercise of power, allow the United States and its cohorts (a few powerful countries and multinational corporations) to dominate "Empire." This paper outlines the nature and *modus operandi* of this recent classico-postmodernist imperialist power project, one that combines tradition with novelty in its logic of rule, and argues that the "unholy trinity" of capital, US led imperialism and manipulated globalization has reached a climactic, volatile stage since the system it has created is undermining humanitarian values and justice. This paper also argues for a new collective mode of counter-hegemonic thinking needed to counter the kind of injustice and inhumanity spawned by late capitalism. Such resistance, the paper proposes, could be attempted through measures such as reawakening of humanitarian standards, "reinvent(ing) civil disobedience", globalizing labour movements and strengthening the structures of nation-states.

I

As theoretical overtures, TV debates, discussions, talks and conferences proliferate over issues of how the world order has substantially changed over the centuries and what the new world order is and will be like in coming decades, and as the

elements, forces and powers of the world order continue to be named and renamed, the most obvious problems that persist and intensify humanitarian crises are often bypassed for less important concerns in discussions and summits of transnational bodies created with an aim to maintaining global peace and balance. Some of the most persistent problems of our world include the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, denial of human rights in many regions, atrocities committed in military and democratic-pseudo regimes backed by world's neo-imperial powers, deaths of innocent people in the Middle East and other parts of the world, and so on. More and more people are becoming unemployed. They have less access to basic human needs, or go to sleep on the streets of this metropolis, only able to cast a last, long-lasting blank look at a TV program visible through the transparent glass of a Sony showroom.

The roots to the above and many other instances of inopportune issues and phenomena is a new world order regulated by capital, imperialism and globalization – three "different but interlinked forms and forces of exploitation and oppression in the world today" (Hussain 9). As European imperialist countries were responsible for oppressing and exploiting peoples from different parts of the world in different eras of history, many critics attribute the responsibility of today's instances of exploitation and injustice on a global scale to the USA and its supporters. Since the emergence of USA as a global power in the early years of the 20th century to the country's present heyday of power, USA has always acted shrewdly, even violently at times, to secure and also further strengthen its economical and political power. Thus, though the USA has taken judicious steps in many spheres, the country has also been accused of causing violence in different parts of the world for its own, self-centered interests. Even the very recent incidents of the Arab Spring that shook most Muslim countries in Asia and Africa are said to have been orchestrated by the US and its allies for regime change in those countries. It is thus important to discuss the ideas and works by critics like David Harvey, Arundhati Roy, Christian Salmon etc. who have attempted not only to discuss imperialism and its evils but also to analyze America's unilateral interests as the causes of various problems of our world today.

Globalization seems to have licensed an ever-increasing flow of money, products, technology and people across borders, and this fact poses a challenge to most nation-states as they try to monitor or control this flow. According to Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, "the sovereign power that governs the world" or "regulates these global exchanges" is "Empire" – which, they maintain, is the "new global

form of sovereignty…composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule" (xii). Hardt and Negri differentiate Empire from "imperialism" based on the fact that unlike imperialism, "Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers" (xii). This Empire modifies the uncomplicated, spatial divisions of the three worlds by negating the rule of just one particular nation over the whole world, consolidating its own juridical, constitutional power, reducing the scope of ethics to its own usage, fighting "just wars" (10) around the globe, tending to encompass all time and history "within its ethical foundation" (11) and attempting to perpetuate its existence by suspending history.

All these aspects that form Hardt and Negri's Empire could, in most cases, be viewed as US imperialism's new order, a reconceptualization of the country's capitalist missions with its ever-changing politico-cultural global reach. The pattern of imperial rule has gone through so many stages of development and adjustment in relation to the changing history of the world (not to forget that imperialism, on the other hand, is largely responsible for changing the history of the world) that it has so far been called by many names, major and minor, starting from classical European empires that divided the world among themselves to Hardt and Negri's recent application of the upper-case term "Empire", a phenomenon of the postmodern period. Even though Hardt and Negri define Empire as a deterritorialized nexus of power, the fact that the US occupies the hot seat in it and dictates it is noteworthy when we consider that the country wields immense diplomatic and muscle power. The country has so far been instrumental in dominating global cultural, political and economical landscapes in recent times, with the help of its European allies, IMF, WTO and some corporate elites. The US as an imperialist power has both similarities with and differences from old European imperialist powers and operates through coercive strategies, manufactured consent, liquidation and cooperation. American power started to gain momentum in the aftermath of World War I, and since then the country has always found new ways of creating avenues for global supremacy and has opted to be pre-emptive to thwart potential challenges against its global domination. The classico-postmodernist tendencies of US imperialism today combine old strategies of rule such as coercion, invasion, mercantilism etc. motivated by ideas of "gold, god and glory" with an array of new strategies that leave its adversaries perplexed and guessing – strategies such as propagandas, spying, launching "holy" wars and creating and telling unique stories to justify and preserve its imperial missions.

Thus, the idea of today's imperialism that largely serves the unilateral interests of the US could be termed either as Empire, US empire or US imperialism. All these terms refer to the country's apparently imperial traits, its penchant for direct control over some countries through military bases, or its adaptation of a strategy combining coercion and consent, all of which is for capital accumulation. Ellen Meiksins Wood suggests that "one of the most important characteristics of capitalism is that the economic hegemony of capital can extend far beyond the limits of direct political domination". This characteristic, he contends, is true both in cases of relations between capital and labour and between imperial and subordinate states (128). And, the US, whose economic control of the globe exceeds its political control, surely excels in what it takes to be the major hegemon in today's capitalist world: "Money, productive capacity, and military might are the three legs upon which hegemony stands under capitalism" (Harvey 41). A sign of the US's military supremacy over the rest of the world is its military bases in about 150 countries of the world. Remaining as legacy of its engagements in warfare in the past and established in the name of peace-keeping missions, these panoptic bases actually help to secure markets, exert unhindered export of natural resources to the US and watch over signs of any potential threat to the country's elevated sense of security. Quoting from Richard Butler's Op-Ed piece in the *New York Times* (January 18, 2002), John Bellamy Foster notes how the war in Afghanistan helped the Californian oil company Unocal build a pipeline across Afghanistan and Pakistan. He observes that "…without a strong US military presence in the region, through the establishment of bases as a result of the war, the construction of such a pipeline would almost certainly have proven impracticable" (64). Ironically, although understandable since it is a part of its attempt to secure the political and capitalist interests, such bases around the world have apparently been used by the US to spark and then nurture sectarian violence in different countries and to maintain an aggressive posture for the US so that it can launch attacks on different regions of the world to further its varied interests.

One of America's major sources of strength is that it is perceived to be the leader of the capitalist countries of the world. Even though capitalism has always adjusted itself to the contemporary order, the fact that capitalism depreciates labour, impoverishes people, maximizes profit and exploits nation state has always remained ingrained in its operative schema. Although the nature of capitalism has not changed much over the centuries, the question that needs to be asked now is where capitalism is poised now, and what the coordinates and characteristics of capitalism are in the new millennium. Lenin in his *Imperialism, the Highest Stage*

of Capitalism (1916) indicated that capitalism had in his time evolved into a higher stage through its transition from free competition to monopoly. He declared, "…imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism" (105). To him capitalism and imperialism have become inseparable as they have joined hands to create monopolies that divide the world among themselves and regulate economic life. Lenin's idea of capitalism is still very much relevant today although the main control of global politics, resources and markets has shifted by now from Great Britain to the US. In his book *The Wor(l)d in Question*, Azfar Hussain repeatedly uses the term "late monopoly capital" (13) to recognize the endless complexity and flexibility he detects in the nature of capitalism today. Hussain borrows his term from Ernest Mendel's idea of "late capitalism" though Hussain appears repetitive in his attempts to tag the word "late" to capital's contemporary stage. The "lateness" he attaches to capitalism echoes Lenin's idea of monopoly capital though Hussain thinks that capital's capability to monopolize in recent times is unprecedented. However, Ray Kiely feels that Lenin's characterization of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism is somewhat 'unconvincing' because capital in Lenin's time actually flowed between imperialist countries whereas "there was actually limited capital accumulation in the colonies" (59). This assertion actually reveals a futuristic Lenin whose insight is more tenable now than when it was formulated. The world today has indeed been witnessing an uncontrollable flow of capital crisscrossing virtually the whole globe. In today's-'globalized' economy, the influence of capital is so diffuse that it can take every possible direction, even though the global market is yet far from being integrated.

Apart from the changes capitalism has brought to the nature of power or domination, US imperialism's distinctive nature lies in the lessons it has learned from history in promoting itself from a colony to an imperial power. With the final phase of decolonization in the wake of World War II, when there was rapid disintegration of the European empires, mostly in Africa and Asia, it soon became clear to analysts that the era of uncomplicated, direct conquest of a country and subjugation of its populace by setting up a colony was over. What was clear was that only a complex, capitalist exercise of power backed by support maneuvered from different powerful countries and supranational bodies and organisms could be sustained in the long run.

The way the US operates its imperial missions, or has so far operated them in the Middle East, is noteworthy. The mix of a complicated version of the old "divide and rule" policy, and the so-called "war on terror"– this is how the US operates now. There have been attempts to divide the populations of the Middle

East and Central Asia according to their ethnic, religious, sectarian, national, and political differentiations. Conflicts between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq and Shiite and Sunni Muslims throughout the Middle East are assumed to have been aggravated by the US and its allies. Besides, the war between Iran and Iraq, the Gulf War, "wars on terror"- all these suggest a common recipe: make an autocrat, have him knock down the other(s), and then remove the very despot himself when a regime change is imperative. This formula has been effective not only in securing the oil market for the US but also in maintaining political control over the Middle East while strengthening US military might in this region, through creation of new bases. John Bellamy Foster observes:

> "In 1990, prior to the Gulf War, the United States had no bases in South Asia and only 10 percent as many in the Middle East/ Africa as in 1947…The appearance of new bases in the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America and Plan Colombia therefore can be seen as a reassertion of direct US military and imperial power in areas where this had to some extent eroded." (62-63)

II

In addition to its unprecedented concentration of military and muscle power, US imperialism backs itself through its capacity for creating and telling stories - narratives that earn it support from transnational bodies and ex-imperial countries, keep a whole host of powerful countries in or out of its business, and attempt to silence voices of resistance at home and abroad. Through a synchronization of fiction with reality, US forces of power, which includes the Oval Office, Department of State, international proponents of the US cause and the corporate elites, manufacture stories to frame reality and expand its political and economic influence.

In his intriguing book *Storytelling: Bewitching the Modern Mind,* Christian Salmon thus discusses how technocapitalist US imperialism has adopted strategies of power to such an extent that the modern mind has been immersed in an illusory universe that maneuvers perceptions, frames feelings, behavior and ideas, and "…tacks artificial narratives on to reality" (10). Salmon opens his book by describing a video game used to train American troops fighting in Iraq. This game was developed by the Institute for Creative Technologies founded by the Pentagon in 1999. This research center at the University of Southern California makes use of Hollywood's creativity in creating stories to augment Pentagon's training methods. This novel role of stories in smartening up war tactics reflect

the fact that, as Salmon puts it, "The empire has confiscated narrative" (12). The US's use of extraordinary narratives ranges from domestic election campaigns to creating new political realities, creating fake terrorists and launching wars on countries labeled as "failed states" by US master storytellers.

From Agamemnon to Bush of America, the classical formula that "Empires are forged by war" (*Troy,* the movie) has not lost much of its application; it is only the tactics, *modus operandi* and methods of launching wars that have had to be so fine-tuned in successive imperial eras. In the post Cold-war age, the nature of modern warfare has evolved innovatively. It has now earned brand names such as 'hybrid war', 'postmodern war', 'aesthetic war' etc for itself. In his book *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, Frank Hoffman reviews the background and the changing temperament of warfare in our time. He uses the term "hybrid wars" to redefine modern day wars that incorporate different modes of warfare that include conventional and unconventional capabilities, tactics, propaganda activities, indiscriminate violence, coercion etc. The wars the US launched in the last few decades have employed combinations of different types of warfare that were unprecedented, and in effect, have been continuously evolving. Battlefields and the actual site of warfare have now been relocated and are in cyberspace, international forums and the media. These virtual wars are being fought in a new hybrid environment where along with old weapons, "…data, systems for decoding information, and storylines whose ultimate goal is not so much the annihilation of the enemy as the mythical construction of the enemy" have been employed to a great extent (Salmon 121). The US fights these postmodernist "hybrid wars" all over the globe. Hardt and Negri observes that "Empire is formed not on the basis of force itself but on the basis of the capacity to present force as being in the service of right and peace" (15). Wars are thus "aestheticized" by the US on a regular basis through a whole host of propaganda activities and advertising that go on prior to and during a war. Even some post-war justifications are smartly drawn into the act through supposedly humanitarian initiatives such as healthcare, rehabilitation etc. carried out on a small scale on a war- evacuated landscape.

The US led 'wars on terror' of recent decades surely exemplify all the above-mentioned brands of war, and a discussion on US motives behind Iraq war would illuminate why all these identical wars are fought in the first place. The actual reasons that the US went to war against Iraq deserve scrutiny, now that most of the truths are out. David Harvey explains why "there is indeed a long history of governments in trouble domestically seeking to solve their problems

either by foreign adventures or by manufacturing foreign threats to consolidate solidarities at home" (12). Harvey then provides accounts of how the country was in a more troubled situation in the year 2002 than its near past. Problems such as recession, unemployment, corporate scandals, messy healthcare, poor administration were threatening the stability of the US. However, those who opposed the war and doubted its necessity think that oil was the key motive behind the war as Iraq was a threat to the flow of oil to international markets. After all, "whoever controls the world's oil controls the world's markets," (Roy 37). That is why US's capitalist precautions sought to dismantle Iraq. It was reported after the war how the then Vice President Cheney's old company Halliburton won billion dollars of contract for oil services immediately after the war. Arundhati Roy, while quoting from Thomas L. Friedman's national bestseller *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, observes how imperialist power and corporate globalization have joined hands to secure markets. To quote from Friedman: "… McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the US Air Force F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps" (464). Another argument that might make it clear that Iraq war was no holy mission is the time chosen for and reasons offered behind this war. There was no proof that Saddam's Iraq had weapons for mass destruction. Besides, he was not attacked earlier when, backed by the US and its European allies, he was conducting his worst atrocities of killing hundreds of Kurdish people by using chemical weapons. He thus had to be removed when he became an obstacle pain for America's global interests and internal economy.

III

The proponents of globalization hypothesize it as an effective apparatus for creating homogeneity among nation states, thereby reducing disparity among them. But in reality, globalization has inherently become an important tool for sustaining imperial interests that depend on a system built up by cross-communications and interactions of multiple countries behind which lies the logic of expansion of neoliberal capitalism limited to a great extent to the trajectory of few corporate elites. The monopoly power of advanced capitalist countries dominate trade, finance, production, services and flows through neoliberal free trade and open capital markets, and for that purpose they make use of transnational financial bodies and governments of different nation-states. The nation state is surely one such apparatus whose legal and political authority over its people is required to maintain the economic and operational stability of

the systems of capitalism. The state is used to keep a class from owning property so that these people can be exploited whenever required. They are not allowed to cross borders at their will, and are forced to fulfill capitalism's growing demand for labour by bringing out other family members who also join the labour force for survival. On the other hand, transnational financial bodies, dominated by the US, help the global network of capital to function smoothly. David Harvey observes: "The emergence of a 'Wall Street-Treasury' complex within the United States, able to control institutions such as the IMF and to project vast financial power across the world through a network of other financial and governmental institutions, has exercised massive influence over the dynamics of global capitalism in recent years." (134)

Although globalization has brought the world closer in many respects, its impact is not identical or symmetrical in all fields. As Eric Hobsbawm points out, "We can have a globalized economy, we can aspire to a globalized culture, we certainly have a globalized technology and a single global science, but politically speaking, we have a world that remains in reality pluralist and divided into territorial states" (43). Globalization, indeed, has widened the gap between the economic and political power of capital and has helped transnational capitalism, represented by Microsoft, McDonald's, Nike etc., extend its reach and systems beyond the grasp and boundaries of the nation state. One common trait that the transnational corporations or the TNCs share is their intent to maximize profit by exploiting the pools of cheap labour in the third world countries. The undaunted facility that they have in such countries is cheap labour coupled with necessary supports from the state to have the labour force in control; for example, Suharto's Indonesia in the mid-1960s experienced what amounted to almost a ban on trade union activities. The Bangladesh government's recent agreement with ConocoPhillips, an USA energy giant, for exploration in two deepwater gas blocks in the Bay of Bengal offshore reflects a similar condition where Bangladesh will get only 20% of the extracted gas and the rest, as the agreement goes, could be bought by Bangladesh. Studies reflect that most TNCs earn more revenues outside than in their countries of origin, and their global reach and profitability have also earned them a place amongst the world's biggest economic entities. According to data stated by D. Steven White, and released in July 2010 by Fortune *Magazine* and the World Bank, the world's largest 175 economic entities in terms of their revenue generation include 109 corporations (62.3%). Wal-Mart, Royal Dutch/Shell, Exxon Mobil, and British Petroleum rank among the top 40 entities in the world, far above countries such as Finland, Portugal, Ireland, Malaysia and New Zealand.

Corporate globalization claims increase in the world's total income though the computation leaves out the fact that the number of the poor across the world has increased accordingly. It also threatens democracy of poorer countries by impairing their legal functioning as they attempt to take necessary reforms for privatization devoid of necessary state intervention. This practice goes against the interest of the poor and forces them to buy those things as commodities that they once enjoyed without spending money. The term "globalization" should thus be seen as "corporate globalization", "globalization of capitalism" and so on, to highlight specific evils of the phenomena over the idea of righteousness that the generic use of the term suggests. In the Manifesto of the Communist Party, Marx and Engels too hint at the fact that the general idea of globalization is an outcome of the dynamics inherent in the very nature of capitalism that seeks to expand its dominion everywhere in the world: "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere" (5).

IV

Because of its preference for profit over people and its contradictory practices, capitalist empire is in itself an anarchist, contradictory system that always needs newer terrains and surplus labour at its disposal for exploitation. Capitalism reduces wages for labour but needs more consumption on part of even the labour force, which is one of its contradictory logics. The worst sufferers of the capitalist expansion are thus the labour force who are devalued constantly and are ultimately caught in a system that seems to dehumanize them eternally. As Marx points out in *Capital*: "Capital is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks" (342). The singular motto of endless capital accumulation in space and time also ceaselessly searches for profits indiscriminately, thus creating tensions, according to David Harvey, "…between competition and monopoly, between concentration and dispersal, between centralization and decentralization, between fixity and motion, between dynamism and inertia, between different scales of activity…"(101). These tensions lead to capitalism's creation of a geographical landscape to run its activities, only to exhaust it in the end and look for a new landscape. Again, capitalism thrives on competition but after a point it has to foil competition to survive, or look for new places to expand its horizon. Moreover, through necessary intervention of the nation state, capitalist globalization, to a large extent, prevents integration of markets universally to enhance the profitability of capital, maintaining an ironic balance between opening borders to global capital and dissuading the integration of markets.

As new inter-imperial rivalries seem improbable in present times, the vulnerability of US empire thus springs from its over-ambitious capitalism and inner contradictions. Aijaz Ahmad rules out the possibility of China becoming a possible threat to US ascendancy because, according to him, "China is extremely vulnerable to the United States, militarily and economically…" (60). Ahmad argues that the US is very much capable of creating internal conflicts and separatist movements in China. This longevity that Ahmad claims for US empire could be negated by the fact that the country's global, capitalist ambitions and international conflicts are too expensive and expansive to sustain in the long run. Citing the information that the United States spends billions of dollars every year on nuclear weapons, intelligence, modern warships and aircrafts, and sends out millions of soldiers to fight, Fidel Castro in one of his speeches delivered on 3 July 1998 envisaged that this thoughtless culture of the US's hunger for domination would one day make the country suffer a profound economic crisis, more so because of its unsustainable stock markets and inflation of value. Castro sounds quite prophetic when he says: "We maintain, based on mathematical facts, that such a neoliberal globalization is not sustainable; that the crisis is inevitable" (Speech delivered on 3 July 1998).

Though power relations in capitalist systems are often so diffuse that it is tough to find a target of resistance, if any exploitations are to be opposed in the first place, it has to be those done by the US's capitalist, tri-continental missions. There are countries such as Cuba and Venezuela that are continuously holding onto their ideologies against US aggression. Leaders around the world could use Latin America as a model where an ideological revival of the successes against Spanish imperialism in the past is now being assimilated and practiced by leaders and activists against present-day oppressive power. In recent times, the ideologies and praxis of the recently deceased Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, known as New Bolivarianism which "… combines continental nationalism and social-democratic reforms fuelled by oil revenues", have been posing a massive moral challenge to US expansionism (Ali, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Axis of Hope* 41). Having paid off his country's debts to the World Bank and the IMF, Chávez freed his country's economy from the clutches of such lending institutions that promote the priorities of the Washington Consensus. He, along with a few other Latin American leaders, has already set up a new financial institution called "Bank of the South" run by Latin American nations and has vowed to support it with Venezuela's thriving oil revenues.

Getting velocity around the world is also an increasing amount of public opinion, movements and labour organizations shaping against labour exploitation, corporatization and US aggression. Anti-imperial thinkers and

activists now need to form close ties among all these scattered initiatives and movements fighting against the same set of evils. Arundhati Roy offers the following guideline for confronting empire:

> Our strategy should be not only to confront Empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness - and our ability to tell our stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe. (86)

Roy's passionate outcry should be mingled with the voices raised in organized movements to challenge the capitalist empire's exploitative authority that denies the rights of the vast majority. Roy also urges "reinvent(ing) civil disobedience in a million different ways" (85) to render the power structures of empire inactive. Inspiration can be found from 15 February 2003, days before the Iraq war when over eight million people converged on different streets of different continents to dissuade the US and its allies from attacking Iraq. Unsuccessful though it was, Tariq Ali still calls it, the "first truly global mobilization unprecedented in size, scope or scale…" (*Front Lines1*). Movements such as this and labour movements scattered here and there need to be truly globalized to face an adversary that is globalized in its extreme form.

The manipulation of governments of most nation states by financial institutions such as IMF and WTO to strengthen the capitalist empire is now globally recognized by experts as the major problem of political economy in most third world countries. To quote from Harvey again: "With the core of the political problem so clearly recognized, it should be possible to build outwards into a broader politics of creative destruction mobilized against the dominant regime of neo-liberal imperialism foisted upon the world by the hegemonic capitalist powers" (179-180). If a just world government is not established, or some supranational bodies like the UN are not strengthened to provide regulation to this capitalist global village, then this volatile situation might turn into an anarchist one, leading to regional power conflicts and in effect a more destabilized world. The immediate task at hand then is to strengthen the structures of nation-states and force the representatives of people to work for the cause of the masses, not for corporations. The situation is dire now, but things can get even worse unless we come up with the right measures so that the evils of Neoliberal hegemony and the stranglehold of military might incarnated in the shape of the "United States of North America" and its close associates do not reach the point of no return in its mission to exploit the rest of the world.

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The Role of Sisterhood Penitentiaries in the Reclamation of Fallen Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain

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Abstract

This article focuses on the role played by sisterhood penitentiaries in the rehabilitation of 'fallen women' in nineteenth-century Britain. Beginning with a brief outline of the disciplinary rules implemented by these remedial institutions, it moves on to investigate the backgrounds of the penitents, the relationship between the sisters and the penitentiary wardens, the 'advantages' reaped by the penitents during their penitentiary sojourn, the schemes of reformation followed by the sisters, their solidarity with the penitents across the conventions of class, sexuality and morality, and the criticism of the reclamation system by some leading female activists of the day. By probing into such issues, this paper offers fresh perspectives on the socio-cultural relevance of female-managed penitentiaries during the reign of Queen Victoria.

A confessional lyric about an unnamed speaker who recounts her life history to the priest attending her deathbed, Dora Greenwell's "Christina"[1] follows a highly conventional and clichéd narrative trajectory: orphaned, impoverished and naive, the speaker is seduced and abandoned, and turns to prostitution. She no longer contacts her childhood companion Christina, but retains an emotional bond with

[1]Virtually unknown today, Dora Greenwell (1821-1882) was a household name in Victorian England, famous for her lyrical and religious verse. Her debut collection *Poems* (1848) was followed by a further seven volumes of poetry, including two largely devotional works, *Carmina Crucis* (1869) and *Camera Obscura* (1876). In her day, Greenwell was thought to belong to a trio of eminent poetesses, including Jean Ingelow and Christina Rossetti. The work of each poet reveals many shared interests. There is a possibility that "Christina", composed in 1851 but withheld from publication until 1869, may have had some influence on the poems about women and sexual temptation that Rossetti authored in the 1860s.

her: "Across the world-wide gulf betwixt us set/ My soul stretched out a bridge" (Greenwell, 1998, p. 442). However, when the two women meet accidentally over the grave of Christina's daughter, Christina implores her friend to return home with her to take the place of her dead child. But the speaker rejects this solution, offering no explanation for her decision. Instead, she leaves "the guilty city far behind" and enters a "goodly inn", where she carries out her penance under the benevolent guidance of some "gracious souls", who "loving their Lord" "could trace His image" "upon the . . . Long-lost, defaced and soiled" (Greenwell, 1998, p. 448). Although couched in a heavily figurative language, such an ending seems to insinuate that the speaker has taken up residence in one of those penitentiaries managed by Anglican sisters, where "fallen women" – a culturally approved euphemism for prostitutes, kept mistresses, female thieves and alcohol addicts – were given asylum in the reign of Queen Victoria.[2] These institutions were intended as rehabilitation centres, where such wayward and transgressive women could be changed into conscientious and diligent women, a transformation which involved both a spiritual metamorphosis from sinner to repentant, and a concomitant social shift from ostracised female to respectable woman. Funded by the Church of England, penitentiaries (also known as Houses of Mercy) were a part of a large-scale Christian reform movement which stretched all over Britain. In fact, by the middle decades of the nineteenth century every English town and metropolis had at least one conventual organisation devoted to the emancipation and edification of fallen women (Bartley, 2000, p. 25). The Community of St. Mary the Virgin, Wantage and the Community of St. John Baptist were two of the earliest female-managed penitentiaries established exclusively to minister to this pressing social need.

All potential penitents were expected to remain in a House of Mercy for about eighteen months to two years to accomplish penitential assignments fruitfully, although cases were considered on an individual basis. The working patterns, leisure facilities and general lifestyle at these institutions were markedly alike; in a scribbled note found in the pages of the minutes of the Liverpool Penitentiary, a committee member scheduled the daily routine of the inmates as follows: "work (7.00am), breakfast (7.30am), work (8.00 - 10.30am), rest (10.30 - 10.45am), work (10.45 - 1.00pm), lunch (1.00 - 2.00pm), work (2.00 - 5.00pm), tea (5.00 - 5.30pm), work (5.30 - 8.00pm)" (cited in Bartley, 2000, p. 53). *Seeking and Saving,* the official bulletin of the Victorian reform movement,

[2]The fact that Greenwell was personally involved in finding penitentiary homes for young prostitutes makes this interpretation even more plausible. See Maynard, C. (1926). *Dora Greenwell: A Prophet for Our Own Times on the Battleground of Our Faith*. London: H. R. Allenson.

suggested that there were four methods of disciplining penitents and keeping order in these institutions: (i) the military discipline "where everything was done to a signal"; (ii) the mute discipline "where all crept about silently"; (iii) the unrestrained discipline "where inmates laughed and talked about the sisterhood in perfect freedom"; and (iv) the "discipline of force" where inmates were administered coercively, if they refused to obey (cited in Bartley, 2000, p. 46). Some penitentiaries hung disciplinary rules on the walls as a constant reminder for all inmates of the need to behave properly. The Horbury Penitentiary kept a report book in which all breaches of rule were entered. Each Monday these report books were sent to the Sister Superior, who deducted a half-penny from weekly earnings of four pence for delinquency. All unpaid work, from scrubbing floors to cleaning windows, from making beds to sweeping carpets, from mending clothes to cooking food, was carried out by the penitents (Bartley, 2000, p. 50). The exhausting physical hustle involved in these activities meant that "the wild restlessness, the lawlessness, the animal passions, and excitement of the old life, were worked off by muscular exertion" (Hopkins, 1879, p. 15). Penitents were evaluated by the loss or gain of "marks": the accumulation of marks synchronized the speed with which a penitent would be promoted for release (Mumm, 1996, p. 536). However, to prevent monotony and spread of disgruntlement among penitents occasional excursions were arranged by many institutions. Usually this involved a tour of the surrounding countryside, a stroll in a park, boating on a lake or a walk by the seashore. Periodic invitations to the garden parties at the residences of local humanitarians were common. Special events were celebrated. For instance, at Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee the inmates of many penitentiaries were provided with tea and an afternoon out to watch the revelry taking place all over England (Bartley, 2000, p. 57).

One customary practice of every nineteenth-century penitentiary was the maintenance of a general memorandum on the familial backgrounds and occupational histories of the penitents. Three common denominators in these women's family backgrounds were financial bankruptcy, orphanhood and illiteracy. The predominance of the female relatives of gardeners, washer men, carpenters, shoemakers and tailors in the penitentiaries reinforces the malicious role destitution played in the creation of fallen women. Contemporary social activist, Anna Brownell Jameson (1859) observed: "We talk of 'fallen women'; but for the far greater number there is no fall. They are starving, and they sell themselves for food" (p. 39). Many applicants were parentless: they had been raised by foster relatives or had somehow survived as waifs and strays. "A good home till mother died" is the usual grievance made by the entrants in the

penitentiary roll books. Lack of education in families also contributed in these women's socio-economic vulnerability. The Thirtieth Annual Report of Lincolnshire Penitent Females' Home disclosed that of the thirteen penitents registered in 1878, five could read and write, six could do neither, and two could read but not write; parents of these girls were most likely illiterate (Mumm, 1996, p. 544). As time passed it became increasingly recognised by the sisters that the bulk of inmates were previously employed in various domestic professions. The Clewer House of Mercy traced the initial occupations of its plebeian penitents between 1866 and 1869. In these three years, fifty-nine servants, twenty-one housemaids, seven cooks, four nursemaids, three dressmakers, two barmaids, two factory labourers, one governess, one milliner, and one shop girl entered as prospective penitents (Mumm, 1996, p. 532).

Although a penitentiary was run exclusively by the deputed sisters working close at hand, there was a clerical warden always available to perform religious services and oversee pecuniary matters. Invested with ultimate sovereignty in the penitentiary, the warden was, however, not always personally engaged in its day-to-day operation. The function of the warden was thus a paradoxical one: the bureaucratic head of the ecclesiastical network administered the penitentiary; nevertheless, he had only minimal or highly ritualised interaction with the members of his institution. His curious status of absent-presence constituted a veiled patriarchy that tangentially dismantled the sororal paradigm espoused in the penitentiary movement's appeals for female volunteers. In other words, the unvarying triangulation of roles within the sister community forced women to define themselves and their relationships to each other in terms of an extra-sororal male presence, generally invoked as a last resort for consultation on matters affecting the penitentiary. Scott Rogers (2003) believes that the political resonance of the warden was "felt most powerfully in the hierarchical dispensation of authority within the sister relationship, and in the ways this affected the internal dynamics of the community of women" (p. 869). But to assume that Victorian wardens took zero interest in the daily functioning of their convents is to blinker our understanding of their significance in the penitentiary movement willingly. Certainly there were some exceptions. One such exception was the warden of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin, Wantage, a well-beloved figure in the sisterhood circle, who in an 1881 symposium urged his putative audience not to separate penitents merely on class and moral grounds: "I have found that the great mass of the girls brought in are not at all worse in any manifest way than ordinary maid servants and with proper advantages they are not worse than many other girls" (cited in Mumm, 1996, p. 120).

That all nineteenth-century penitentiaries faced a routine oversupply of applicants requesting admission raises a question of incentive: why did women clamour to accommodate themselves in an institution for a twenty-four month course of penitence when they could attain respectability merely by starting life afresh? There are two possible explanations. First, Victorian lawmakers made the certified programme of formal penitence obligatory for all fallen women who desired to lead a reputable life in accordance to the set conventions of mainstream society. Second, women realised that they could reap multiple advantages and reorient their lives if they managed to gain access to a sisterhood penitentiary. Unquestionably, the second argument had more credence than the first; for these fallen women, the penitentiary was indeed a getaway from an infected environment and a sanctuary of opportunities which would enable them to get reabsorbed into the social fabric surreptitiously. Let us now examine some of these "advantages" of penitentiary life exploited by prostitutes, kept mistresses, female thieves and alcoholic women respectively.

Every penitentiary offered free accommodation, rations, clothing and medical treatment to its inmates. Consequently, many prostitutes who suffered steep decline in earning power owing to ill-health and senility requested admission to a House of Mercy with the expectation of spending their last days in peace and comfort. Some prostitutes who voluntarily abandoned the scene of their commercial activity out of feelings of personal culpability and self-mortification wanted to join a penitentiary to atone for their sins. The Community of St. John Baptist called such women consecrated 'Magdalens'; these should not be confused with ordinary penitents. But the general public seldom made this distinction and the two terms were often conflated. Surprisingly, the notorious Contagious Disease Acts of the 1860s also played a pivotal part in escalating the number of prostitutes in penitentiaries. The purveyors of these laws mandated compulsory genital inspection for venereal disease in suspected prostitutes and the detention of such women in penitentiaries. As a result, penitentiaries all over Britain became jam-packed with "unhealthy" prostitutes who were often discriminated against by other "healthy" penitents. One important feature of the rehabilitative penitentiaries was the vocational education imparted by nuns, sufficient to make penitents completely independent of the help of others. Apart from providing extensive tutoring in reading, writing and arithmetic, sisters emphasised that inmates should be trained for rudimentary domestic activities such as cleaning, washing, ironing, dairying, and needlework. In the 1870s penitents in at least one convent could earn sufficient spending money by undertaking these works during recreation times

(Mumm, 1996, p. 536). Such utilitarian facilities appealed to our second category of fallen woman: the kept mistress. In her influential study on the rhetoric of fallenness in Victorian culture, Deborah Logan (1998) has hinted at how kept mistresses in penitentiaries were coached to fill posts as household servants, generally specialist posts such as parlour-maid or nurse (64). Some of them received good references and assistance in finding jobs in what has been termed as "the great Victorian dustbin for the unwanted", the colonies (Hobsbawn, 1969, p. 84). However, it must not be assumed that all types of fallen women entered monastic penitentiaries in an earnest attempt to make a new beginning. Female thieves regarded these institutions as an expedient of bettering themselves and/or as a suitable bolt-hole to escape from the clutches of law. They would stay for as long as they fancied, usually during the bleak winter season or while recovering from illness. When the weather or their health improved they would leave, paying no attention to the solicitations of the nuns. Some of these pseudo-penitents absconded furtively at night, stealing whatever items of value they could carry with them. The rationale for the rising popularity of the penitentiaries among alcoholic women was the secular indoctrination given there as a part of the penitence curriculum. Coming invariably from a different social milieu, these hardcore alcoholics had no interest in learning about Christian rituals or about the sanctified lifestyle of the sisters. As a result, despite the unflinching religious constancy of the sisters themselves, many British penitentiaries allegedly tended to downplay the religious practice among inebriate penitents. One senior convent-manager counselled thus:

> I believe there are many [addicts] who are repelled by the violent change from their free and easy life to the strict and severe system of a Penitentiary. Let them be admitted simply as inmates of a Home, requiring of them only quite behaviour, obedience, and work, and leaving them as perfectly free as regards religion. (cited in Mumm, 1996, p. 539)

Furthermore, penitentiary humanitarians made special remedial provision for alcoholics, after learning that these women's addiction problem rendered it difficult for them to stay abstemious and to retain decent jobs. In view of these facts, penitentiaries could be seen as therapeutic havens and the penitents as patients in treatment.

A major thrust area of the penitentiary programme was the wholesome reformation of the fallen women's bodies, minds and spirits. Both sisters and wardens strongly reckoned that strict implementation of this threefold reform

schema would be necessary for making these women physically as well as psychologically fit to re-enter mainstream society. The reformation of the body included proper acquisition of deferential and respectful demeanour. The fallen women wore a uniform dress, curtsied when passing seniors, observed regular hours of silence, entered others' room with permission, and refrained from mentioning their pasts. The reformation of the mind included adherence to bourgeois values, the ability to make the right decisions, and the capacity to work intelligently, and not like machines. The sisters' wish was to render the fallen women mentally unfit for their former lives; success was attained when previously acceptable manifestations of working-class idiom and conduct filled raised fallen women with revulsion. The reformation of the spirit included proper religious initiation under the tutelage of individual sisters; the ostensible aim was the hope that even if these fallen women reverted to their old lives they would ask for the privileges of the Church before they would die. It should be noted that these stringent corrective practices prescribed for fallen women were in many ways akin to those followed by the sisters themselves. This sameness of experience led the fallen women to see themselves as extended alter-egos of those who formulated and imposed the rules.

Significantly, many Anglican sisters perceived themselves as surrogate mothers of the penitents working under their supervision. These celibate nuns, who vehemently repudiated their myopic culture's strait-laced assumption that matrimony and maternity were the preferred goal and instinctive standard for all women, embraced the penitents as their spiritual, if not biological, daughters. Thomas T. Carter, Rector of the Clewer House of Mercy, was openly appreciative of such emotional mother-daughter bond shared by the sisters and their fallen yet willing-to-be-rescued penitents. Optimistically, he declared:

> We are merely supplying . . . a home and mother's care. We are simply providing out of the bosom of the Church what nature had failed to give, and what the world cannot. This is the true way of viewing the case of these fallen women. (cited in Mumm, 1996, p. 538)

The life-cycle of every Victorian woman typically involved a movement from the father's family to the family of the husband. Prostitutes, kept mistresses, female thieves and alcohol addicts were expelled from both; the communities of the sisters with their egalitarian philosophy of mystical motherhood offered these unfortunate women a substitute congenial domestic space, the "home" of the penitentiary. Debunking the belief that fallenness was an outrageous offence against the ethical principles of the society, one that resulted in the incurable

deterioration of character, the sisters preached that the distinctions between penitents and other women were more of circumstance than of character. While the self-appointed guardians of morality passed the sentence of excommunication on the penitentiary inmates, the sisters did not; they were quick to break the barriers prohibiting their interaction with the inmates. Symbolically, the maternal compassion and camaraderie exhibited by these pious sisters upheld the penitentiary movement's insistence that "fallen women need some such sisters to be ever at their side, watching them in weak moments, encouraging them in seasons of overwhelming gloom, checking outbreaks of temper and light words, directing and controlling their conversations" (D'Amico, 1992, p. 72).

Intrinsically associated with the functioning of the conventual penitentiaries was the notion of mutual solidarity between sisters and penitents across the conventions of class difference, sexual myth and moral law. Although the general public was of the opinion that "good" women should maintain a sufficient distance from "bad" women[3], the sisters thought otherwise and defiantly spearheaded the reformative process to ensure unflagging support for the fallen women in their route to social reintegration. In so doing, they metaphorically lived out the biblical parables of Jesus Christ; like the shepherd looking for the lost sheep or the woman searching for the precious coin or the Good Samaritan attending the half-dead Jewish traveller, they made every possible effort to offer the penitents a sure means of escape from the quagmire of sin, money and flesh. Dissolution of class differences is indicated by the fact that sisters (usually upper-class in background) often received hundreds of correspondences from ex-penitents (belonging to the working-class): intimate bonds were formed when such "old girls" returned to visit the sisters during Christmas vacations or to make monetary contributions as a gesture of their active interest in the work of the community. Demystification of sexual myth is seen in the foundation of Magdalen orders by canonised sisterhoods where former penitents entered as nuns. This posed a radical challenge to the Victorian dualistic paradigm of femininity, a paradigm that promulgated an uncompromising segregation between two mutually exclusive categories of "pure" and "impure" woman. When a former penitent became a nun this not only signified that the sexual contamination of her character had been white-washed by expiation, but also situated her in a more elevated spiritual and social plane than she had been

[3]An article titled 'Female Penitentiaries' in *The Quarterly Review* of 1848 gives expression to this blinkered public mentality. In general the reviewer lends his support to penitentiaries, but balks at the idea of "virtuous" nuns undertaking any practical running of them: "We may express a doubt whether it is advisable for pure-minded women to put themselves in the way of such knowledge of evil as must be learnt in dealing with the fallen members of their sex" (Armstrong, 1848, p. 375-6).

before her fall from virtue. Questioning of the moral law is evinced in the sisters' probing of the double standards and divided consciousness of the Victorian frame of mind. Sisters urged that the social stigma of moral contagion often levelled against women should be extended to men as well; they were convinced that men's ethical standards must be hoisted to those of women so that both sexes could become alert to their respective roles in soiling an otherwise unsoiled world.

Nonetheless, confidence in the power and viability of the penitentiary was questioned by many sceptical Victorians, who perceived it as a system of paternalistic regulation and severe religious observance, which the penitents, and even the sisters, found somewhat hard to bear. Activists such as Margaret Goodman, Penelope Holland and Felicia Skene[4] unequivocally focused on the flawed organisational methods governing these institutions in their writings on the "problems" inherent in female-managed communities. As Goodman (1862) recalled:

> Led chiefly by the wish to minister to untended suffering, I joined the Sisters of Mercy at Davenport. As time went on, Miss Sellon thought fit to develop such conventual rules . . . that pressed too heavily upon me; and, therefore, after a sojourn of six years I returned to my former occupation. (p. 1)

Holland offered an analogous criticism of contemporary penitentiary life. In an editorial in *Macmillan's Magazine*, she asked acerbically "whether it be right for women who have reached the full maturity of their intellects to submit themselves to a system by which they are treated as we should scarcely treat an infant in these days, when fools' caps have gone out of fashion" (Holland, 1869, p. 536-7). Much in the same vein, the punitive reform policies implemented by the sisters were denounced sneeringly by Felicia Skene (1865):

> One of the cruellest parts of the system is their rigorous confinement to the house, and total want of exercise in the open air. Not one breath of fresh air is allowed to these poor prisoners; not one half hour is granted them in which to look on the blue sky and the sunshine, and to meet the cool breeze with its invigorating power. (p. 10)

[4]Goodman entered Ascot Priory, Davenport as a novice and her bitter experience there was reflected in her anti-sisterhood writings for which she was roundly criticized by Florence Nightingale in a letter (dated 18 January 1863) to Hilary Bonham Carter. Skene was a Scottish philanthropist and prison reformer. She published in a wide variety of genre, including memoirs, novels and poetry. Her most significant work is *Hidden Depths* (1866), a realist novel about prostitution. There is a blue plaque for Skene, installed on 2 July 2002 by the Oxford Blue Plaques Board, located at 34 St. Michael Street, Oxford. Nothing substantial is known about Holland's life except the fact that she wrote extensively on woman-related subjects for *Macmillan's Magazine.*

Adding impetus to such existing anti-penitentiary sentiments was what Pauline Nester (1985) has recently termed as the "thriving anti-conventual fiction" (p. 4), which either demonised sisters or associated conventual life with a kind of kidnapping. Indeed, the foreword to one such novel, *Sister Agnes; or the Captive Nun: A Picture of Conventual Life* (1854), alludes to the widespread profusion of sensational "narratives of escaped nuns, converted priests, and ex-confessors," purporting to unmask the dark underbelly of religious sisterhoods (cited in Nester, 1985, p. 4). While many of these charges might seem to have been fabricated, the tantalising scandals surrounding penitentiaries galvanised the widespread belief concerning the dystopian ambience of the sisterhoods and aggravated an already polarised debate about women's competency for communal activity in England. One such scandal was the case of *Saurin vs. Starr and Kennedy*, known as "The Great Convent Case", tried before Lord Chief Justice Cockburn in the Court of Queen's Bench in February, 1869. The plaintiff Miss Mary Saurin sued her former convent, and the overwhelming media attention attracted by the case threatened to make public the inner workings of the penitentiary system (Rogers, 2003, p. 874).

In light of the arguments made so far, it would be fairly justifiable to claim that two major demands overlapped in the nineteenth century: the number of deviant fallen women desiring institutional welfare in order to lead a future life of unblemished decency was accelerating, and the newly-mushroomed sisterhoods, seeking a means to justify their charitable enterprises, deemed the provision of remedial penitentiaries for fallen women as an incontrovertible vindication of their own existence. However, these penitentiaries, with their pervasive inclination to control, contain and change nonconformist and problematic behaviour of the fallen inmates, appeared to operate under the principle of what Michel Foucault (1979) has famously called Panopticism. Invoking Jeremy Bentham's conceptualisation of the Panopticon as an exemplary prison, Foucault points out that "whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panopticon schema may be used" (205). The Panopticon and a Victorian female penitentiary were conceived of in such a way that their architectural and administrative setups turned out to be strikingly alike: both were designed as enclosed segmented spaces observable at every point by an ever-present power – watchmen in case of the Panopticon and sisters in case of a penitentiary – and the regulation and regimen enforced in these institutions aided in the training of the problematic inmates, inducing in them an awareness of their own constant visibility. Bentham regarded the Panopticon as one which combined safe custody, confinement, labour and

instruction, a process which with the use of timetables, tutoring, exercises and surveillance would successfully tame the deviant into docile, and more importantly, also deter the potentially deviant (Mukherji, 1996, p. 60). Similar rules and objectives prevailed in every Victorian penitentiary working for the rehabilitation of fallen women. A sisterhood penitentiary was therefore the archetypal symbol of modern disciplinary power much like the Panopticon.

However, by the twentieth century many of these sisterhood penitentiaries quickly started to lose their importance in Britain. Fewer women enrolled owing to a number of factors: the duration of the coursework, the inflexible disciplinary policies, the droning lifestyle and the inward-looking stagnation of the Anglican sisterhoods themselves. In addition, the founding fathers of the penitentiaries were aging and thus lacking enthusiasm for the reclamation of fallen women. In the Liverpool Penitentiary, for instance, subscribers were dying off just as the premises needed drastic renovation; in particular, a new roof, exterior paint, an extended doorway and drainage. By 1921 there were only two penitents left in the institution and not surprisingly it closed in 1922 (Bartley, 2000, p. 64). After the First World War, penitentiaries were replaced by new institutions such as homes for unwed pregnant women known as "mother and baby homes" which operated under the same rhetoric of amelioration and maternalistic supervision. Most of these revamped institutions subsisted until the counter-cultural revolutions of the 1960s, but they could never manage to match the social omnipotence of their Victorian precursors.

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The Romance and Reconstruction of National Identity in *The Shadow Lines*

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Abstract

What are some of the consequences of imagined nationalism in a post-colonial world, particularly at the sub-national level? In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues nationality is "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). Edward Said, too, writes about imagined geography in *Orientalism* where the Orient is a mere concoction, an imaginary space. While Anderson discusses nationalism, nationhood and nation-space (all the while blurring the line between the terms) in a broader sense, Said limits his discussion to the Orient. Inarguably, the people of a nation do share a bond, a closeness that they cannot deny. However, the question Anderson and Said prompt us to ask is how authentic is that imagined quality of an imagined geography/community?

In Amitabh Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, a non-linear narration highlights how time and place are not permanent. The lines that divide places and even times are, mere shadows, and hence forever trespassed. Ghosh's novel delineates the intricacies of man-made nation space in the Indian subcontinent in a fluid yet pithy way. Further complicating the already tricky issue of nationalism in India is the cross-national relationship between a man with no countries and a woman across the seas. What, thus, are the consequences of imagined nationalism and/or imagined nation-space? Can there be a situation where nationalism is not a unified, political ideology? Can nationalism be stratified, even reconstructed? The project, thus attempts to understand what really happens when the author tries to construct an understanding of nationalism from a post-ideological perspective.

The Romance and Reconstruction of National Identity in *The Shadow Lines*

What makes a nation? What is nationality? What is it about borders – some few thousand or more square – inches-that make the people within a nation feel connected to each other? Borders are political and often politicized. They can be illusory too; sociologically speaking, nationality and nation space have more to do with social agents like economic, legal, cultural and spatial structures than with discernible differences among people. In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues nationality is "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). People belonging to a nation-state do often share a bond, a kind of uniformity that is unique to them. For Edward Said, nationalism is a perception of space imagined by the Occident based on myths and images. The manifestation of this imagined geography is essential for the existence of the Occident. There is an obvious power battle here – those with the power to 'imagine' possess the strength to 'create' a space that befits their agenda, whatever it may be. To complicate matters even further, there is no 'real' geography that the imagined ones can be compared to. Questions thus remain: how authentic is that imagined quality of imagined geography/community? How can an individual negotiate with the imagined aspect of nationality, community and identity?

Nationality and its many weighty facets can be hard to define. In fact, there is little evidence to claim the existence of a universal definition and execution of nationalism. Anderson by way of explanation suggests, "unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers" (5). The reality is, he argues "the end of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (3). Nationalism, thus is nowhere near to being illegitimate in today's political and social life. Nonetheless, how crucial is it in the lives of individuals?

For the characters in Amitabh Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* the very borders the masterminds and policymakers behind Indian 'independence' had fought brutally over signify very little. The non-linear narration of the text also highlights how time and place are not permanent. The character Tridib lives his life vicariously through the narrator. When his story is combined with those of his lover May and his brother Robi, together they outline the places from Ballygunge to Brick Lane as dramatically to the reader as to those who lived in them. The

lines that divide places and even times are, thus, mere shadows, and hence forever trespassed. Even the contrasts against which Tridib's character stands, Ila and the narrator's grandmother, show that the characters all work for and in opposition with Tridib because of their shared missing link – that of a place to call home. Ghosh's novel delineates the intricacies of man-made nation space with sensitivity and empathy.

Thus, some of the key questions for this essay include: What are the consequences of imagined nationalism and/or imagined nation-space? Can there be a situation where nationalism is not a unified, political sentiment? Can nationalism be stratified, even reconstructed? In *The Shadow Lines*, nationalism is a familial, cultural and geographical concept that runs parallel to, if not above, religious and/or communal complexities. Ghosh's handling of the issue is nuanced and thought-provoking, and does not undermine that seriousness of the matter in the subcontinent. For the major part of the plot, it shows that borders and national identity can and should be traversed. Yet it is the ending of the narrative that throws the question of individual or national identity slightly off when two people belonging to entirely different continents, race and age group become one. Does the novel supersede the thorny issues related to national identity and nationalism for a too-easy mishmash of romantic love? Not quite – rather Ghosh constructs the ending in a way so that his characters articulate a vision to reside in or rather choose a world where people can come together because of those very differences.

I

The misery of the general population prior to and post-independence in 1947 is well documented in history, fiction and archives. Amitabh Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* exemplifies the repercussions of a very complex and difficult independence process and shows how the residues of violence still haunt and affect human lives across the superficially imposed borders nearly half a century after its occurrence. As Ghosh shows in his novel, August 1947 did not bring to an end the terrifying results of religious and political violence; the lackluster attempt by the British and Indian authorities to produce a resolution by drawing the maps of the newfound nations did not make things any less complicated in either India or Pakistan.

Ghosh's novel takes place in Bengal, among many other locations. Bengal is a historically significant and conflicted part of Indian subcontinent. "The territories of British India were partitioned between the two new countries on a principle of religious majorities. Thus provinces with Muslim majorities

constituted the territories of Pakistan, divided into two wings, one in the west and the other in the east. Two provinces – Punjab and Bengal – were themselves partitioned according to the religious composition of the district populations in those provinces", notes Partha Chatterjee (1). Home to both Hindu and Muslim population, Bengal suffered heavily during Partition. Urbashi Barat stresses, "for Bengalis, Independence was also Partition, the invention of borders which permanently and irrevocably exiled entire communities. Even today, more than half a century after the event, the victims of Partition continue to explore the dimensions of their loss of home, to attempt to understand what it has done to their sense of identity and their social relationships"(214). Ghosh introduces individual characters in the novel who represent the horrors and confusions brought about by Partition. Through them, he tries to examine identity from both a national and post-national perspective. His characters are global citizens who are often baffled and intrigued by such concepts like nationalism and national identity.

The Shadow Lines introduces the reader to two families and a series of events that transcends generations, time and space. The novel centralizes on the life and story of Tridib, the unnamed narrator's uncle he lives vicariously through. Tridib – a character that is luscious with depth – acts in the novel as a sort of liaison between two continents, three countries and two Partitions. Through the narrator's back and forth storytelling about his uncle's life, the story travels from Kolkata to Dhaka to London – all the while blurring the boundaries and borders that, ideally, should separate the characters. Through Tridib, Ghosh attempts to disintegrate the idea of a nation state, which manifests in the portrayal of three cities that are emblematic of three countries. The story also travels through time – this is a story of India and Pakistan during the 1960s, India and England during the 1980s and the beginning of the twentieth century. Sujala Singh argues that "the first movement 'going away' looks out in the world, collecting and classifying, mapping, conceiving of geographies, which the unnamed narrator records an obsessive will to remember. This is an individuated spatiality, organized by the structure of a private re-collection" (162). The boundaries between private and public are somewhat fluid in the novel. Tridib, over the course of the novel, becomes a link that connects the various characters of the novel, including the narrator, his lover May, and his brother Robi. Eventually, through Tridib's life, the narrator re-examines his lifelong notion of a nation state. The love affair between Tridib and May bear direct consequences of a Partition narrative that is fraught with disbelief and uncertainty. So does the character of the narrator's grandmother – a formidable female figure who questions the ludicrousness of

Partition itself with an exasperation many victims (perhaps all fifteen million who had to find a new home) could identify with.

On the other end of the spectrum is the narrator's cousin Ila, the quintessentially cosmopolitan Indian who refuses to be one or bear any resemblance to what she thinks it means. The irreverently rash character picks such heavy-handed battles with her national identity that they border on stereotypes. Not allowed to dance at a nightclub of Grand Hotel in Calcutta, Ila exclaims, "Do you see now why I've chosen to live in London? It is only because I want to be free. Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you" (Ghosh 87). As Tridib observes, "Although she had lived in many places, she had never traveled at all" (21).

The lives the characters of the novel live are not defined by geography or location as we know it. From Thamma's (the grandmother) migration to India to Tridib and May's love affair to the narrator's almost voyeuristic pleasure in already knowing the alleys and corners of London and Dhaka without ever setting foot there, a wide range of plot points shows how *The Shadow Lines* constantly tries to re-define space.[1] What makes Ghosh's foray into the discourse of imagined space particularly engaging is the way in which he strangles the banality of borders and maps (through Thamma) while simultaneously remaining fascinated by places both imaginary and real (through the narrator). The narrative arc-defining scene where the grandmother faces the idea of revising her birthplace Dhaka after many years of exile is ripe with caution, frustration and reproach. She wonders if there is an actual border with "trenches perhaps, or soldiers or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land" between India and East Pakistan (148). The answering "no" is met with sheer indignation and bafflement as she loudly proclaims, "what's the difference then? And if there's no difference, both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before[…]What was it all for then-Partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something in between? (149). Indeed, these are some of the key queries Ghosh himself sets out to answer in this novel. What is this nation-space then? What defines it? What makes it a strong imperative that people will wage war in its name?

Why does nation-space matter? More importantly, why does it matter in the context of *The Shadow Lines?* Before one can venture out to solve that problem, one must wonder, what is home? Urbashi Barat suggests, "Home is the sight of nostalgia as well as of a terror of the unknown, the borders between the

[1]Thamma took part in India's nationalist movement, reestablished herself into a new homeland and refuse to let go of her former homeland or the idea of it even if it was not anything like it used to be. When she visits Dhaka years later, she keeps asking "but where is Dhaka?" (201)

spaces are 'shadow' ones, achieving presence only when they are crossed" (219). *Desh* in Bengali has two meanings, one's "nation" and one's native village. Home, too has dual meanings: *basha* means a house, a dwelling while *bari* is where one's ancestors have lived, where one at once forms the history and is part of it. Do Ghosh's characters yearn for that *bari*? A nation-space that is also part of their history and where they are also part of? Perhaps that explains the fierce protectiveness Thamma has for her home. Barat agrees, saying, "the ferocity with which the grandmother defends her home and its values is clearly a part of the alienation and the disorientation that are themselves the product of exile; the fluidity of borders that Tridib and the narrator experience are also born of their dislocation from home" (226). Is dislocation the root of all uncertainty then? The incapacity to fit in? Many of Ghosh's characters refuse to be defined by a uniform definition of national identity for the most part. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Franz Fanon argues "a national culture is sought in systematic fashion. It becomes a set of automatic habits, some traditions of dress and a few broken-down institutions" (Fanon, 1588). In a criss-crossing storyline of love and space between a man with no countries (Tridib) and a woman across the sea(May) Ghosh's text builds an intricate and complex web of back and forth. It shows a kind of geographical displacement through personal and emotional experiences and thoroughly questions concepts such as "home" and "homeland".

The central characters of the novel have multiple belongings and plural identities – all the while breaking the regular or appropriate standard of time and space. Thanks largely to the truly global citizenry of almost all of them – with the head of the family in the Foreign Services, Ila's father in the United Nations and Tridib, Robi and Ila all repeatedly traveling back and forth between Europe and India. The tattered old atlas Tridib gave the narrator and the way in which he knew the nooks and crannies of London without ever setting foot there once for all complicate their identity. For Ghosh, the dilemma between "coming" home and "going" home is ripe with innuendoes. "How could you have 'come' home to Dhaka? You don't know the difference between coming and going"--asks the young narrator to his grandmother (Ghosh 150). *Ashi*, the Bengali replacement for both coming and going is a wonderful paradox Ghosh uses to its full potential. For Tha'mma – someone who is caught literally between memory and belonging and between reality and a strict belief in nationality – it is no wonder that she is lost. It is also no wonder the young narrator, the voice of sanity in the novel, is also out of his depth trying to understand the coming and going of it all. As he later tries to explain: "Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what my grandmother was

looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement" (150). Home, homeland, *desh, bari*, coming, going, nationalism, map and borders are all concepts that are problematic in the novel.

That particular quest of looking for a home is eventually what propels the redoubtable grandmother to embark upon a rescuing mission of their uncle across the border in Dhaka. As the narrator explains, "For people like my grandmother, who have no home but in memory, learn to be very skilled in the art of recollection" (Ghosh 194). Among all the characters of this book, hers perhaps is the most strident form of nationalism. It does not come as a surprise to the reader though, simply because while Ghosh's characters all share a palpably comparable longing for a "home" it is Thamma who believes in giving blood for it. At one point in the novel Tha'mma declares that Ila has no right to a home in Britain as her ancestors had not given their blood for it, so it could never be her nation, her desh.

Incidentally, her Jethamoshai an uncle is another shining example of a character whose caustic remarks prove the entire Partition exercise pointless – "I don't believe in this India Shindia. Once you start moving, you never stop, he said. It's all very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere?" (Ghosh, 215) The takeaway from this rant is not that he is above and beyond the rescue his nieces think he so desperately needs but that once a line is drawn to alter the ones that never were, there is no turning back, no stopping. In the case of India, therefore, what the Radcliffe Commission did can never be undone – only aggravated.

The novel culminates in the death of Tridib in a religious riot in the other half of Bengal in Pakistan. With that the narrator asks the reader to share in his own experience and unlearn everything he had learned about borders and religion and identity. His death in a religious riot that rocked both sides of Bengal is a testament to the religious and cultural reality of the subcontinent. A seemingly innocent loss of the Prophet's hair from Kashmir perpetuates repercussions that prove reality is strangely similar across the borders in the subcontinent. Also crucial is May's involvement in that pivotal moment that forever changed the lives of the characters. In the end when the narrator lay in the arms of May, his uncle's lover, he not only questions his nationhood, but also begins to dismiss the necessity of it. By the denouement of the novel, he not only questions the relevance and validity of political and religiously constituted nation space but re-learns the meaning of being a child of "a free state" (Ghosh 242).

In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson argues that "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, […] for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (Anderson 7). In the context of India and Pakistan that comradeship includes religion. The way that religious conflict plays out in *The Shadow Lines* is problematic. In *State and Politics in India*, Partha Chatterjee argues that the concept of nation state is largely formed in western social scientific thoughts. Thus when the idea is applied to the subcontinent, its effectiveness is negligible (Chatterjee 24). The practical problem, according to Chatterjee, is that in adopting the paradigm of nation-state post-colonial administrators blinded themselves to new possibilities of thinking outside Western categories.

Not only does Tridib's death help negotiate the legacies of artificial boundaries erected through Partition, Ghosh is also interested in challenging the very question of national identity. The tendency emerges through the character of May in *The Shadow Lines*. The events leading to Tridib's death and the narrator's own personal encounter with violence are in fact ripple effects of one particular event – the disappearance of a sacred relic, the hair of the Prophet Mohammad from Hazratbal Mosque of Kashmir. During the first days of riot, Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus did not fight each other; their common enemy was the establishment. Still, as with any war that is waged between "oneself and one's mirror image," tension mounted to a fever pitch in East Pakistan and India as Hindu refugees began pouring over to India and mobs went ruthless on the Muslims in Kolkata (200). The way Ghosh ties together the two events of Tridib's death in Dhaka and the schoolboy narrator's encounter with the riot in Kolkata is symbolic. It goes on to show that reality is the same across the border in the subcontinent. While discussing Hindu Kolkata and Muslim Pakistan, Singh argues that "the signs and effects of religious and national identity are shown to spill over the constraints imposed by the agencies of power that endeavor to cordon off a space as its own" (170).[2] The allegorical tattered old atlas Tridib uses to teach his nephew about the fluidity of borders also confirm that geography has little significance in terms of people's perception of religion and national identity. Singh stresses, "The compression into a narrow time-slot of systematic events, mirroring each other across the border, is a ploy utilized in the narrative to

[2]Sujala Singh notes: "It is in dreams and memory, and in the particular arrangement of their narratives, that the silences in the discourses of the public spheres are prized upon by the juxtaposing of spaces and the freezing of time, in parody of the ways in which the newspapers do the same" (169). She also suggests that Tridib's death "invites us to read off an allegory of sectarian nationalist identity in post-Partition India" (170).

indicate how any carved-out notion of a communal or national identity is haunted by the spectre, the reflection, of the constitutive Other"(169). At the heart of Ghosh's novel, thus, is a quest to find meaning in this meaningless of borders, partitions and separations.

While the concept of entangled identity is quite appropriate in the context of the subcontinent, how effective is it in terms of England and India, as those two imagined geographies are represented through Tridib and May? May's is a complex characterization by Ghosh: she falls in love with the good-humored, wise-beyond-his-years Tridib almost as quickly as she judges the ways in which a post-Partition India functions. From her altruistic rescuing of a dying dog in the streets of Kolkata to her sheer repulsion in discovering a giant, imported oak dining table at the Chowdhury household – May's response to India is complex. However, what most complicates May's position in the novel is her involvement in Tridib's death at Dhaka. When the little rescue force comprised by the Bose sisters, Tridib and May try to take the senile Jethamoshai back with them to Kolkata, her actions cause irrevocable damage in the lives of the central characters. When an angry mob assaults the driver and the uncle, May's superior 'Memshahib' attitude makes her jump out of the car to help (218). Her action prompts Tridib to jump right into the frenzy and leads him to his eventual death within minutes (alongside the old uncle and the driver). Was she acting out of superiority? Her feeling of guilt is clear affirms that when she confesses that she was not "going to listen to a stupid, cowardly old woman" and she that she did try to be a "heroine" (245). How responsible does that make her though? Should she have had a better grasp of the unique situation of mirrored reality across the border in Dhaka? This stray, singular moment of violence caused by individuals who want to fuel the differences between communities and the individual actions of May and Tridib accentuate the necessity for individual action to confront such communal agitation.

Yet, question remains: is individual action enough? Tridib's death was a sacrifice; Ghosh insists, "Tridib gave himself up. It was a sacrifice" (246). He had died in Dhaka, a city he had little intimate history with, and in the hands of a stray group of rioters for a cause he cared nothing about. It was love that propelled Tridib to meet his doom, not religion and definitely not nationalism. The deaths of Khalil (the driver), the old uncle and Tridib stand independently, away from the actual riot that broke apart the Hindu and Muslim population in India and East Pakistan. Somehow, it provides a romantic ending for Tridib and May where two different people from two different continents, cultures and races

finally come together. It gives Tridib and May a chance to finally consummate their mostly chaste relationship. Through their union in death, Ghosh asks his characters to forget their differences and the nations they represent. The lines that separate the central characters, thus, are not only of borders and frontiers, but also of present and past, self and image, colonizer and colonized. In a way, Ghosh thus offers an opportunity to his readers (and characters) to evade the enmeshed complexities of differences borders enact on humans.

II

In light of the multiple kinds of boundaries that divide characters from one another and in the context of the example of May and her character's representation of a romantic and private transcendence, what really are the consequences of imagined nation space in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*? The only time the expanded Dutta-Chowdhury family members deal with a persisting Hindu-Muslim conflict in a post-Partition era is during Tridib's death. The terrible ending haunts the lives of Robi, May and the narrator for the rest of their lives and it leaves some form of conflicted feelings in the other characters. Ghosh insists that the Muslims and Hindus of India and East Pakistan were almost helpless in their participation in the 1964 riot. On the one hand, the narrator remembers the fear that crippled him during the nightmarish bus-ride in 1964, "it is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent" (200); on the other, Ghosh asserts "there were innumerable cases of Muslims in East Pakistan giving shelter to Hindus, often at the cost of their own lives, and equally, in India, of Hindus sheltering Muslims" (225). When the college-age narrator realizes that Tridib was killed by a mob in Dhaka in the same riot that engulfed Kolkata, he realizes "there will always be something that will connect Calcutta to Dhaka, Bengali to Bengali. Even in their self-destructive violence the people of East and West Bengal exhibit their common inheritance and kinship" (225). One of the major consequences that arises from the depiction of the riot is the narrator's realization of the similarities between these two seemingly unrelated events. The reasons for Tridib's death in Dhaka are discovered (by the narrator) in deep layers of private as well as public history.[3] Thus when the narrator tries to excavate his memories of that event he is

[3]"Sujala Singh stresses the following, "In the second movement, 'coming home', this conceptualization of his private memory is contextualized within public histories, and punctuated by the calendar dates of singular events. The sweep of his early vision gets marked up for divisions of war, religion and gender, and he has to grow up to face the responsibilities imposed by stories that refuse to let his outlook transcend them" (162). She goes on to argue that "Tridib himself appears from a fragment of newspaper article from a long time ago, cut down by the horrors of the religious lines drawn across maps and between people" (162).

incapable of separating the two. Years later, as a PhD student the narrator's memory is jogged by an Australian expert in Asian Studies and he begins to see through the texture of the events. Once the narrator researches the archives and gets all the data in his hands, he begins his "strangest journey: a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events" (Ghosh, 219). This act of going to the library to support his claims of a terrible riot in 1964 in which the number of deaths was not a lot less than the war of 1962 shows that India's political history is anything but objective. As Ghosh rightly notes, this is how the subcontinent functions – for just shy of two weeks after the riot ended the newspapers stopped writing about it. Ghosh brings to light an amnesiac tendency to gloss over painful details, an eerie capacity to move on even after something so avoidably tragic happens. "I believed in the reality of space; I believed that distance separates; I believed that across the border there existed another reality" says the narrator and slowly, with time, he begins to unlearn everything he had known (214).

In the end, when in honor of Tridib's memory, the narrator chooses to unlearn the national divide resulting from Partition and instead embraces homogeneity, Ghosh offers his readers some kind of a solace. The Bartholomew Atlas, Tridib's dreams for his nephew to "worlds to travel in and…eyes to see them with," all conspire to challenge the very concept of imagined boundaries in the subcontinent (20). As the narrator recalls his memory of the riot, he realizes: "It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent form the rest of the world – not language, not food, not music – it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror" (200). Ultimately, the novel offers just that – to brave that war and reconcile.

Ghosh's novels, almost all of them steeped in history have a tendency to accommodate views that can only be suited to someone like him – a true global writer who is comfortably rooted in his own identity. The *Circle of Reason* (1986) too, begins in Bengal, criss-crosses across India, moves on to the Middle East, and ends somewhere in Africa. The same holds true for *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) – travelling back and forth between colonial India and twentieth-century New York and Kolkata and *In an Antique Land* (1993) which moves backward and forward in history and traverses a track as widespread as the Middle East, India, Africa, Europe and North America. In short, his novels, although mostly situated in India, are never shy of being global and never afraid of redefining concepts such as time, spatiality and temporality.

All his life, the young narrator of *The Shadow Lines* aspires to rise above his Kolkata-based existence. His fascination with the cafes in Madrid, the corner store in Brick Lane and that old atlas show a kind of strange obsession with a world that has no boundaries; yet he is forever impatient to intrude in it. Tridib and his nephew's shared desire to bring together an already fractured world comes from their own personal incapability to belong. In *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhaba argues, "Our nation-centered view of sovereign citizenship can only comprehend the predicament of minoritatian 'belonging' as a problem of ontology – a question of belonging to a race, a gender, a class, a generation become a kind of 'second nature', a primordial identification, an inheritance of tradition, a naturalization of the problems if citizenship" (xvii). Through Tridib and his nephew's relationship with May, Ghosh tries to connect the imperial center and the former colony. His cosmopolitan characters make colonial and postcolonial history come together and Ghosh eventually captures the perspectival view of time, space and events in this book that attach people together. Finally, *The Shadow Lines* offers us hope. While admitting the many complexities of cultural and national identification in the subcontinent Ghosh nonetheless opts to offer a narrative conclusion where divisive lines which threaten our common humanity cease to exist and where individual resistance comes out triumphant.

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History as Aesthetics in the African Novel: a Reading of Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*

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Introduction

African literature is as unique as the African people themselves. This is because, among other reasons, there is no way it can be interpreted outside the people and their past experiences. This is why it seems as if every African novel is a piece of history. Hyppolyte Taine, the father of historical determinism in literary criticism, has postulated that the best critical outfit which can evaluate the works of literature will first consider the history that is behind the author of the work, stressing that:

> It was perceived that a work of literature is not a mere play of imagination, a solitary caprice of a heated brain, but a transcript of contemporary manners, a type of a certain kind of mind. It was concluded that one might retrace from the moment of literature the style of man's feelings and thought for centuries back (1971:602)

Although we have some pieces of literature that are cut out of historical facts, Taine wants us to accept any literature as an evolution of the "embalmed" facts of the writer's past. He, therefore, recommends that history forms the most crucial index for the understanding of any piece of literature. Hence, he further asserts:

> - a poem, a code of laws, a declaration of faith? This you say was not created alone. It is but a mould, like a fossil shell, an imprint, like one of those shapes embossed in stone by an animal which lived and perished. Under the shell there was an animal and behind the document [literature] there was a man. Why do you study the shell, except to represent to yourself the animal? So do you study the document only in order to know the man? The shell and the document are lifeless wrecks, valuable only as a clue to the entire and living existence… It is a mistake to study the document as it were isolated (1971:602).

This, no doubt, re-echoes my intention expressed elsewhere in a paper titled "Psychoanalytical Criticism: Evincing the Dynamics of the Mind in the African Novel", to view most African literary works as products of writers whose minds have already been fossilized by historical experiences.

Taine tells us to study the historical background of the author and place of the text in focus because he believes that as a dead animal lies behind a fossil, there is a history behind the work and its author. To him, therefore, an author's historical experiences are germane in the metamorphosis of his creativity. The historical critic believes that it is logical for any reader to assume that an author's experience always shapes his writings. To limit the scope of analysis to Africa, we discover that African novelists, at certain points of their artistic endeavours, concentrated on the colonial experiences of the people. Then, the emphasis was on an Africa under the colonial grip. The focus later shifted to the post-independence mess that characterizes post-independence sovereign Africa countries. Both of these commitments of the African novelists have their sources in Africa's history.

According to Oyegoke, general literary theories often reveal setting, plot, character and dialogue as "some essential elements" that are the discoverable "general aesthetic rules and canons" of the novel (265). If this is universally true, then it is true of the African novel only that the proper application of these rules lies in the operation from a historico-literary standpoint when the text in focus is the African novel (1996:268). This observation is credible because, "nothing exists through some individual man: it is this individual with whom we must become acquainted" (Taine, 1971:602). The understanding of the "individual man" and, to a large extent, his works is contained in the understanding of his history. This had led us to my acceptance of the historical approach to criticism

i.e Historical Determinism, which I believe has a lot to offer in the evaluation and interpretation of the African novel.

Historical Determinism: Theory and Principle

Historicist critics often analyse literature from two angles:

(i) they provide necessary contextual information necessary for the understanding of the background of the literature

(ii) they show how literary texts reflect the ideas and attitudes of the time in which they have been written.

According to Di Yanni (2002:2082), "these two general approaches to historical criticism represent methods and approaches that might be termed "old historicism" and "new historicism". Old historicism insists that a literary text must be read with reference to the time and place of its creation. This, the historicist believes, is necessary because "every literary work is a product of its time and its world" (Di Yanni, 2002:2082). It is thus assumed that the understanding of the socio-economic and political background and, perhaps, the "intellectual currents" of the time of the preparation of a work, will go a long way in the illumination of the work for generations of readers.

An insight into some historical facts about the pre-colonial Igbo society, and those of the ensuing colonial presence, for example, will shed light on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and this will enable readers to properly appreciate the novel. Similarly, the understanding of most of the Francophone African novels, more often than not, necessitates constant reference to the Assimilation Policy and the Negritudinist historical antecedents.

Historicism and the African Novel

Like the old historicist, the new historicist critic also "considers historical contexts of literary works essential for understanding them" (Di Yanni 2002:2082). However, a significant difference between both varieties of historicism is that new historicism emphasizes the analysis of historical paraphernalia with the same intensity and scrutiny given the literary artefacts that abound in the text. Hence, the new historicist analyzes and evaluates the historical materials that explain the literature along with the literature, and will not merely consider it as a form-giving tendency. Part of the important features of the new historicism is its concern for the examination of "power relations of rulers and subjects". This is an

attribute it shares with the Marxist "node" of historical trajectory which entrenches all socio-political happenings into the frame of history. The assumption here, therefore, is that

> texts, not only literary works, but also documents, diaries, records and even institutions such as hospitals and prisons, are ideological products culturally constructed from the prevailing power structures that dominate particular societies (Di Yanni"2002:2083).

It thus appears that new historicism, in valuing historical materials in the analysis of any literary text, still appropriates some of the methods of the Marxist. This is what further reveals to us that history not only constitute mere background for the new historicist critic but rather an equally important text which is

> inseparable from the literary work, which inevitably reveals the conflicting power relations that underlie all human interactions, from the small-scale interactions of social institutions (Di Yanni 2002:2083).

Both variants of historical criticism contradict the stiff tenets of the formalists or the structuralists who often limit their analysis of a literary work to its language and semiotic structure. The historicist critic spends his time and interest on non-literary materials – history – from the same time in which the work in focus was produced with a view to getting a vital clue that will facilitate its evaluation and judgement.

When we narrow all these down to the African literary tradition, we may be forced to agree with Irele who posits:

> To be meaningful, any kind of discussion of literature implies a responsiveness not only to the text, in its inherent capacity for suggestiveness through a unique structure of signs and meanings, but also to those areas of experience – of feelings, attitudes and insight – which that structure evokes to take on significance (1981:24)

Irele's historical posture here is undoubtedly influenced by the fact that any examination of the African literature must place it in the context in which it can be meaningful. Irele's position also has its foundation in Howe's assumption that

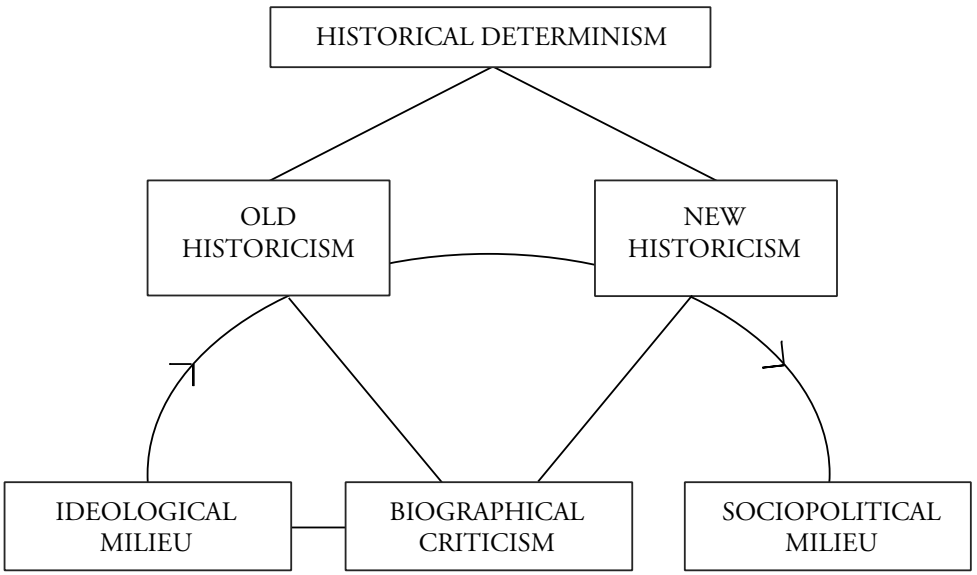
criticism is not a child's play "secondary though it always is to the work itself, criticism offers seemingly endless possibilities for the discrimination of values, the sharing of insights, the defence of a living culture" (1958:37). Invariably, all African novels seem to provide "insights" into the culture, ideology, and politics of the African people as these societal indices are the denominators of history. A historical critic has the right to view literature as that which exists "to bring us a sense and a perception of life to widen and sharpen our contact with existence… And to know the experiences of others and to understand our own experience better" (Perrine 1987:04).

A typical historicist critic of African literature will accordingly, not isolate some novels as "historical" but will perceive all novels as portraying the history behind their authors. Little wonder Gordimer in *Black Interpreter* observes that "… if you want to know what war is like, and how people of a certain time and background dealt with it as their personal situation, you must read *War and Peace*" (8). Gordimer's submission here is clearly supported by Clingman when he asserts lucidly that her opinion is that "fiction can present history as historians cannot" (165). Like Gordimer, Clingman believes that novelists are historians who are "themselves limited historically by being caught up in the process which they attempt to describe". Far from being neutral or innocent assessment of reality, "novels effectively take up ideological positions according to which that reality is learned" (165).

It is clear, then, that history is the primary material which a novel offers. This perspective is given adequate exposition by Mensah in his article, "The Use of History: Three Historical Novels from West Africa" in which he posits that the purpose of the novel is "to make the reader experience the psychology and ethics of the past, not as a curiosity, but as a phase in mankind's development which is of concern to the reader" (1996:69). Though Mensah, like Lukacs, has identified what he calls "a tiny sample of the large corpus of 'historical fiction'" in the canon of the novel, historical criticism is of the belief that all literatures are historical since the purpose of every literary text is the "creation of the individual" whose history is most likely that of the author (Goodwin Reneé "Literary Criticism" http// literary explorer. Blondelibrarian .net/crit.literal).

Any novel is constituted of a "textual world" of conceptual relation where text agents relate syntagmatically and paradigmatically. But there is always an "outside world", which determines the novel's form though which is external to it. One of the materials of this outside world is history, which the historicist believes is the most credible aesthetic material. Quite often, in applying the tenets

of historical determinism to literature, we are bound to explore the possibility of the author's own history in his work. The result of this is biographical criticism which brings to bear the author's life in the interpretation of a work. The following scheme represents the point being made:



In the scheme, the nodes from both variants of historicism touch biographical criticism to give the explanation that all variants of historical criticism may see the author in his work and the result is biographical criticism. The curve that cuts through the two variants extends clock-wise from the ideological milieu to the socio-political to reflect how the historical approach to criticism entails recourse to the ideological and socio-political milieu. The straight horizontal line that connects the ideological milieu to biographical criticism is a reflection of the fact that both are intertwined because a discussion of a work as the author's biography is an indication of the author's ideology.

Ambiguous Adventure and the History of Cultural Genocide

The radical approach to the search for self-identify and self-determination has a place in the literary formation of Francophone novelists. Omolafe explains the situation thus:

> In the search for cultural identify, various attempts have been made by the African intellectual elite to reflect on the topic of what has come to be known as

> the "African personality". This preoccupation arose as a result of a number of factors.
>
> On the one hand, it was a reaction to the biased view of the western world which, until recent times, has been one of contempt or denigration of the African person (17).

This insight explains the temper of Francophone African novels. Abiola Irele further elucidates this phenomenon in his book, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* when he opines that

> creative writing has been so consistently employed by French-speaking black intellectuals to express persuasive form and force to their ideological position that it is justifiable to see their literature, especially when viewed through its themes and its attitudes (both explicit and implicit), as very largely a component to their ideological writings. (1981:146)

One of the ideological movements that offers a better picture of Francophone literary topography is the Negritude Movement. Negritude has been a part of these writers' reasoning from the primordial stage of their literary development. What may explain, for instance, why most Francophone novelists are bound together by the spirit of Negritude is the fact that René Maran, the West Indian who set the ball of the Francophone narrative in motion with the publication of *Batouala* in 1921, was particularly identified, according to Irele, as "an important forerunner of Negritude" (1981:146). Negritude is of course the ideological movement championed by Sartre and Senghor. As Irele explains it, Negritude

> can be taken here to describe the writing of the French-speaking black intellectuals in their affirmation of a black personality, and to designate the complex ideas associated with their effort to define a new set of references for the collective experience and awareness of black people. (1981:68)

Apart from *Batoulala,* narratives like Bakary Diallo's Force bouté, Ousmane socé Diop's *Karim* (1935), Birago Diop's *Les Contes d'Amodou Koumba* (1942), Bernard Dadie's *Legendes africaines* (1950), Djibril Tamir Niame's Soundiata (1960), Nazi Boni's *Crepuscule des Temps anciens* (1902), Abdoulaye Sadji's *Nini*

(1954), Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* (1953), Cheikh Hamidon Kane's *L'Aventure ambigue* (1961) et cetera, are included in the corpus of Francophone narratives. One important thing about all these narratives is that they have traits of history in them. Among these authors, Camara Laye, Hamidou Kane Ferdinard Oyono, Mongo Beti and Ousmane Sembene, are the most influential. These novelists have authored narratives that promote African integrity, which is all what Negritude is all about. Later, female writers like the Senegalese Aminata Sow Fall and Mariama Ba, as well as radical writers like Alioum Fautoure, joined the brigade of the Francophone nationalist writers. In any brief mention of the classics of the Francophone novels one must also mention Kane's *L'Aventure Ambigue*, translated into English by Katherine Woods as *Ambiguous Adventure*.

Ambiguous Adventure is according to Irele, "palpably an allegory derived from a meditation upon the contemplative function of imaginative fiction" (1981:167). As Irele further informs us, Kane himself accepts that his story is nothing but "a narrative that is barely removed from a direct reporting from fact" (1981:167). According to M'Baye, *Ambiguous Adventure* is

> a historical and autobiographical novel written by a Senegalese author who lived on different side of the Atlantic ocean and who examined the change and dilemma that the contact between France and Africa brought into the cultures of Africans home and abroad. The book is an essential work of African history. (2006:194).

The ambiguity in *Ambiguous Adventure* begins to register when the most Royal Lady conveys a town's forum where she states "I come here to say to you: I the Most Royal Lady do not like the foreign school. I detest it. My opinion nevertheless is that we should send our children there" (45). As the Most Royal Lady delivers her speech we are made to understand the imminence of the psycho-philosophical complication of Samba Diallo, Kane's protagonist.

> The school in which I would place our children will kill in them what today we love and rightly conserve with care. Perhaps the very memory of us will die in them. When they return from the school, there may be those who will not recognize us. What I am proposing is that we should agree to die in our children's hearts and that the foreigners who have

> defeated us should fill the place, wholly, which we shall have left free (46).

The historical outlook of *Ambiguous Adventure* is further captured by Irele in one of his latest books - *African Imagination* (2001) in which he points out that the novel looks

> back to the early years of French occupations in Sahelian West Africa to the period of transaction between the dissolution of the precolonial Islamic States in the region and the full establishment of the French colonial administration as the point of departure of the narrative (2001:87).

M'Baye also tells us that Kane's novel is historical as the author captures the transformations, anxieties and ambivalences that colonization created in the lives of modern African people as they attempted to define their identities and understand the nature of their relationship to the west (2006). Hence, drawing from the socio-political and cultural contexts of the time of his upbringing and development in Senegal; as well as from the period of his experience as an expatriate in France, Kane "fictionalized the consequence that geographical displacement and fragmentation of Black identity created in the lives of modern African (M'Baye, 2006:194).

Kane is, as such, not alien to the kind of disintegration of black identity that Samba experiences and which consequently decimate his psycho-philosophical status. This is because, like Samba, Kane was sent to a French school when he was about ten years old. He also studied philosophy at a university in Paris only to return home in disillusionment that emanated from colonization. Therefore, through Samba we are acquainted with the mind of the educated African whose culture and tradition the westerners have adjudged inferior. Kane himself admitted the historicity, or historicalness, of his novel when he agreed:

> I was pushed by the desire to say that our societies had in themselves a profound reality. That any desire to assimilate them was an error since they have their own basic civilization [and it] was to justify colonization that the Europeans pretended that we were not human beings. (cited in Irele 2001:04)

It was, most likely, in his attempt to explain African history that Kane inverts a plausible character and gives him the name "Samba", which, we are told, is actually Kane's house-name. Kane sets Samba to France where the latter discovers that he cannot identify with western values because of his Afrikoranic background. In France, "Samba also realizes that he cannot easily return to the stable [of] African Islamic and cultural traditions that had produced him" and his case becomes quite tragic (M'Baye, 2006:195). When Samba returns to his Diallobe environment, the devastating complexity that the ambiguity of his "self" has created finally results in his death. He returns to the country of the Diallobé after Thieno, his former Koranic teacher, dies. As M'Baye observes

> [s]ummoned by his father, Samba arrives the country of the Diallobe late and, on account of being acculturated and lost in philosophical meditation, refuses to kneel and pray in front of this teacher's grave. It is at the unexpected moment that the character of Le Fou [the Fool], who had been Thieno's assistant during Samba's absence stabs Samba to death (195).

The drama that results in Samba's death is best presented through a long quote from the text:

> Samba Diallo felt that someone was shaking him. He raised his head.
>
> "The shadows are falling. See, it is sunlight. Let us pray" said the fool, gravely.
>
> Samba Diallo made no response.
>
> "Let us pray, oh, let us pray," the fool implored. If we do not pray immediately, the hour will pass, and neither of the two will be content"
>
> "Who?"
>
> "The teacher and his friend. Let us pray, oh, let us pray!"
>
> He had seized Samba Diallo at the neck of his boubon, and was shaking him.
>
> "Let us pray, speak, let us pray."… Samba Diallo pushed him from himself and got up to go away.
>
> "You cannot go away like that, without praying!" the fool cried. Stop, oh stop! You cannot!"…

> "You cannot go away. Stop, oh stop! Master -" … As he spoke, the fool had begun to walk along behind Samba Diallo, burrowing feverishly into the depths of his frock-coat.
>
> "Thou wouldst not know how to forget me like that. I will not agree, alone for us too, to suffer from thy withdrawal. I will not agree. No…"
>
> The fool was in front of him.
>
> "Promise me that you will pray tomorrow"
>
> "No. I do not agree…"
>
> Without noticing, he had spoken these words aloud.
>
> It was then that the fool drew his weapon, and suddenly everything went black around Samba Diallo. (173 - 174)

Readers feel a great deal of pathos at the death of the protagonist. A myriad of philosophical questions could, therefore, be raised around the death of Samba Diallo. However, Samba's antecedents suggests the hard task of knowing how to find a balance between African and western values. This reminds one of Du Bois's idea of "double consciousness" with which he explains the attempt to work out the line between African and western culture for the average modern African. In Du Bois's words the situation is

> … a peculiar sensation, the double consciousness, the size of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness… two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled things: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1965:2)

The thesis of this paper aligns with that of Du Bois's since the motivation here lies in the attempt at fathoming a solution to the problem of the absence of a real African Identity. Before his final assassination by the fool, Samba has been culturally assassinated because he has been recreated culturally to look through the European's eyes. Bisi Ogunsina, a professor of Linguistics and Yoruba studies, discerns the Eurocentric sentiment that Kane and his contemporaries repudiate in their works when he asserts,

> Fun òpòlopò odún seyìn ni awon oyinbo amúnisìn ti gba pe awon ni akódá, adédàá ati awise lori ìmò-ìjìnlè-èrò (philosophy) ati orisiirisii imo-eko. Ninu ironu tiwon, eniyan dudu ko ni imo-itan, litireso, imo-ede, sayensi, imo-ero, imo-ijinle ero abbl. L'oju tiwon oyinbo nikan ni orisun imo. Won si ri i gege bi ojuse won lati maa fi imo won ko iran eniyan dudu. Iru ero yii lo mu ki Rev. Leo Taylor so ninu idanilekoo kan ni Eko ni odun 1942 pe: "since you have no literature of your own, you must study the English literature". Iru ironu yii lo mu ko je pe fun odun gbooro, litireso ile Geesi lo gbile gboko, jakejado ile eniyan dudu (105).
>
> (For many years past, the colonial masters have always seen themselves as the superior in all forms of knowledge – philosophy and all forms of education. Simply because of this mindset, it is assumed that the blacks do not have their own history, literature, linguistic, science, technology, engineering et cetera. In fact to the colonialists, the whites are the only origin of knowledge. As such, they saw it as incumbent on them to impose their own type of knowledge on generations of black Africans. Because of such prejudice Rev. Leo Taylor could once say in a lecture delivered in Lagos in 1924 "since you have no literature of your own, you must study the English literature". This kind of mindset is responsible for why the English literature was popular within the African setting for a very long time (my translation.)

This quote gives the contextual background upon which the interactions between the black man and his white master is premised. In fact, for the Francophone African the case is even more pathetic.

Conclusion

For the historical critic to ask what a piece of work means is to ask what the author meant when he created it. Historical critics are more often concerned with the causal links which indicate that the text is the product of the author's milieu, which is in turn the product of his own age. As *The Golden Papers of Criticism 2 (2010)* tells us, "the poem's real meaning is always in the past, even if sometimes in the very near past, and the search for that meaning is the search for the author's original intention" (2). From the analysis of Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, it becomes obvious that the author and his age coalesce into meaning and as argued in the body of the paper, there is very little a critic can do in the analysis of the text if he fails to place its content upon the pedestal of what the author and his environment experienced.

In *Ambiguous Adventure*, Kane evinces the impact of colonisation and with the eventual death of his protagonist he seems to advocate the need for decolonization of Africa from the grip of newer forms of slavery. The history that supplied inspiration for Kane and his contemporaries both in the Francophone and the Anglophone literary enterprises is still evergreen. As M'Baye notes.

> From the 1880's to the 1960's France, Britain, and Portugal took the land of African and forced the people to work for the posterity of their social lives as Europeans took their freedom and compelled them to work for the benefit of a foreign hegemonic power that had no other goal but to exploit African labour and raw material. (196)

While Francophone writers such as Mariama Ba and Sow Fall, perhaps because of their gender, were motivated to re-present the post-independence political/Feminist struggle of the African women, Kane was more pre-occupied with reflection of the flagrant bastardization of the African selfhood. Certainly in *Ambiguous Adventure*, we have the subtle presentation of this bastardization. This presentation characterizes most Francophone novelists leading Palmer to conclude that such is the "reaction to the consequence of western infiltration of traditional African society" (124).

Kane thus set out on an agenda to represent the history of his people. This statement may, however, not go down well with the New Critic who queries the significance of the critic's knowledge of the author's intention. To such a person, a critic has committed a crime that he tags as *intentional fallacy* if he attempts to

retrieve a text's meaning from anywhere else except from the text itself. The New Critic advises that a critic must react to a piece of literature by staying within the intrinsic attributes of the text. One then wonders how apt it would be to adhere to this advice in the evaluation of Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* which the author himself confirms is composed with materials that are drawn from historical material of Francophone Africa.

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Residual Cultural Imperialism in Primary Textbooks in Bangladesh: A Critique of the *English for Today* Textbooks

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Abstract

It has been assumed that with the rising importance of English as a global language (Crystal, 1997) that 'the centre' (native English speaking countries) produced ELT materials have become tools, using which linguistic as well as cultural imperialism may take place in 'the periphery' (non-native English speaking countries) contexts marginalizing local needs and cultures (Phillipson 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2006). Therefore, the authorial ownership of materials can be given to local experts who know about the culture, needs and realities of local communities (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Taking these issues into account, this paper aims to examine how far the locally produced textbooks, *English for Today* (Class 1-5), have been able to resist cultural imperialism at the primary level in Bangladesh. The analysis of the cultural contents of these textbooks reveals that though these locally produced materials have been able to resist cultural imperialism to some extent, they still have some limitations regarding the way exposure has been provided to the local as well as the target cultures.

1. Introduction

It is argued in certain parts of applied linguistics literature that this is an age of empire and globalization, (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and English is the dominant language of this globalized world (Crystal, 1997). With the rising importance of English, it has been assumed that the centre (native-English speaking countries) have been producing English language textbooks that are becoming tools using which neo-imperialism is taking place in English as a foreign language (EFL) or in English as a second language (ESL) contexts (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2006).

From this viewpoint, the use of these textbooks in the EFL or ESL classrooms has been considered as one of the mediums through which the centre is engineering cultural imperialism in the periphery (non-native English speaking) countries; in the process marginalizing local cultures and languages (Phillipson, 1992). To face this assumed threat of cultural hegemony and to decentralize textbooks, the authorial ownership of materials can be given to local experts who know about the cultural variations, needs and situations of local communities (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

As Bangladesh is a developing country, its government has also become interested in getting more access to this global language which may be considered as the gatekeeper to the global economy and the key to higher education, science and technological advancement (Seargeant & Erling, 2011). The government of Bangladesh believes that the large population of the country can be turned into human capital by acquiring communicative competence in English (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008).

Therefore, the Bangladesh government has introduced a competency-based curriculum at the primary level (Classes 1-5) in 1992. That curriculum was revised adopting "communicative language teaching" (CLT) as the official methodology, replacing the traditional "grammar translation method" in 2002 so that learners' basic communication skills in English could be developed (Hamid, 2010). This curricular innovation led to the redesigning and restructuring of primary textbooks by local-experts. The publication of these textbooks was also carried out by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of the country. As a result, it can be hypothesized that these locally produced ELT materials will be able to reflect the cultural variations, needs, beliefs and situations of local communities successfully.

This paper aims to examine how far the locally designed and produced textbooks have been able to resist cultural imperialism at primary level classrooms in Bangladesh in view of these developments. The first section of this paper focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of restructuring textbooks. The second part highlights the primary ELT scenario of Bangladesh. The third section discusses the cultural content of the textbooks, and the last part includes some recommendations and the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Underpinnings of Restructuring Textbooks

2.1 ELT and Cultural Imperialism

According to Richards (2008, p. 2), critical theorists have taken 'the status of English, the drain on education resources it demands in many countries, and its role in facilitating domination by multinational companies' into account in 'this age of change', and found that ELT may have underlying political attachments. ELT activities have been viewed as the reincarnation of colonialism of the centre from this strand, and this hegemony has been seen to be promoted by the marketing of the British and American textbooks in periphery countries (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999). In this way, countries of the centre are perhaps trying to impose their own culture disregarding local cultures which are related to the values, beliefs, purposes and activities of local communities. Therefore, Phillipson (1992) has argued that ELT can be seen as the facilitator of linguistic imperialism and mentions that "the tenets of ELT have ideological and structural consequences. They serve to strengthen the hold of the centre over the periphery" (p. 192).

Pennycook (1995, p. 43) has also declared that English can be seen as 'the language of international capitalism' and due to that factor it may promote the supremacy of English discourse (written or spoken) over all other languages of the world. Thus the superior image of the native speakers can be established in the periphery countries. This kind of imperialism may result in inequalities in all fields including economics, politics, education, culture and communication. He, therefore, has argued that "the expansion of English language education is … both a continuation of the racist hierarchies of colonial rule and of the colonial construction of the inherent superiority of the native speaker" (Pennycook, 1998, p. 194).

Similarly, Fairclough (1989, p.43) has pointed out that English discourse may have 'power in and behind' it and inferred that this type of discourse in the social milieu may lead to further imperialism. From this perspective, when learners start acquiring English, they may also start accepting the cultural, political and economic values of the dominant group to gain mastery over the target language (TL). This kind of acceptance can occur because teaching and learning always involves the 'transfer and negotiation' of some kind of values and interests (Canagrajah, 1999, p.17). This transmission in different ELT contexts may lead to cultural homogenization and pave the way for cultural imperialism (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

Therefore, cultural imperialism (cf. MacDonalization cited by Ritzer, 1993) has been viewed as a process whereby the centre may try to win over second language (L2) learners by gaining their 'empathy towards and appreciation for' TL communities (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 268). SL learners may give into this homogenization and integration process by adopting the norms of the target culture by assuming that detailed knowledge about the target culture and its communities will help them to gain mastery over English, the 'linguistic power' (Kachru, 1986, p.1). Thus, cultural imperialism may take place in ESL or EFL contexts.

However, Phillipson's (1992) views on linguistic imperialism has been criticized by Bisong (1995) who has argued that users of English in periphery countries may have the ability to choose languages independently considering various sociolinguistic realities of local communities (e.g. Nigeria). Therefore, the promotion of ELT in these countries may not be a practice of linguistic hegemony; rather, it may have been facilitating the communication process in multilingual contexts. Similarly, Conrad (1996, p. 20) has also considered that Phillipson's (1992) framework of linguistic imperialism is built on an assumption of power asymmetry, and it presumes that 'to learn a language is to become dominated by it'. Therefore, following this kind of framework can lead to committing 'empirical errors' in any studies.

In spite of these criticisms, Phillipson's (1992) arguments about linguistic imperialism have raised questions which can clarify the ethical dimensions of ELT. And it can make the ELT practitioners more sensitive to their own cultural and national priorities.

2.2 Risks of Using Global Textbooks

With the rise of worldwide interest in English, the textbook publishing industries of the centre have concentrated on marketing global textbooks which have been 'designed' to serve ELT all over the world (Block & Cameron, 2002, p.10). Thus they are probably meeting the demands of thousands of copies of textbooks produced in English and generating a great deal of wealth (Gray, 2002). *Headway* (Soars & Soars, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2003) and *Cutting Edge Intermediate* (Cunningham & Moor, 2005) are good examples of these textbooks. The publishers of the books have often gained an easy access to local markets because though ELT is now being practiced widely all over the world, the approaches, methods, materials and techniques of ELT and its supporting teacher-training programs are still generally directed by the center to periphery countries

(Canagarajah, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). In this way, the centre's 'firm grip over textbook authorship and production' may have been tightening in periphery ELT communities (Kumaravadivelu, ibid, p.15).

Moreover, the use of global textbooks can have many other adverse effects. Since these textbooks can be "used by students at a particular level and age group anywhere in the world regardless of culture" (Ranalli, 2003, pp. 3-4), they usually portray native speaker-oriented standard English disregarding local as well as other varieties of English (Pennycook, 1994; Gray, 2002). The underlying intention of these textbooks may even be to connect people by promoting target culture-oriented homogeneity around the world (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

The connectedness of these textbooks, therefore, can be seen as one of the manifestations of the globalization process as it has been argued that "globalization merely implies greater interconnectedness and deterritorialisation" (Waters cited in Edwards & Usher, 2008, p. 23). Moreover, nowadays content of these textbooks may have been 'deterritorialzed' by including not only native speakers' settings but also international contexts to show 'English as an increasingly global language' (Gray, 2002, p. 157). Still, these textbooks may discriminate between the centre and the periphery countries because these books can convey 'ideologies' from the 'culturally dominant' counties to the 'less dominant' countries through the medium of 'English in any of its countless world varieties' (Derbel & Richards, 2007, par. 3).

Moreover, according to Gray (2002) global textbooks mainly focus on 'aspirational' content by including topics such as traveling, holidays and shopping which may encourage learners' to 'aspire to' such activities (p. 161). Though this type of content may have drawn lots of learners' attention, they can breach the learners' bonding with their local cultures. Thus, they may raise learners' integrative interest in knowing the 'cosmopolitan cultures' of 'materialistic' lifestyles portrayed in these books through English (Brown cited in Gray, ibid, p.160). Therefore, these books may not only carry cultural trappings with them but also have an 'one size fits all' approach in terms of their topic choices (Gray, ibid, p.159).

Tomlinson (2008, p. 3) has also criticized these global textbooks. He argues that these textbooks may not be able to provide L2 learners with 'the provision of opportunities for acquisition and development' because these books have not been designed according to learner's individualistic needs and learning styles which are conditioned by their local environments and learning culture.

Consequently, many EFL and ESL learners may fail to achieve a satisfactory level of competence in English. Therefore, Tomlinson (ibid) has pointed out that local and well-designed non-commercial materials will be better in comparison to global textbooks for teaching English in EFL or ESL contexts.

Additionally, teaching materials should reflect 'the reality of language use' (Tomlinson, 2003, p.22) and try to raise learners' critical awareness and sensitivity (Byram & Flemming, 1998). However, the producers of global textbooks may have not taken all these issues into account since these books may not emphasize the local realities (Gray, 2002). Therefore, ELT textbooks produced locally can be considered as a better option for teaching the TL rather than global textbooks.

2.3 Textbook Content and Raising Cultural Awareness

Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 17) suggests using English only as a tool for communication in periphery ESL or EFL communities in the face of these assumed hegemonic threats from global textbooks. This can be followed by the 'transformative restructuring' of teaching English as a second language (TESOL) activities from philosophical, pedagogical and attitudinal perspectives. From a pedagogical viewpoint, he advises these communities to design their own ELT materials by portraying mainly local cultures. Similarly, Markee (1997) and McKay (2003) mention that the local culture can play a crucial role in the choice of the appropriate methodology and teaching materials for a particular community, thereby producing great support for carrying out curricular innovation.

Therefore, a question could be raised: what type of critical awareness should be nurtured through locally produced materials? Fairclough (1992) suggests raising learners' critical language awareness (CLA) by making "language itself the object of critical scrutiny – both language as social practice and language as social process, evidenced in reading and writing texts" (Wallace, 2002, p.112). Thus, L2 learners will become conscious of the idea that TL can be modified and used only as a tool for communication to meet their diversified communicative needs in both local and international contexts. This critical awareness will help the learners in 'sensitizing' themselves to the 'social inequalities that confront' them and develop their 'necessary capabilities for assessing those inequalities' regarding language use (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 164).

Kramsch and Sullivan (1996, p. 210) also proposes promoting an 'appropriate pedagogy which would, at the same time be a pedagogy of

appropriation'. This pedagogy will take into account both global and local needs of L2 learners according to learning contexts. It will disregard the native speaker-oriented authentic pedagogy that mainly aims to foster the use of a particular variety of English across diversified socio-cultural contexts by ignoring learner's needs. Therefore, though Byram (1997) suggests nurturing learners' critical cultural awareness by making them aware of the importance of negotiating meaning, social roles and relationships according to their L1 and L2 cultures, Baker (2012) argues that only L1 and L2 oriented cultural awareness will not be helpful for functioning in a globalizing world. To survive in such a world, learners will need to acquire intercultural awareness which will prepare them for taking part in intercultural communication in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Therefore, local experts should take all such cultural-awareness related issues into account while designing teaching materials.

2.4 Raising Cultural Awareness among Young Learners (YLs)

Fairclough (1992), Vickov (2007) and Nieto (2010) particularly recommends raising the CLA of children because cultural ideologies can play an important role in conditioning children's cognitive and social development. According to Vickov (2007, p. 108) 'developing the awareness of learners' own cultural identity and nationhood should be given more importance in case of YLs because this would help them to form ideas about their own cultural identity and serve as 'a basis for understanding' other cultures in the long run. Therefore, in EFL classes, YLs' familiar concepts based on their local culture and environment can be introduced earlier than the target culture which will help them to understand new concepts in relation to their L1 (Vilke cited in Vickov, 2007, p. 108).

Additionally, Tomlinson (2003) and Hill (2003) point out that selection of culturally appropriate visuals is very important in designing materials for YLs. Since these learners may have very limited experience about the outside world, unknown words or concepts can become meaningful to them mainly through such visuals.

Therefore, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) emphasizes including three types of cultural information in English language textbooks for raising learners' cultural awareness. According to them, textbooks can portray the source culture i.e. learners' own local culture; the target culture, i.e. the culture of native-English speaking countries; and the international target culture which will be the combination of cultural elements drawn from both English and non-English speaking countries around the world. Even then, the portrayal of local culture

may create some new problems. As Holborow (quoted in Bisong 1995, p. 126) points out, firstly, it might be difficult to decide which one would be the real native language of a country due to a process of continuing linguistic assimilation; secondly, the promotion of native language may introduce its own 'oppressive strategies' to dominate over other varieties of languages used in a local community. Thus in attempting to remove one kind of perceived hegemony, there is the risk of putting another one, which will also be harder to resist. Therefore, material designers will have to be very conscious in selecting the content of textbooks used for teaching YLs.

In the light of the above discussion, the next three sections focuses on the primary level ELT context of Bangladesh and tries to find out whether locally produced textbooks have been able to restrict the intrusion of cultural imperialism at the primary level in Bangladesh.

3. Primary ELT Scenario of Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a decolonized country. However, when the sun of the British Empire set in Bangladesh in 1947, it was still a part of Pakistan. English was taught as a compulsory subject at the primary level here till Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971. Subsequently, Bengali (L1) was emphasized, suppressing English in the educational and administrative domain to further on the decolonizing and nation-building processes (Ahmed, 2005).

However, this situation started to change in 1990s when the Bangladesh government decided to initiate a curricular change. In 2002, a revised curriculum included four English language competences which were not taken into account before 1990s. Those are:

(i) Listening to and understanding simple commands/instructions/requests in English and carrying them out.

(ii) Speaking and understanding simple English according to students' age.

(iii) Reading and comprehending textbooks according to students' age group and level.

(iv) Writing alphabets, words, numbers, simple sentences, passages, paragraphs, informal letters and numbers according to students' age groups and levels.

(Ahmed, ibid, pp. 21-22)

In spite of this newly alleged interest to developing English language competences, Bengali continued to be emphasized in the nation's political and cultural identity formation and English was generally viewed 'as a language of international and to some extent national currency in business, education and culture' (Banu & Sussex, 2001, p.137).

According to the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE, 2008), around 3,66,000 teachers are working at the primary level in Bangladesh. Since almost 75% of the primary level students (1,63,12,907) go to schools in rural areas, the teacher-student ratio in these schools (1:52) are higher than that in urban schools (1: 48). Though there are a large number of primary students, there are not enough trained teachers in these schools due to 'inadequate infrastructure and limited institutional capacity' for teacher training (Hamid, 2010, p. 289). 80% of these teachers received one year long general certificate-in-education training and only 28.5 % of them received 5 days long subject based training (DPE, 2008). Even this training experience can be considered as 'wastage' because this limited exposure may not be able to achieve the desired result due to these teachers' poor English skills (Hoque cited in Hamid, 2010, p. 296).

4. Discussion on *English for Today*

English for Today (EFT), Class 1- 5 (NCTB, 2010, 2011) constitute a series of textbooks which are used in Bangladesh at the primary level. These books were designed with the help of the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) of Bangladesh (1997-2005) which was initially funded by the UK government's Department for International Development (DfID) and Ministry of Education, Bangladesh, and was later funded by NCTB and the seven education boards of the country. The lessons in these books tend to provide learners with opportunities for practicing different skills through individual, pair and group work. Thus these textbooks have focused on promoting active learning in a learner-centered way, following the CLT approach.

However, most primary teachers still follow the traditional teacher-centered approach in teaching large classes. Even though some of them show interest in applying CLT techniques, they usually do not have easy access to the teachers' guides designed in accordance with the EFTs. In addition, their limited training experience is not often enough to provide them with knowledge required to initiate learner-centered activities (Ara, 2009). As a result, they depend heavily on the textbooks than on any other materials for teaching YLs. Therefore, designing local context appropriate textbooks has become a crucial factor in the primary

sector of Bangladesh in making up for the deficiencies of teachers and in producing more socio-culturally appropriate content than imported ones.

4. 1. The Cultural Content of *English for Today*

EFT books have promoted not only national identities but also tried to emphasize the religious and political priorities of Bangladesh. The visuals of these textbooks introduce figures (flower, poet, bird and animal) related to Bangladesh's national identity and the map of the country in Class 1 (Lesson 30, p. 48), 2 (Lesson 11, p. 21) and 5 (Lesson 11, p. 35; Lesson 13, p. 41- 43). Furthermore, since most Bangladeshis are Muslims, many visuals of bearded male characters representing the Muslim communities have been included in these books. In addition, the whole country has been described in detail in the EFT book of Class 5 (Lesson 20, pp. 61-62) with a visual of rural Bangladesh where a mosque, a church and a temple can be seen in the same frame, depicting the political view that people of all religions are treated equally in Bangladesh. All these elements can raise YLs' knowledge about the national identity of Bangladesh. Dat (2008) has also found this type of cultural representation in locally produced materials of Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand.

Additionally, EFT books have tried to raise YLs' awareness of the target language as well as global communities by introducing characters from neighboring countries (Nepal, India, Japan) as well as native English speaking countries (UK, Australia) in Class 3 (Lesson 12, p. 31) and 4 (Lesson 17, p. 42). Some of these characters are at times similar to them in respect of age or sex but also differ from them in terms of costumes and hobbies. Furthermore, the EFT book of Class 5 (Lesson 26, p. 83) presents an adult English speaking character from Australia who has been learning Bengali, and has Chinese, Italian and French speaking friends. In these ways, these textbooks have attempted to raise YLs' sensitivity regarding the existence of different nationalities and languages in the world. According to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993, pp. 7-8), this kind of exposure helps YLs to realize that people can act differently depending on social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence.

Other characters introduced in the EFTs are familiar to YLs due to their activities. This kind of content has no doubt been included to acquaint YLs with their society (Tomlinson, 2003). Therefore, the EFT of Class 3 (Lesson 30, p. 80) includes a poem about three characters (a cobbler, a tailor and a policeman) from different occupations. In addition, the visuals of farmers have been incorporated in the entire series clearly to emphasize the fact that farming is the main occupation in Bangladesh.

The topics of these books can also be related to YLs' personal lives. For instance, the EFT of Class 4 (Lesson 10, pp. 22-23) describes the daily routine of a urban boy whereas the EFT of Class 5 (Lesson 8, p. 25) depicts the daily activities of a rural boy so that YLs can personalize their learning while communicating in the TL (Pinter, 2006). Moreover, these textbooks have reading passages on describing families which can enable YLs to talk about their own family lives as well.

Additionally, EFT books emphasize YLs' socio-cultural values, beliefs and behaviors. These books present joint (Class 3, Lesson 9, p. 24) as well as nuclear families (Class 1, Lesson 5, p. 5) with no more than three children probably to show that having fewer number of children is one of the keys to having happy families. Moreover, the necessity of raising students' sense of respect for women is stressed by EFT. Therefore, the EFT of Class 3 (Lesson 23, p. 62) focuses on the demanding daily life of a mother who is a home maker, and the EFT of Class 5 includes a reading passage on a woman who works as a shop assistant (Lesson 7, pp. 20-21). In addition, the EFT of Class 4 (Lesson 21, p. 56) describes the hardship of a farmer so that YLs can become more considerate about people who serve the country selflessly by growing crops for all.

Moreover, different issues, such as, how to maintain a healthy life and the meaning of traffic signals have been taken into account in the EFTs of Class 3 (Lesson 10, p. 27 & Lesson 11, p. 30) and 4 (Lesson 5, p.12) so that YLs' general knowledge and sense of responsibility towards the community can be awakened.

The linguistic contrasts between the YLs' L1 and TL have been addressed in these books mainly by including lessons on pronunciation practice from Class 1 to 5. Some of the English consonant, vowel and diphthong phonemes (/p/, /f/, /s/, //, //,/ i/, /æ/, / e/, /e/, //, //) which pose difficulty to EFL learners have been presented in these lessons with their phonetic symbols, and the different contexts in which these phonemes can occur (Class 1, Lesson 17-22, pp. 35-40; Class 3, Lesson 4, p. 6 & Lesson 17, p. 50; Class 4, Lesson 6, p.13, Lesson 11, p. 27, Lesson 28, p. 73; Class 5, Lesson 11, p. 33). Additionally, the EFT of Class 4 presents the phonemes (//,/ i/, /æ/, /e/, /s/, //) and their equivalent Bengali sounds.

The dissimilarities between the YLs' source culture, the international cultures and the target culture are illustrated through the mention of the names of different meals (Class 4, Lesson 3, p. 7) and religious festivals (Class 5, Lesson 25, p. 79-80 & Lesson 26, p. 83) in these textbooks. Revealing these contrasts are

very important for EFL textbooks as Savignon (2002, p. 10) observes 'just knowing something about the target culture will not suffice'. She argues that textbooks should expose students to different linguistic and cultural contrasts. This experience could raise their consciousness about their own culture and help them develop a flexible attitude towards other cultures.

Additionally, all EFT books provide YLs with exposure to different communicative functions of English such as greetings, describing and introducing people, asking and answering questions, giving commands and instructions, making requests, talking about times and days, and buying things from a shop through different conversational cues. All these transactional and interactional functions of English (Brown & Yule, 1983) have been exemplified to show English as a communicational tool important for textbooks promoting the CLT approach (Richards, 2008).

4.2 Limitations of *English for Today*

In spite of connecting the content to the local contexts, EFT books have some limitations. For example, these textbooks have overemphasized the maintenance of the politeness principles of the centre. Thus, the EFT books of Class 3 (Lesson 19, p. 54), 4 (Lesson 12, p. 30; Lesson 16, p. 39; Lesson 24, p. 63) and 5 (Lesson 2, p. 4; Lesson 10, p. 30) have included five lessons on making requests. These lessons have presented various adjacency pairs and asked students to use these models while playing roles and writing dialogue. For example, the EFT of Class 4 uses the following examples:

i) W ould you lend me your English book, please?
O f course. Here it is.

ii) W ould you open the window, please?
Sure. I'll be happy to.

iii) Could y ou pass the sugar, please?
S ure. Here you are.

(*English for Today,* Class 4, Lesson 24, p. 63)

Since children at this stage may learn everything by relating it to their L1, this kind of exposure may appear strange to Bangladeshi learners. Confusion could occur because Bangladeshi YLs do not make requests in such a structured way (e.g. would you….please, could you…please) in their L1. Therefore, this kind of structured representation of any speech act may indicate the inherent supremacy

of English discourse to students (Pennycook, 1995). Maintenance of these principles can therefore be seen as a kind of imposition on YLs.

Moreover from the pragmatic viewpoint, EFT books may not have been able to provide YLs with sufficient exposure to different conversational strategies (e.g. repair, negotiation of meaning, comprehension check) needed for managing successful oral conversations (Richards, 2008). The conversational cues, group works and pair works included in these textbooks may not provide learners with challenging contexts where they will need to take communicative risks and get feedback on their performance (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). Most lessons have introduced the form of embedded teacher initiated cues at first and only ask students to practice applying these cues. Therefore, these textbooks may not be able to fulfill YLs' individualistic needs and may not reflect the realities of language use of local communities (Tomlinson, 2003).

If the interaction patterns presented in EFT books are considered, it can be argued that the conversational cues included in these textbooks may show an unequal distribution of power between a teacher and his or her students. The teacher can be seen as an authoritarian figure possessing the sole power and knowledge of English, and the students may be viewed only as eager submissive learners. For example, there is a lesson on 'Commands, Requests and Instructions' in the EFT of Class 5 (Lesson 2, p. 4-7), where a female teacher brings in a packed box full of utensils, a stove and some necessary ingredients for making a cake in a class and asks students to help her out in preparing it. The model for using English for giving commands and instructions and making requests have been applied through their dialogue in this lesson. However, what the pedagogical purpose behind creating this scenario in the class has not been clarified to the students by the teacher, and very little negotiation of meaning takes place during this example of teacher talk (Cullen 1998). This kind of exposure may shape an uncritical attitude in learners towards the centre because this can make them assume that English language proficiency may have connection with power and control for which the teacher is playing an authoritative role and they may give in passively (Kachru, 1986; Van Dijk, 2001). Therefore, these stereotypical cues may represent the power play of English in the EFL classroom influencing YLs' perception of the TL. YLs may also speculate that the TL is more powerful than their L1 since their Bengali textbooks do not have such representations.

These textbooks also depict the inter-relationship between the target culture and the source culture in a way that may not be comprehensible to YLs who have very limited knowledge about the outside world (Pinter, 2006). For example, the EFT of Class 1 (Lesson 23, p. 41) has a rhyme that talks about a pussy cat which has visited London, and has met the queen. Since the very little YLs of Class 1 may not have any idea about the underlying relation between London and the queen, this kind of inter-cultural connection may seem quite vague to them. Besides, the images of the queen (symbolizing power) and London (the centre) can be taken as a representation of the resistance of imperialistic element as well. In addition, the rhymes on a teddy bear who goes to a government primary school in a rural setting wearing polished shoes (Class 1, Lesson 8, p. 8), and the visuals used in the rhyme 'Humpty Dumpty' (Class 2, Lesson 31, p. 57) to show the king's men and horses may also have cultural implications pertaining to the centre which will be difficult for YLs to understand.

In addition, the local community's life style may have not been presented in a satisfactory way in these textbooks (Banu, 2009). For instance, if YLs compare the simple items of a poor ill-clad village farmer's daily meals with that of a urban middle class family's lavish daily meals, snacks and dessert depicted in the EFT of Class 4 (Lesson 3, p. 7 & Lesson 21, pp. 56-57), they will get the impression that there is extreme economic stratification in society which impacts on people's daily life styles. Similarly, there is another lesson in the EFT book of Class 4 describing a picnic where an urban family is 'having fun' amidst nature by having different kinds of local dishes (Lesson 7. P. 16) whereas there is another lesson in the same book where a poor farmer says that he does not have enough food at home but consoles himself by saying that 'May be I will have better luck next year' (Lesson 21, p. 56). On the one hand, this type of representation of people's daily life may enrich YLs' knowledge about different communities. On the other hand, this type of exposure may seem quite insensitive to YLs who belong to low income families. In addition, some of the visuals which have been used for describing a urban boy's bedroom (Class 3, Lesson 28, p. 73) and daily routine (Class 4, Lesson 10, pp. 22-23) showing different aspects of his well-furnished house may induce rural students' towards materialistic gains in life.

Moreover, the EFT books presents Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, as a place where children have easy access to the zoo (Class 5, Lesson 36, p. 118), flyovers (Class 5, Lesson 27, p. 85), multi-storied buildings (Class 5, Lesson 15, p. 47), and children's park and museum (Class 4, Lesson 27, p. 70). These places

can draw YLs' attention quite easily. In contrast, village life is shown as a place where no such modern facilities are available though the children can enjoy the company of nature there by flying kites (Class 3, Lesson 24, p. 65), chasing frogs (Class 1, Lesson 32, p. 50), and playing on the swing (Class 4, Lesson 31, p.77). This comparative representation may provide an image of Bangladesh where villagers are deprived of the modern amenities of life. This exposure can raise YLs appreciation for cosmopolitan culture and make them detest their local identities. Such attraction may gradually turn into an obsession with global communities when they grow up. Consequently, such lessons may lead to an inferiority complex as well as identity crisis among YLs who live in rural areas (Banu, 2009).

Though these textbooks were based on the CLT approach which is supposed to give utmost importance to the negotiation and communication of meaning (Richards, 2008), they tend to focus more on the forms than on the content. As the education system of Bangladesh is examination-oriented and students' reading and writing skills are what is assessed, these books may be prioritizing preparing YLs for examinations as the target need (necessity) and performing well in the examination as the learners' learning needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) by concentrating primarily on fulfilling these needs. This viewpoint may have led these books to include explicitly stated rule-based discussion on phonological and syntactical aspects of English. Therefore, it can be said that these textbooks have given a form-focused exposure to CLT in order to accommodate the needs of local communities including teachers who also need this kind of support from teaching materials.

Additionally, these textbooks may have overemphasized centre-oriented standard pronunciation. Though maintaining the conventions of the centre is not important any more in order to use English as a communicative tool in this global era (Alptekin, 2002), these books include eight lessons on the rules and practice of using stress (Class 4, Lesson 14, p. 36; Class 5, Lesson 32, p. 108), intonation (Class 4, Lesson 22, p. 59), and punctuation marks (Lesson 18, p. 44; Lesson 25, p. 65; Lesson 26, p. 67 in Class 4 & Lesson 17, p. 53; Lesson 22, p. 72 in Class 5). Inclusion of these topics may indicate to YLs that they may need to conform to foreign norms while using English. Therefore, this overemphasis on maintaining these norms can be seen as the target culture's intrusion at the primary level. Thus, YLs may become intimidated as they may think that the use of the TL will not allow any kind of modifications according to contextual variations and needs of local communities. This may lead to learners' forming negative attitude towards TL, and they may find it difficult to use the TL outside

the classroom. In addition, the topics related to practicing stress and intonation could even prove to be difficult to teachers who have poor English language skills.

Finally, though 1.5 percent of the total population of Bangladesh belong to indigenous communities (UNHCR, 2008) these textbooks have not represented their lives at all. As a result, many YLs will not be able to attain any insight into these communities from these books.

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the discussion in the previous section it can be concluded that though the EFT books might have been successful to some extent in representing the local culture, values and beliefs, these books still have some limitations regarding the manner in which exposure has been provided to the TL and to local culture. Firstly, the norm-oriented exposure to the TL in these books may make YLs think that the TL cannot be used fully to accommodate to local contexts, and whoever will have the knowledge of how to communicate in English fluently, will possess the power to dominate over the less knowledgeable others. Secondly, the social discriminations which have been portrayed in these books about local communities may raise YLs' aspiration for power and materialistic gains. Thus YLs' social and cognitive development might be affected, and they might find it difficult to understand that the TL could be used only as a tool for communication. Therefore, the following initiatives can be taken for making these textbooks more culturally appropriate to the primary level context of Bangladesh.

Firstly, the content of these textbooks can be simplified by reducing explicitly stated rule and by including conversational cues and activities which will present YLs with situations, posing the challenge of negotiation of meaning and taking risks. Thus, YLs will be able to learn from what they experience in class and how they construct meaning by noticing salient features of the TL input (Cameron, 2001; Tomlinson, 2008). This exposure will help YLs' to accept English mainly as a tool for communication. Thus, they will realize that FL learning is not all about learning rules and conforming to standards, and there may be no hidden agenda in acquiring the TL.

Secondly, these textbooks can try to exemplify the inter-cultural relationship between Bengali and English in a more culture-sensitive and age-sensitive way so that it may appear meaningful to YLs who may have just started forming attitudes towards the target as well as other cultures (Ellis, 1985).

Thirdly, since the teaching materials may play an important role in cultural transmission between the education system and the rest of society (Cunningsworth, 1995) the content of the textbooks can focus on maintaining an appropriate balance among local rural, urban and indigenous communities' life styles and cultural variations.

Fourthly, primary teachers can concentrate on developing their language skills so that they can become more confident in teaching English and make better use of these textbooks. The government and donor-funded projects can help them in this respect by providing them with practical guidelines and local context and culture-oriented effective training.

Finally, it can be said that though the locally produced primary textbooks of Bangladesh may have been able to restrict cultural imperialism to some extent, the NCTB still needs to focus more intensely on how the local culture as well as the target culture can be represented in a more sensitive and balanced way.

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Investing in the Culture Industry to Enhance Economic Growth in West Africa

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Abstract

This essay examines the role culture can play in effectively advancing economic growth in West Africa through the agency of the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) and the different national governments. Although a much contested terminology, culture remains an untapped area for economic growth partly due to the absence of commitment on the part of the leadership of West African countries and partly to their ignorance of the central role culture plays in innovation, technology, development and growth of regional and national economies. However if well harnessed, the rich cultural repertoire of this region of Africa can provide an impetus for economic expansion, employment and stability more than ever before in a region known more for its numerous conflicts in the past twenty years or so than for its economic growth.

1. Introduction

Available records and recent developments in the economic sector across the world practically attest to the fact that some countries such as China and Japan in Asia have attained economic and technological development by going back to the roots of their indigenous knowledge systems (Nigeria, www.nigeriannews24.com/.../use-culture-to-create-economic-development). Such indigenous knowledge systems are rooted in the culture of the Japanese and Chinese and not foreign cultures. In spite of this revelation, modern neoclassical economics tends to downplay the importance of culture in the development of different countries and regions of the world. Some economists assume that human beings are rational utility-maximising individuals, and such maximising behaviour is largely invariant across different human societies but where the rational ability is higher, development follows. Besides, the standard economic growth model pioneered by

Robert Solow examines the inputs of capital and labour and the more recent so-called 'endogenous' growth models and shows how they lay emphasis on the role of technology in economic growth. From this perspective, culture constitutes a kind of residual factor that is important and that people can appeal to when every other explanations which are rooted essentially in economic terms fail (Culture and Economic Development: 3130-3131).

The way a people behave or react to work can be understood from their culture of work. For instance, in some parts of Latin America, there is a feeling of disdain for labour and commerce, sumptuous patterns of consumption, individualistic behaviour and anti-progress attitudes (Leon, http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/Ias/studies/pdfs/leon.pdf). Such a culture of hatred for work in favour of sumptuous consumption produces an economy that is not only weak but also is anti-progressive. Investors in such economies need to understand the people's culture of work so that they can either refuse to invest there or take measures that can motivate them towards liking work. If they are not able to change this retrogressive culture, they will quit rather than invest in a non- progressive society. Any investor who has an inadequate knowledge of a people's attitude towards work which is often rooted in their culture of upbringing will compromise growth and expansion in business.

The Liberian National Campaign for Cultural Identity (NACCI) was quick to observe that the absence of cultural ties in Liberia resulted in the division of the people as they were not able to agree on issues of national interest. This had hindered national growth and development in Liberia before the NACCI recognised this weakness and took steps to address it so that Liberians could come together to reconstruct their society (Liberia 2010). Similarly, the National Commission on Culture (NCC) of Ghana in 2008 used different channels to emphasise the need for corporate organisations in Ghana and Africa to incorporate cultural values into corporate management activities for better results. According to the NCC this would assess the degree to which cultural values impinge on corporate performance for the development of Ghana in particular and Africa in general (Osabutey 2008). In effect, the NCC recognised the importance of culture in increasing the productivity of corporate organisations not only in Ghana but also other parts of the African continent.

During a World Conference on Cultural Policies held in Mexico in 1982 The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) upheld the importance of culture in economic growth. The organisation also discussed the importance of human resources development, and

the spiritual and cultural needs of people as far as material needs are concerned. The UN specialised organ particularly observed that a stimulation of creativity in the arts was a way towards the attainment of the material needs of a people who have a collective destiny (Karanko 1992: 58-9). The Japanese had many decades earlier observed that human and material development was very useful in the harmonious coexistence of man and nature or his environment. This shows that the material development of society is possible through the establishment of an effective mechanism that brings together a person and his/her environment which can be better appreciated through a sound knowledge of a people's culture. It is on this philosophy that the Japanese rely to initiate and sustain economic growth which has made the country to be noted for its economic growth and expansion.

Culture is an important component of different peoples of the world and shapes their outlook on life. Although the term culture itself is problematic, we shall in this essay discuss culture as the totality of the lived experiences of a people which include their philosophy or rationale of the organisation of society, production and outlook on life. In fact, culture should be considered as the sum total of all the experiences of the life of different people and ethnic groups. Different people and scholars of culture have discussed the challenges of culture and the richness in values associated with culture and their relationship with development and growth for some countries when appropriately used. In some cases, culture has been used to create serious conflict between people and groups and for this reason the growth of some societies has been compromised and not promoted.

West Africa is one of those regions of Africa with diverse cultures between and within countries. The different people of this region speak hundreds of different languages, practice various religions, and have many histories and traditions but there is a history of interrelationships between these people, their religions and cultures from one place to another.(http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m17/activity3.php). The more different human beings of different cultures and religions come into contact with one another, the more the possibility of an exchange of values of some kind. All these put together may always serve the needs of the people of West Africa better. The long term result of such contact may eventually stimulate economic growth in the region.

Nigeria, for example, is socially and culturally one of the most diversified African countries. Its cultural policy aims at understanding the life of the people, their cultural values, needs and expectations. It also focuses on building up a national cultural identity and parallel affirmation of cultural identities of different

ethnic groups. In addition, Nigeria's cultural policy is intended to develop the cultural infrastructure and to introduce new technologies in cultural activities as well as establish links between culture and education and between education and the different cultural industries, particularly the mass media (Cultural Policy in Nigeria).

This cultural diversity notwithstanding, since 1975, the countries of West Africa came together to found the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with the aim of promoting economic integration and political cooperation. Since then the fifteen member states have tried to make integration a reality through greater mobility, communication, trade and growth for all member states. In spite of this laudable effort, the region has been known and projected to be politically and militarily unstable in the African continent. Such political and military instability have been frustrating to the mission of ECOWAS in mobilising human and natural resources to ensure stability and growth for all member countries of this organisation. These challenges notwithstanding, ECOWAS has since its establishment in 1975 made more positive strides in some areas of economic and cultural integration than many other regional organisations in Africa such as the Central African Customs and Economic Union (CEMAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

2. Defining Culture

The definition of culture has remained problematic in modern scholarship because of the scope of the issues involved (Gilbert and Reynolds 2004: 306). This problem notwithstanding we intend to define culture in this study to include almost everything about human existence and experience over time. Within the behavioural sciences, culture is defined in terms of a full range of learned human behaviour patterns (http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm). The English scholar Edward B. Taylor in the 19th century defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [woman] as a member of society" (http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm). Taylor's definition of culture takes into consideration the experiences and things humankind has produced over time in the process of growing up. Again, the definition emphasises key characteristics of culture such as a people's customs, their works of art, system of organising society that is rational and functional, the values they uphold in life and the reasons for this but above all the way of one's behaviour in society. One common thing to note about the two definitions is that they are clear on the nature of organising society as a key

element of cultural identity and development of any given group of people. The way societies are organised and function is very likely to influence their activities. Such activities include but are not limited to the attitude to work, leisure and the resulting consequences.

Culture is also defined as the collective manifestations of who and what people are, including religious beliefs, political systems, customs, values, intellectual acumen and creative endeavours (http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm). In this definition of culture, the intellectual acumen and creative endeavours of people are considered crucial to an understanding of their culture and associated values. Any culture that lacks ingredients such as creativity and innovation tapped from the intellectual acumen of the people concerned is a culture that is most likely to be vulnerable to decline and eventual extinction. The creative ingenuity of a people has the potential to enrich their culture and by extension its ability to enhance individual growth as well as that of the economy and other associated economies. In fact, experience has shown that a people's culture builds up an individual's creative potentials. Such potentials are crucial to stimulate the production of goods and services. Production can either be sustained or increased depending on a number of factors which include the ability of the people to be innovative and skilful in managing people and resources efficiently. Such values are found in cultures which should be identified and utilised in West Africa to enhance growth and integration.

There are other definitions of culture which take into consideration "every aspect of life: know-how, technical knowledge, customs of food and dress, religion, mentality, values, language, symbols, socio-political and economic behaviour, indigenous methods of taking decisions and exercising power, methods of production and economic relations and so on" (Karanko, 59). Such a comprehensive definition of culture points to one main conclusion: every human endeavour be it economic, social or political is influenced by culture in one way or the other. This is because culture has a visible and invisible influence in almost every human endeavour. It is dynamic and incorporates positive aspects of life because culture in itself is dynamic and contributes to progress of individuals or communities.

The word "culture" has also been defined to include political systems, religious beliefs, history, customs, arts, sciences and education. In this sense, culture defines the collective manifestations of who really people are, what they want to be and also include issues like intellectual acumen and creative endeavours (http://cultural economics.blogspot.com/2009/09/what-is-cultural-

economics.html,) which have been discussed earlier. Frey (2009: 20) defines culture simply as an attitude or way of behaving. Meanwhile in cultural anthropology, culture is associated with a common or shared values and practice by any group. It has also been somewhat narrowly defined as "certain activities … and the products … which have to do with the intellectual moral and artistic aspects of human life such as works of the visual, performing and literary arts (Throsby 2001:4)."

In spite of the diversity and multiple meanings of culture, there are certain common features which can be identified with what culture is either within ethnic groups or a combination of ethnic groups usually within a country like those of West Africa. These varied definitions either explicitly or implicitly recognise that while no single thing explains the full meaning of culture, a combination of them can do so. These definitions recognise that culture is about the learned behaviour of a people. This is usually based on the knowledge system of the people, their creative abilities, customs and political and economic relations. From this premise, one can argue and not wrongly that economic growth goes hand in glove with the culture of the environment in which this growth takes place. There is need to understand the enabling cultural environment and the appropriate responses of a people of a given environment to probably succeed in a business venture which has the intention of growing and expanding in an economy or different economies. Failure to understand or negligence to exploit the creative ability of a people for the good of the larger society can only lead to more failures.

One must therefore not ignore the cultural environment that will enable him/her to carry out the right prospection and investment which will lead to growth, expansion and integration. Economic growth and creativity are 'birds of the same feathers.' The absence of creativity and innovation and opportunities may work against the determination of a people to make progress a motto. Besides, the knowledge system of a people is the very basis on which society need to lean to develop an autonomous economic system relevant to the immediate socio-cultural and economic needs of that people. Many a times, the value-based system of a people is completely shelved aside for foreign values that help to confuse, contradict and negatively affect economic growth. The multiplier effect leads to insufficiency, and instability affecting people across different socio-political and natural boundaries. The long term ripple effects are telling on families and countries. Karanko (1992: 58) observes that culture is an inescapable reliable determinant of a people's spiritual, material, intellectual, civil and

emotional features and can impact on their very direction of development and civilisation. He also adds that a society without cultural coherence is easily penetrated and disrupted. Such penetration and disruption could be of economic value but detrimental to real growth and integration. Many West African countries are suffocating economically because their economies were easily penetrated, disrupted and destroyed. Culture adverse economic policies have the potential to destroy or frustrate the economic advancement of a people and region.

3. ECOWAS and the Promotion of Culture

ECOWAS recognises the importance of culture for the unity of West African peoples and countries. In Articles 29 and 31 paragraphs 1 and 2 of Protocol A/SPI/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, it is stated that this regional organisation recognises that culture is essential for peace, stability and development of each member state. The Protocol recognises that each of the culture of every group of the Member State shall be respected and developed and that the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS shall take necessary measures to organise periodic inter-state cultural events such as festivals of arts and culture, symposia and various cultural events on literature, music, arts and sports.

Through events such as the ECOWAS cup in football, and Miss ECOWAS beauty pageant, ECOWAS countries organise a broad array of cultural and sports activities (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_Community_of _West_African). Besides, within the Department of Education, Culture, Science and Technology of ECOWAS culture is valorised by this regional body. The cultural programme of this department of education, culture, science and technology which was approved by the Council of Ministers of ECOWAS is designed to strengthen and develop exchanges, to promote creativity, cultural tourism development, and free movement of cultural products as well as to enable African artists to have greater access to the international art market. It is also designed to ensure that culture is taken into account in the regional integration process for development and to foster a sense of belonging. The broader aim of the cultural programme is to support and encourage creativity within the ECOWAS space, promote cultural exchange and strengthen cooperation with film makers (www.comm.ecowas.int/dept/stand.php?id=e_e1_brief&lang=en; A/DEC. 4/11/96 ECOWAS Cultural Programme). Still within the context of promoting culture, the Social and Cultural Affairs Commission of ECOWAS was established

as one of the six specialised commissions. The other specialised commissions include Trade, Customs, Immigration, Monetary and Payments, Industry, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Transport, Communications and Energy, Administration and Finance and Information (Economic Community of West African States, www.referenceforbusiness).

4. Discussion: Shortcomings of ECOWAS Culture Policy

A close look at the culture policy of ECOWAS and its implementation shows that it is peripheral to the core mission of this regional body. From birth ECOWAS focused on the promotion of trade, cooperation and self-reliance in West Africa. Even after the revision of the ECOWAS Treaty in 1993, this regional body for West Africa re-emphasised the need to spur economic integration and political cooperation and culture was simply shelved from the core concern of ECOWAS (www.referenceforbusiness.com/encyclopedia/Dev-Eco/Economic-Community-of-West-African-States-ECOWAS.html). The recognition but near neglect of culture as an important element in the cultural integration of a multicultural ECOWAS has contributed to an unstable economic environment for all ECOWAS member countries, although some of them are more stable than others.

Besides, it is not enough for participants to recognise and respect the culture of every group of the member states of ECOWAS if they fail to tap from these cultural specificities to engineer growth in cultural and related industries in West Africa. Some of the greatest cultural challenges are from within different member countries of ECOWAS like Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire and not necessarily between countries and foreign-imposed linguistic differences of the English, French and Portuguese. The inability of the governments to handle this diversity in cultures for good has made it difficult for umbrella organisations like ECOWAS to use culture as a tool to promote economic growth in West Africa.

Cultural activities of ECOWAS such as the organisation of the beauty pageant and the football cup have very little potential for meaningful economic growth that can lead to the employment of thousands of people who are jobless. These two activities indeed are not good indicators of growth for the region. The one thing that these might have done is foster the ability of the people to integrate easily but such integration is not synonymous with growth which has the potential to keep citizens of the region from moving because they will have the opportunity right at home or within the region to nurture their creative potentials. Even cultural exchanges between member states which have been

encouraged by ECOWAS seem not to have produced the desired results several decades after the formation of the organisation. These have not been targeted and so no huge investment has been made in this sector with the conscious aim of boosting the cultural industry so that it could promote employment and growth in industry in West Africa.

Although cultural tourism, free movement of cultural products and creativity have been recognised and encouraged by ECOWAS in the cultural programmes of the Department of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, except in a few countries, much of this has remained wishful thinking. Cultural economics remains an untapped reservoir for economic growth in West Africa. This was publicly noted by experts in Dakar Senegal in 2006. During the Dakar conference these experts brainstormed on the challenges of cultural industries. While they recognised that music, cinema, audiovisual and book sectors were experiencing a certain dynamism, they were confronted with obstacles and difficulties such as piracy, customs and fiscal system problems and the legal environment which was not too favourable for the development of cultural industries as well as high production costs (www.diversite-culturelle.aq.ca/index.php?id=112&L=1&tx).

5. Towards a Culture that Enhances Economic Growth

Culture has been recognised as an important vector of development by ECOWAS and some West African countries but has not been exploited sufficiently for the benefit of member states to make this a reality. While a few countries like Nigeria and Ghana have recognised its importance and tapped from it to develop a cultural industry that has promoted economic growth through various forms of investment and advertisement, most of them have not done so because so many politicians generally regard culture only in the divisive and negative sense. Cultural values and the cultural industry must indeed be consciously pursued by West African countries because culture plays a role in how the production of goods and services are organised, how value is placed on labour and opportunity, how purchase and investment decisions are made and how the resources of the earth are utilised. This is because attitudes about education, individual rights, accumulation of wealth and the importance of private property drive the adoption of economic systems and political institutions (Cultural Economics. http://culturaleconomics.blogspot.com/2009/09/what-is-cultural-economics.html).

Since culture shapes the body and influences the skills people acquire (Vander Niet 2010: xi), there is need to recognise its importance vis-à-vis the productive industry if growth is to be maximised in West Africa. Besides, arts and culture-related industries also known as the creative industries provide direct economic benefits to states and communities. They create jobs, attract investments, generate tax revenues and stimulate local economies through tourism and consumer purchases (http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0901ARTSANDECONOMY.PDF). While a few countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Nigeria have exploited this possibility to some extent, most of them have not realised that the creative or cultural industries are a dependable source of economic growth through culture tourism and other forms of wealth creation and employment. Through arts and culture there is a lot that can be done to complement community development and enrich local amenities that will attract young professionals to an area that will provide them with the opportunity to contribute to growth in a visible and practical way. The cultivator of the arts and culture can create new jobs and also foster an environment and develop amenities that could attract talented young workers. It has been proven in countries like Kenya that tourism built around the arts and culture can contribute to state and local economic growth by providing a diversified and sustainable means for creating jobs and attracting revenue thereby and urging investors to come in and invest their money.

While an effort is being made to promote music, visual arts, literature and film through theoretical and practical ways in some countries of the West African sub-region, a lot still has to be done to popularise these activities in such a way that people will see in them a way of propelling ECOWAS member countries positively forward. These activities play a crucial role in the state's economy and the tourist industry as has been highlighted in the preceding paragraphs. These creative activities which are culture bound have been increasingly contributing to the contemporary workforce, making substantial contributions to industries' products and services, and infusing culture into community development (http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0901ARTSANDECONOMY.PDF). The craft industry in particular encourages individual creativity, skill, and talent and has the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. Any attempts made to bring about economic growth without reflection on how the communities can be brought into the mainstream ends up not achieving the required results. The cultural sector has shown clearly that through it a holistic type of development from the base to the top can be guaranteed for many more years to come.

Since it is culture that determines people's material features and the very direction and type of development and civilisation (Karanko 1992: 58) it will be important to recognise this and invest in and understand the cultural values of the people in order to engage in those economic activities that can be supported by the people. In this way there will be a certainty of economic growth because this economic activity has been established on the basis of cultural values that are development-oriented. Besides, if West African countries want to make long range economic forecasts, they must understand how culture and cultural change will shape future economic choice (Cultural Economics, http://culturaleconomics. blogspot.com/2009/09/what-is-cultural-economics.html). This is necessary because cultural conflict is a barrier to exploration and production.

Other West African countries may borrow from the experience of Nigeria because her advertising strategies both use western and traditional African cultural values in their pursuit of wealth and economic growth. This, however, has its own problems in the sense that the western values are not fully appreciated by everyone although some people have no problem with it. It would perhaps be more meaningful and more productive if traditional values are put in place in the advertising industry as many different people will be attracted by it and such a policy can therefore ultimately lead to greater growth and diversification of the economy.

The way to economic growth in West Africa is to avoid the adoption of technology without a profound understanding of its cultural implications. Where it is possible, technology should be indigenous and consistent with cultural norms. Scientists and innovators must fully understand culture, society, politics and history, and develop a holistic way of looking at, assessing, evaluating and implementing new technology (Culture, Technology Adoption, and Economic Development husky1,stmarys.ca/~hmillar/techcul.htm). Linked to the need to understand the cultural environment, western-oriented medical practitioners in West Africa need to learn and know the taste of their clients' community, borrow certain aspects of such culture (Ogungbile 1997: 109) if they must work well and succeed in initiating economic growth through a dependable social policy.

There is also the problem of the culture of impunity and non-preservation of the historic sites among the people of West Africa like their counterparts elsewhere in the continent. This is one of the areas of culture that if fully tackled can lead to growth in output and employment for the citizens of West African countries. Experience has shown that the preservation of the historic built

environment can be a critical vehicle to promote rather than hamper economic growth (Rypkema 1999). West African culture ministries and related services should pursue a policy of preserving this historic built environment vigorously as an important source of economic growth and take advantage of the employment opportunities this will provide. Agbontaen-Eghafona and Okpoko (2004) have intimated that using traditional preservative methods in museums are good because of their availability, effectiveness and reliability. Considering the importance of museums in the history of each community and the lessons that can be learnt for future development, there is need to invest in this sector more meaningfully to encourage the development of the raw material sector and the employment opportunities this would engender.

Culture has been identified as an important sector for economic growth and the cultural sector is an important employment generator. Some countries like Brazil and Argentina in South America have used this sector to provide employment and generate growth. In Brazil, the cultural sector contributes 6.7 % and in Argentina 4.1 % to Gross National Product. For the United States of America the percentage is 7.75 % (Culture as an Engine for Economic Growth, Employment and Development, http://www.oas.org/udse/english/documentos/inf1.doc). These are great percentages that have led to economic growth. The simple fact is that the culture industry has specifically contributed to the economy, employment and material welfare of a people. One of the few problems that need to be addressed is piracy of cultural products which have not benefitted the producers of this product as much. This is the case with the Nigerian film and book industries where books and films have been pirated with impunity by people who are always ready to reap where they did not plant.

Countries of West Africa should also take advantage of the developing "evening economy" where shops remain opened for long hours and other forms of mixes of economic activities such as cafes, restaurants, arts venues and gyms. These evening activities are part of the culture of many people of West African countries and they help to diversify the town centre economy and provide many other opportunities for their people. Evidence shows that the evening economy is particularly attractive to new economy workers and accommodates the daily lives of busy adults and families (Cultural Economic Development: A Strategy to Leverage Michigan's Creative Talent and Cultural Assets to Spur Economic Growth and Build Community Prosperity, 2005: 10-11).

6. Conclusion

This paper has tried to show how as complex and problematic as the definition of culture might be, it is an important source of economic growth in West Africa which unfortunately has not been fully exploited in spite of the enormous human resources available. While a few developing countries have tried to make capital out of culture like Brazila, Argentina, the US and Japan knew and made use of cultural activities to enhance the culture industry for greater output Unfortunately, many countries fear even the mention of the word "culture" and are especially wang of kleptocratic leaders who are always pretending to give the impression that they have created a sense of national unity which remains largely theoretical than practical.

The essay recognised the institutionalisation of culture-related activities by ECOWAS but argued that together with national governments, ECOWAS needs to be more vigorous and proactive in its culture and culture-related activities so that these might boost economic growth. This is because at present, these have not succeeded to move the economies of West African countries towards growth and integration. It is only by tapping from culture and fostering those intrinsic values of creativity, innovation, sense of duty and organisation that West African countries will be able to see that investment in culture after all is an important thing to do and assure a steady economic growth. Culture has been so relegated to the background of national planning that foreign intrusion has only helped to disrupt and destroy West African economies. Let West Africa and other regions of Africa learn from Asian countries, notably China, India, South Korea and Indonesia, most of whom by 1961 were either below or at the same level of development and growth with African countries but have today taken a lead as emerging nations with potentials for expansion and security. Their culture has had an important role in this significant breakthrough in the economy and culture which are now being exported to other parts of the world, especially West Africa and other regions of Africa.

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