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MLADIH ANGLISTA, KROATISTA I TALIJANISTA**

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## UVODNIK / EDITORIAL

*Poštovane čitateljice i čitatelji,*

u ovogodišnjemu *Zborniku radova Međunarodnoga simpozija mladih anglista, kroatista i talijanista* predstavljamo radove s četvrtoga izdanja istoimenoga simpozija s temom *Hoće li centar izdržati? (Will the Centre Hold?)* koji se održao u Splitu od 10. do 12. listopada 2019. godine u organizaciji Udruge filoloških smjerova Filozofskoga fakulteta u Splitu *iTHEom*. Donosimo šest izvornih znanstvenih radova i dva pregledna rada studenata sa Sveučilišta u Coimabri (Portugal), Sveučilišta u Leedsu (Ujedinjeno Kraljevstvo) te Sveučilišta u Zadru i Zagrebu (Hrvatska) iz područja filmologije, jezikoslovlja, književnosti i medija s interdisciplinarnim pristupom iz područja filozofije, političkih znanosti i sociologije. Kao i u prethodnim izdanjima cilj nam je bio baviti se aktualnim, gorućim problemima poput analiziranja prikaza pomaka u odnosima moći u političkim strukturama, položaju rodni, seksualnih, rasnih, etničkih i drugih manjina te istraživanje lomljenja opresivnih struktura i instancija otpora koji mladim istraživačima mogu poslužiti kao potka za razmatranje suvremenih pitanja i pronalaženje potencijalnih rješenja za njih.

Želimo zahvaliti autorima što su poslali svoje radove te iskazali strpljenje tijekom čitavoga procesa objave zbog izazovnih i neizvjesnih okolnosti koje su nas snašle tijekom ove godine. Posebno zahvaljujemo recenzentima radova, uvaženim znanstvenicima i stručnjacima sa Sveučilišta u Osijeku, Rijeci, Splitu i Zagrebu, koji su svojim doprinosom omogućili da ovaj zbornik bude znanstveno primjereniji i relevantniji, a oni redom jesu dr. sc. Lucijana Armanda Šundov, doc., dr. sc. Gorana Bandalović, izv. prof., dr. sc. Marita Brčić Kuljiš, izv. prof., dr. sc. Ivan Cerovac, poslijedoktorand, dr. sc. Katarina Dalmatin, doc., dr. sc. Gordana Galić Kakkonen, izv. prof., dr. sc. Krunoslav Lučić, doc., dr. sc. Nebojša Lujanović, doc., Anita Lunić, asist., dr. sc. Nikica Mihaljević, izv. prof., dr. sc. Ivana Petrović, doc., dr. sc. Iva Polak, izv. prof., dr. sc. Antonija Primorac, izv. prof., dr. sc. Simon Ryle, izv. prof., dr. sc. Mirjana Semren, doc., dr. sc. Nikola Sunara, asist. i dr. sc. Brian Daniel Willems, izv. prof. Na suradnji zahvaljujemo i lektorima za engleski jezik Ivani Bošnjak, Toniju Čepeti te Ivici Ježdudu.

Izdavanjem ovoga zbornika radova Filozofski fakultet u Splitu zajedno sa svojim bivšim i sadašnjim studentima potiče studentski aktivizam i pruža mogućnost studentima za osobni i profesionalni razvoj s ciljem stvaranja zajedničke platforme za razvoj obrazovne i znanstveno-istraživačke djelatnosti, promicanje humanističkih znanosti te interdisciplinarnoga pristupa uz jačanje međusveučilišne, međuinstitucionalne te međunarodne suradnje.

*Petra Božanić i Ana Ćurčić*





## ČLANCI / PAPERS

*Izvorni znanstveni rad*  
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### **WORLD DYNAMICS: HOW TO UNDERSTAND POWER TO PROMOTE SOCIAL BALANCE**

#### Summary

*The media, being potentially biased though wide lens of analysis, can be a conduit and represent the implicit struggles that underlie imbalances or misuses of power in a myriad of spheres of context. Power can often be present at the core of traditional structures that promote immediate and unfair imbalances - such as the structures beneath the gender gap which affect women, globally, on social, political, intellectual, cultural and economic levels. Bearing these lines of thought, this article will focus on suggesting ways of thinking 'Power' as a factor which carries boundless potential to act on human nature and, eventually, corrupt it, taking as the main reference point, bibliography-wise, Philip Zimbardo's *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil* (2008). Some mediatic cases will be used to further illustrate the arguments presented. The article aims to promote a route for consciousness and education about power in order to prevent abuses, encourage proactive behaviours to counteract existing power mishandlings and endorse one's responsibility whilst carrying and manifesting power in any form.*

**Keywords:** Education, Global Citizenship, Media, Power, Society

### **POWER AS AN ELEMENT OF CORRUPTION: INSIGHTS**

Culturally, it could be argued that it is not uncommon to project the concept of evilness or any kind of wrongdoings as a direct contrast of a profile of good, immaculate behavioural structures, incapable of committing acts that would violate morality as it is generally perceived.

In *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil*, Philip Zimbardo (2008) explores human nature as a structure which is vulnerable to moral corruption, establishing the assumption that both 'good' and 'evil' are intrinsic and transversal to the human condition itself. His argumentative lines will establish the main matrix of the article.

Zimbardo ascertains his perspective on 'evil' as being:

(...) a simple, psychologically based one: Evil consists in intentionally behaving in ways that harm, abuse, demean, dehumanize, or destroy innocent others—or using one's authority and systemic power to encourage or permit others to do so on your behalf. In short, it is "knowing better but doing worse (2008: 5).

Such position would, by contrast, also imply the definition of 'good' to be the absence of immoral dynamics in the spectrum of social interactions as per explicated by the author. He also highlights that "most people, most of the time, are moral creatures. But (...) morality is like a gearshift that at times gets pushed into neutral" (idem: 17), which, in a way, could be perceived as a statement that self-determines the importance of understanding and tackling the factors that might be decisive for the crossing between states of "moral predispositions".

In the course of exploring "processes of transformation at work when good or ordinary people do bad or evil things" (idem: 5), Zimbardo succeeds to identify 'power' as the element that triggers processes of moral corruption: an element which can, for instance, be present in situational conditions that "are created and shaped by higher-order factors—systems of power" (idem: 9–10). The primary concern would be that someone, who is a holder of power, might mismanage it and affect one physically and/or psychologically, which should, subsequently, trigger the previously referred process of moral corruption.

The way Zimbardo frames his idea is very much compatible with the notion of "banality of evil" as per projected in the scope of the analysis of the trial of German Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann by Hannah Arendt (1964) who perceived Eichmann as a very mundane and average person, despite the atrocities he was being judged for. In a sentence that illustrates the dichotomy existent in the extreme of a dynamics of power where there is one who subjugates and another who one is subjugated, but where the agent who detains the power is a person corrupted by the acritical adoption of a role, Hannah Arendt highlights: "what for Eichmann was a job, with its daily routine, its ups and downs, was for the Jews quite literally the end of the world" (1964: 73).

This core set of notions, which constitutes the first and main block of the argument, will, further in the article, link with an illustrative section which should deepen the understanding of possible implications of power mishandling and, finally, conclude the argumentative line by offering a broad approach to think education as the key to counter-act or prevent profiles corrupted by power and their effect on individuals or society in general.



## **THINKING EVIL IN SOCIETY: HOW IT EMERGES IN MULTIPLE DEGREES OF GRAVITY AND SCENARIOS**

Philip Zimbardo's (2008) reflections on power came on the sequence of the well-known Stanford Prison Experiment, which is regarded as "one of the most famous studies in psychology" (Griggs, 2014: 195). Such experiment, which led Philip Zimbardo to mount a prison-like structure in the premises of his university campus, "began as a simple demonstration of the effects that a composite of situational variables has on the behavior of individuals role-playing prisoners and guards in a simulated prison environment" (2008: 195). Zimbardo emphasises that the goal was "not testing specific hypotheses but rather assessing the extent to which the external features of an institutional setting could override the internal dispositions of the actors in that environment. Good dispositions were pitted against a bad situation" (ibidem).

For his experiment, Zimbardo chose "a sample of individuals who did not deviate from the normal range of the general educated population on any of the dimensions we had premeasured. Those randomly assigned to the role of 'prisoner' were interchangeable with those in the 'guard' role" (idem: 196). He also mentioned there was no criminal record associated to the students who would randomly fill both the designated roles of "guards" and "prisoners", as there was not, as well, any history of intellectual or social disadvantage, nor emotional and/or physical disabilities (ibidem).

Prior to his studies on the corruptive effect of power, Zimbardo (2008), during the Stanford Prison Experiment, suffered himself the same kind of corruption he portrays when depicting the crossing from 'good' to 'evil', which led him to allow the experiment to continue, even though it progressively gained considerable unethical traits, as the 'guards' would make 'prisoners': clean out the toilets with bare hands, withstand involuntary nudity, stay in forced confinement in an isolation booth known as the "Hole", amongst other sorts of symbolic or explicit dehumanising attitudes which triggered considering levels of suffering.

Admitting the wrongdoings of such levels of violence, Zimbardo claims:

[T]he Stanford Prison Experiment must certainly be judged unethical because human beings did suffer considerable anguish. People suffered much more than they could have reasonably anticipated when they volunteered for an academic study of "prison life" that was being conducted at a prestigious university. Moreover, that suffering escalated over time and resulted in such extreme stress and emotional turmoil that five of the sample of initially healthy young prisoners had to be released early (idem: 233-234).

The 'guards', who before the experiment were in the same group of normal, ordinary students, felt entitled to submit their peers, now in the role of 'prisoners', to diminishing treatment. Elements that contributed to that gap of rights and differentiated treatment were elements such as "deindividuating silver reflecting

sunglasses for the guards and staff along with standard military style uniforms” (idem: 301). Also, it is relevant to point out that, as one of the central conclusions, it was noted that:

[A]nything, or any situation, that makes people feel anonymous, as though no one knows who they are or cares to know, reduces their sense of personal accountability, thereby creating the potential for evil action. This becomes especially true when a second factor is added: if the situation or some agency gives them permission to engage in antisocial or violent action against others (ibidem) (...)

The Stanford Prison Experiment and Zimbardo’s subsequent studies of it provides us with a valuable ground to transversally think human nature and the potential dangers of power as an element that may propel normal, common people into roles of evildoers.

### **Media and power: power dynamics and ill-manifestations of power coming to light**

By reflecting on Zimbardo’s (2008) perceptions of power and its corruptive element, capable of leading behavioural profiles considered to be ‘good’ and ‘normal’ towards an opposite conceptual field, where many kinds of abuses and diminishing dynamics may take place (as evidenced in the Stanford Prison Experiment), we paved the way to allow the possibility of analysing other illustrative cases of power dynamics and ill-manifestations of power coming to light, highlighting the role of the media in such process.

Generically stating, one could find fit to portray the media as a vast mirror of the many realities that surround us. Following the same metaphor, it would also be prudent and pertinent to state that those mirrors do not all reflect the same way: the wideness and depth of each reflection might suffer conscious or unconscious adjustments or shifts. As Wolton states, there “is a broad consensus that news outlets are (...) biased” (2019: 548). Nonetheless, even though we might be expecting, to a certain extent, some degree of bias from the media, it is unequivocal that its presence in society is determinant of bringing virtually any sort of episode to light. Irwin recognises the importance of the media to convey to “the public (...) all manners of events” (2011: 109). Eventually, such fundamental role should be able to catapult or incentivise the debate, in society, regarding what is being covered, as “media coverage might bring to public discussion prominent realities of the world scenario” (Irwin, 2011: 109).

Following the premise that the media might not be exempt from biases but is still a basilar source to pass information to the masses and might, too, have a tacit potential to drive debate around a certain topic, some examples will be mentioned with the aim

of illustrating well-known cases of power abuse which, in the light of Zimbardo's study (2008), would be perceived as contexts where power might have corrupted ordinary people and allowed them to cross from a 'good' set of moral attitudes and stands to an 'evil' one.

A meaningful way of illustrating a large, promising debate generated by a mediatic approach to an issue underlying power as the main cause of immorality and abuse is the well-known #MeToo movement. The debate, as Mendes et al. state, has had crucial social repercussions as "hashtags like #BeenRapedNeverReported and #MeToo are making survivors feel heard (...), then they are doing meaningful and worthwhile work in building networks of solidarity" (2018: 238).

They go further contextualising it:

On 24 October 2017, the #MeToo hashtag began trending on Twitter. Although the phrase was initiated by African American women's rights activists Tarana Burke in 2006, it gained widespread attention when actress Alyssa Milano used it as a Twitter hashtag in response to allegations of sexual assault by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Through the #MeToo hashtag, Milano encouraged members of the public to join in to showcase the magnitude of the problem of sexual violence (Mendes et al., 2018: 236).

As the Al Jazeera reports, "Harvey Weinstein was an all-powerful Hollywood mogul wielding unchecked power to make or break the careers of women working in the industry" (2020), which evidences that even though sexual violence against women was one of the central concerns that fuelled the referred movement, Weinstein's predatory behaviour was linked to power within the workplace. This particular episode, related to the imbalances of power based on the gender gap, which affects the way how men and women access opportunities in a myriad of contexts, links directly to how Zimbardo infers the corrosive effect of power, which, in the scope of the gender gap, is stimulated by a global reality that is still to improve. As the World Economic Forum states, "[n]one of us will see gender parity in our lifetimes, and nor likely will many of our children. That's the sobering finding of the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, which reveals that gender parity will not be attained for 99.5 years" (2020).

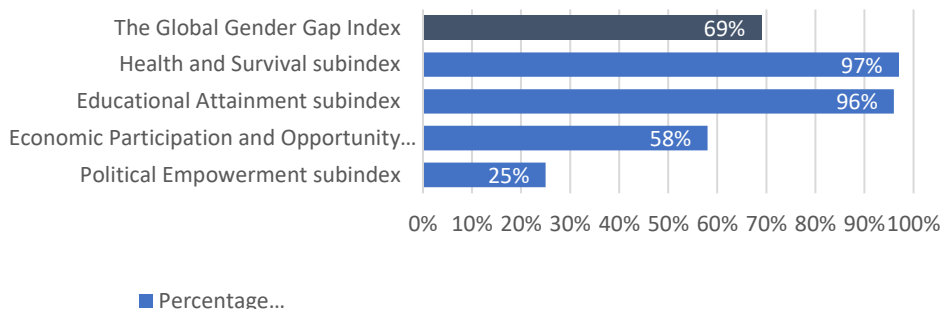


Figure 1: Percentage of the gender gap closed to date, 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2020: 10). Note: population-weighted averages, including the 153 economies featured in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020.

As demonstrated in the figure above (Figure 1), which corresponds to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index 2020, the disparity affects women on social, political, intellectual, cultural, economic and health-related levels. Such a social reality of hard-rooted gender differences might be an indicator that the pre-established dynamics of power that, in this case, would implicitly benefit men, could be easily assumed uncritically by men who would see their moral compass corrupted and would misuse their power to exert some degree of violence on another person – women, in this specific scope – even if that degree of violence was more subtle and taking a symbolic, sexist-fuelled (and often normalised) approach. Within work-related contexts, for instance, one would be able to identify examples such as many men feeling routinely entitled to salaries that would be above their female counterparts. In the European social context, for example, as the European Commission states, “[w]omen earn over 16% less than men per hour in the EU” (2019: 1). The European Commission goes further by linking gender stereotypes and social norms to the way women get affected with extra unpaid work, fewer promotions and fewer opportunities to develop career-wise, giving men an unfair advantage and making women more vulnerable economically and socially (2019: 4-5).

As Mills claims, “[t]he integration of women into the public sphere has not been achieved without conflict and resistance from men. It is clear that women are not treated equally even now” (2018: 20). The need to tackle gender disparities together, with men recognising the power that the predominant social contexts grant them with and use it for the promotion of an equitable society, is progressively endorsed and evidenced in movements such as the UN Women’s movement ‘HeForShe’:

The world is at a turning point. People everywhere understand and support the idea of gender equality. They know it’s not just a women’s issue, it’s a human rights issue. HeForShe is an invitation for men and people of all genders to stand in solidarity with women to create a bold, visible and united force for gender equality. The men of

HeForShe aren't on the sidelines. They're working with women and with each other to build businesses, raise families, and give back to their communities (2019).

Power-based systems can be assumed to bring toxic and dehumanising abuses in other contexts, too, where the perpetrators might prey on minorities due to the power imbalances that can be directly subjacent to their interaction; the vulnerabilities might be exploited namely via homophobic, xenophobic, racist or religious abuses. In essence, anyone that might be 'trapped' in a logic where the holder of power establishes himself/herself as the "dominator" might be in a route of abuses and dehumanisation.

Another powerful episode that pictures a vile dehumanisation of people, also acknowledged by Zimbardo (2008) as a process of moral corruption through power, is the Abu Ghraib episode, which was notoriously explored by the media and exposed to the world. As The Independent UK stated:

The images of torture at Abu Ghraib shocked the world when they emerged nearly 15 years ago. Bound and naked men piled on top of each other in a pyramid. Hooded prisoners connected to electrical cables. A barking dog held inches away from a face fixed in terror. Just as memorable as the horror of the victims were the smiling American soldiers present in many of the images. Their grinning faces symbolised a kind of unthinking cruelty that came to define the war for a generation of Iraqis (2019).

In this example, to which there is photographic proof, there was an evident abuse of power that was perceived as assigned and legitimised by the roles of whom was involved, and potentially some degree of xenophobia intensified by the notion of otherness that might have been attributed to the Iraqis who were imprisoned, tortured and humiliated. Regarding that sense of otherness, Zimbardo (2008: 11) sustains that it "requires a 'hostile imagination', a psychological construction embedded deeply in their minds by propaganda that transforms those others into 'The Enemy'", which, once more, solidifies the notion that the person who is being the victim of the abuses is perceived as not worthy of the same humane status as the perpetrators or their group would be. Zimbardo (2008: 11) claims that the process is started by the creation of stereotyped and dehumanised notions of the other, which would reduce their worthiness, as well as create the mental image of the other as a powerful, demonic, abstract monster that can endanger what one would perceive as 'our' prized beliefs and values.

Within the many abhorrent abuses that the detainees of this episode suffered whilst imprisoned, the CNN (2019) recalls some of them:

- Punching, slapping, and kicking detainees; jumping on their naked feet.
- Videotaping and photographing naked male and female detainees.
- Forcibly arranging detainees in various sexually explicit positions for photographing.
- Forcing detainees to remove their clothing and keeping them naked for several days at a time.

- Forcing naked male detainees to wear women's underwear.
- Forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves while being photographed and videotaped.
- Arranging naked male detainees in a pile and then jumping on them.
- Positioning a naked detainee on a box, with a sandbag on his head, and attaching wires to his fingers, toes, and penis to simulate electric torture.
- Writing "I am a Rapist" on the leg of a detainee accused of rape, and then photographing him naked.
- Placing a dog chain or strap around a naked detainee's neck and having a female soldier pose for a picture.
- A male MP guard having sex with a female detainee.
- Using military working dogs (without muzzles) to intimidate and frighten detainees, and in at least one case biting and severely injuring a detainee.
- Taking photographs of dead Iraqi detainees.

One could state that there are somewhat similar lines to the overall process of the Stanford Prison Experiment as, identically, it "emerged as a powerful illustration of the potentially toxic impact of bad systems and bad situations in making good people behave in pathological ways that are alien to their nature" (Zimbardo, 2008: 195).

Finally, in order to illustrate how, for instance, the members of the LGBT community may be victims of extremely diminishing treatment and violence in today's world, the Chechnya case (which came to light in 2017) will be explored, suggesting the impermeable power and authority of a morally intoxicated sphere of political and social reality, and how that same sphere assumed the role of evildoers for the last few years.

As the BBC UK (2018) reported, referring to the LGBT community, "[d]ozens have fled and some have been granted asylum abroad, amid reports of kidnap and torture by Chechen security forces targeting gay or allegedly gay people" going further (2019) and calling it a "gay purge", stating Chechnya's highly homophobic and conservative stance. According to the International Business Times (2017), LGBT people had been detained in the "first concentration camps since the Holocaust".

In a petition directed to president Putin, the Amnesty International (n.d.) confirmed the abuses mentioning that LGBT people in Chechnya were being "abducted, locked up in secret detention sites, tortured and sometimes killed – purely because of their sexual orientation" as well as trapped in Chechnya as their "passports are being confiscated and destroyed by the authorities".

In a shocking statement that invokes the same notions of arbitrary and vile usage of power in the process of moral degradation in the same line of the one Zimbardo (2008) refers, The Guardian, mentioning one of the victims of Chechnya's "gay purge" reported:

Adam's captors attached metal clamps to his fingers and toes. (...) As they tortured him, the men shouted verbal abuse at him for being gay, and demanded to know the names of other gay men he knew in Chechnya. "Sometimes they were trying to get information from me; other times they were just amusing themselves," he said, speaking about the ordeal he underwent just a month ago with some difficulty (2017).

The particular seriousness of the situation is even more preeminent when taking into consideration Chechen authorities who, according to the Amnesty International (n.d.), "incite homophobic violence by telling people to murder their own family members because of their sexual orientation". Such claim suggests how the otherness notion can be incentivised to diminish a specific person or group thus making it easier to perform any wrongdoings as people would be endorsed by authorities (making it easier to obey). As Zimbardo (2018: 21) stated, "any of us can be vulnerable (...) [to] subtle and pervasive powers (...) easily influenced by authorities, group dynamics, persuasive appeals, and compliance strategies".

All the examples previously explored, brought up to public debate by the media, signal the existence of multiple contexts and degrees of intensity of arbitrary, toxic and inconsiderate manifestations of power towards people or groups that are caught in a power system in a position in which they are preyed upon.

## **EDUCATION AS A MEANS TO PROMOTE A CONSCIOUS ROUTE TO POWER**

By now, the argumentative line sequenced how power can, in more or less subtle manners, evidence itself as a toxic element for people and the way they interact with others, having illustrated it by referencing varied relevant episodes and contexts.

As one understands that power, according to Zimbardo's (2018) perception of it, is the element that might turn ordinary people into evildoers by corrupting their patterns of moral behaviours, it becomes evident that it is imperative to promote a route of consciousness of power in order to prevent abuses. Naturally, as we analysed before, there are power systems that are present and deep-rooted in society and it would be naive to assume they could just be entirely and suddenly restructured or obliterated.

As power structures and dynamics are likely to endure amongst us, it would be wise to understand that possibly the most obvious way to avoid misuses of power is to make people conscious of power and its effects in one's actions and moral compass. That said, it would be necessary to create/forged/discover an approach that would reach virtually everyone, as everyone might be in a position of power in a certain moment of his or her life – in a power system that might be determined by work-related contexts, gender, ethnicity, amongst others – or in a position of victim that might need to be able to fully identify and speak against the wrongdoings. One could argue that tackling an issue via the education of the youth would be the most

promising way, as all the next generations of fully active, adult citizens would benefit from such intervention. The relevance of the young generations is such that Hwang and Kim state that “it is pivotal that youth are informed and engaged with the global vision for the future” (2017: 8).

Fomenting knowledge and respect through the pillars inherent to global citizenship and human rights could be the key to encourage consciousness and proactiveness to counteract power mishandlings and endorse one’s responsibility in case he or she holds any power and might be in a corruptible position. As reflected by Oxfam (2015: 5), “[i]t is transformative, developing the knowledge and understanding, skills, values and attitudes that learners need (...) to participate fully in a globalised society (...) and to secure a more just, secure and sustainable world”. Pointing out to the benefits of introducing education that entangles human rights in primary or secondary education, the UNESCO (2006: 48) states that with it “the school becomes a model of human rights learning and practice”.

The aim of enshrining the education of youth with notions of collective good, prosocial actions and the deep understanding of rights that are inherent to everyone matches Zimbardo’s belief when he states that “[t]he evil that persists in our midst must be countered, and eventually overcome, by the greater good in the collective hearts and personal heroic resolve” (2008: 488).

Due to the nature of this section, which is a piece of reflection regarding the relevance of creating routes for consciously understanding and handling power and potential misuses of power, it would be unviable to explore all the possible insertions of human rights and global citizenship into educational curricula in the many countries, educational systems, and realities of the world. Nonetheless, for illustrative purposes, one could note this manageable way of embedding and exploring education for global citizenship (and, implicitly, human rights) through integrated curricula:

Within class groups, teachers would allow their students to choose a weekly or monthly theme. In older classes students were given the opportunity to choose the themes themselves, whereas, in younger classes, students voted on a set list of themes provided by the teacher. Students then brainstormed on ways to explore their theme and were given the opportunity to guide their own learning and choose methodologies used to explore themes. Through interviews, focus groups and observation it became evident that activities spanned multiple national curriculum subjects, including geography, history, English, art and design, design and technology, mathematics, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and music (Golden, 2016: 94).

The example above is from a larger qualitative case study of an English primary school that developed an integrated school curriculum focusing on the education for global citizenship, which in the scope of this article was inserted to exemplify how viable such a pathway is, namely for the vital purpose that would ultimately be educating for power. It would be, too, a scenario which would allow one to integrate relevant



current discussions of various natures in the line of debates to be undertaken, including prominent topics brought to light by the media.

The importance of exploring the educational context to promote social balance and expand people's notions of their place in an interconnected world, where their rights and actions must harmoniously co-exist, symbiotically, with others' rights and actions – locally and globally – is fundamental. Ghosh states:

Inequalities in power around the world mean violation of the human rights of citizens globally. (...) Educational content (...) is embedded in the sociocultural matrix of every society. Educational practice inculcates the prevalent ideologies, and educational curricula are designed to reflect the values and biases of the ruling elites who propagate the norm of the dominant group (2008: 91).

Bearing in mind that educational content might reflect, influence or structure people's understanding of the world and its realities, it becomes imperative to ensure such element is consciously used in favour of all the people in the world by facilitating moments of debate and deconstruction in the classroom, allowing all sorts of perceptions or social canons to be looked under a prosocial and intellectually honest lens of analysis. It would be, in essence, endorsing a model of proactive minds and behaviours in the youth, ascertaining that "citizenship is not just a mechanism to claim rights that are based on membership in a particular polity, but that human rights are based on membership beyond any state or national boundaries, inherent to all individuals and groups in all places and times" (Abdi and Shultz, 2008: 3–4).

In the same line of the previously presented sample of an English primary school where teachers could, through integrated curricula, facilitate the discussion and exploration of many themes with the purpose of educating for global citizenship, there is another pertinent example which shows the potential of education to, ultimately, educate for power: tackling underrepresentation (or biased representations) of students of minority groups in the many school subjects and, for instance, in the materials which are used or the contents which are covered. As we recall that power dynamics can be present in multiple layers of our lives and experiences, it becomes a priority making sure that all types of traits and people are properly and equitably represented to ascertain all differences as normal and all individuality worthy *per se*. A striking and, regrettably, quite common example that one might find easy to recognise is how women might be considerably underrepresented in positions of active power and would be limited to representations strictly linked to gender biases and benevolent sexism – a statement which matches, for example, the findings of Islam and Asadullah (2018) as they compared the representation of women in Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi school textbooks. Other minorities should be referenced as well for the need of being adequately represented too, such as the LGBT community – as represented through the following example of the laborious

adoption of LGBT-inclusive History textbooks in the American state of California, as reported by the Time Magazine (2017):

It remains the only state to have such a law on the books. Now, after many delays and much wrangling over the details (...) state officials reached a milestone this November (...) In California, kids will get bits of both at different ages when it comes to LGBT figures. In second grade, when kids learn about family and community history, for example, they might see depictions of families with single parents and foster parents, as well as those with two moms or dads. When eighth graders learn about 19th-century U.S. history, including the ravaging of Native American sovereignty and culture, they might delve into notions of gender that were also minimized by assimilation. Individuals described as two-spirit, who did not fit neatly into the categories of male or female, have historically been venerated in some tribes. (...) Changing textbooks is a slow process, just like changing attitudes.

This need of granting an adequate representation for all in the educational sphere should make sure every student has access to contents that mirror an inclusive reality where everyone fully belongs, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, or any other defining aspect of one's existence. It is important to realise that the presence of a particular trait does not invalidate the possibility of an overlap with others, and that also deserves proper attention. For example: being crucial as it is adequately representing women (in general) in the school context, it should be considered, for instance, the singularity of being a black and/or a queer women, which also deserves to be adequately and individually addressed, subsequently avoiding the risk of oversimplifying and homogenising a naturally vast and diverse group (women).

It becomes relevant, once more, to reinforce the understanding that the purpose of this section is limited to promoting the grounds to raise a debate on the relevance of thinking education as a stage to consciously determine how young people can be guided into having a healthy relation with power, assuming they might either be in the position of someone who holds the power or someone who might be subject to some sort of power abuse and would then have the tools to identify the nature of the behaviour and act accordingly. This educational goal of educating for global citizenship, human rights, and, ultimately, for power, could potentially be explored in many ways, such as in the promotion of structural knowledge, skills and values.

Transposing some of the general lines from this section to realities outside educational contexts, adults and civil society in general could also aim to lead children and youth by the empathetic path of exploring global realities, the promotion of a sense of common respect and accountability, as well as, whenever necessary, challenging themselves too, as adults, by consciously and meaningfully undertaking identical steps to become aware of their potential as global citizens and by proactively engaging against wrongdoings, as Zimbardo supports, by acknowledging "heroism an egalitarian attribute of human nature rather than a rare feature of the elect few" (2018: 488).

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this article, using Philip Zimbardo's (2008) study on the Stanford Prison Experiment and his notions of the processes that incentivise ordinary people to be malefactors, the element of power and the importance of consciously understanding power to promote balance were discussed. Zimbardo claimed (2008: 195) that "[t]he line between Good and Evil, once thought to be impermeable, proved instead to be quite permeable" as his experiment – the Stanford Prison Experiment – revealed "the extent to which ordinary, normal, healthy young men succumbed to, or were seduced by, the social forces inherent in that behavioral context" as well as himself and "many of the other adults and professionals who came within its encompassing boundaries".

Using mediatic examples to illustrate a myriad of possibilities in which the mishandling of power might be present, reflections about immoral, diminishing episodes which came to light were developed, using as a guiding line the same logic of power as a potential element of moral corruption, as per thought by Zimbardo (2008).

Finally, in order to promote the ponderation on routes for consciousness and education for power, with the aim to prevent abuses and endorse proactiveness in society, the article analysed the possibility of focusing on education as the main way to virtually reach every profile of person in society and, eventually, allow the notions of global citizenship and human rights to positively reverberate within the global context.

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## IGIABA SCEGO IN THE ITALIAN POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT

### Summary

*This paper presents an analysis of selected works of Igiaba Scego, an Italian Somali writer. The selected works are the novels Oltre Babilonia, Adua and La mia casa è dove sono, in which it is discussed the subject of Italian colonialism in Somalia and the postcolonial period, in Italy and in Somalia. Through the postcolonial approach, the analysis shows the importance of the selected works in the denaturalization of colonial myth and stereotypes about Black people created by the colonial discourse. The value of these works, from a postcolonial point of view, becomes greater, if one takes into account that in Italy there was no great discussion of its colonial past. In addition, the analysis deals with the problem of rejection of identities of origin for the influence of colonial discourse that negatively evaluates them. The analysis also includes the problem of new hybrid identities that do not satisfy the criteria of fixed identities and therefore reveal the historicity and the artificiality of these identities that are no longer adequate in the globalized world of today.*

**Keywords:** Hybrid Identity, Italian Colonialism, Postcolonial Approach, Selected Works of Igiaba Scego

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, every society includes various groups of people who are marginalized for different reasons. Immigrants from former European colonies in Africa represent one of the discriminated groups. European colonialism is not a finished historical period because its traces and its influence are still present today and can be seen in the topicality of structural discrimination and in micro situations. Italy, as a former colonizer country, is special in the sense of silence and denial of colonial past (Mihaljević and Carić, 2019: 79). Therefore, the role of postcolonial literature becomes more important. Postcolonial literature does not refer to literature after colonialism in a chronological sense, but to literature whose starting point is colonialism, seen as obligatory for any postcolonial history anywhere in the globe

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a reduced and revised version of the thesis (mentor dr.sc. Nikolina Gunjević-Kosanović) defended at the Department of Italian Studies, University of Zadar (2018). Since the thesis is written in Italian language, the author of this paper is translating the needed quotations.

(Mellino, 2005: 51). Igiaba Scego is one of the African-Italian postcolonial writers whose personal history is linked to Somalia, a former Italian colony (De Vivo, 2010/2011: 6), and her novels discuss the colonial period in Somalia, but also the relationship between Italy and Somalia, from the collapse of colonialism until today.

In this paper, three selected novels by Igiaba Scego (*Oltre Babilonia*, *Adua* and *La mia casa è dove sono*)<sup>2</sup> will be analyzed, whose themes are linked to the period of Italian colonialism. These novels offer another point of view from the predominantly European one and give voice to the subalterns, that is to the colonized people. Alongside the denaturalization of the colonial discourse, Scego, as the representative of the second generation, deals with the problem of hybrid identity, which is opposed to fixed national identity. In other words, she addresses the suspense of the second generation between the two worlds and the problem of their precise definition (Mihaljević and Carić, 2019: 23). The purpose of the paper is to describe the stereotypes created by colonial discourse, show their relevance and define how they influence the identity of Somalis, immigrants and the second generation in Italy.

## OLTRE BABILONIA

In Scego's novel *Oltre Babilonia* the history of Italian colonization is the starting point, that is, the only possible past (Mellino, 2005: 51) necessary to understand the history of the colonized Somalis, the first generations of immigrants and the second generation. First of all, she offers a critique of the (past and recent) work of the Italian government in colonial Somalia and of the current state: the dictatorship of Said Barre and the civil war (Groppaldi, 2015: 68). Scego presents Italian colonialism in its most extreme aspects, describing its acts of brutality and violence against the Somali people. The cruelest story refers to the description of the collective rape of a group of Somalis by the fascist and German military for a bet:

Famey e il cugino subirono la stessa sorte. Lei fu presa da tre uomini diversi. Due italiani e un tedesco. Col primo si sgolò, scalcio, morse, cercando di divincolarsi. Col secondo non fece più nulla, perché atterrita dalle grida del cugino. Lei sapeva bene che quelle cose accadevano alle donne. Ma com'era possibile che succedessero anche ai maschi? Lei credeva che gli uomini potessero annichilirli con le pallottole, non con il cazzo (Scego 2008: 69).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is necessary to highlight that Scego's complete bibliography in some way discusses the (post)colonial period, but due to the format of this paper it is not possible to include all novels.

<sup>3</sup> "Famey and his cousin suffered the same fate. She was raped by three different men. Two Italians and a German. With the first she disengaged, kicked, bit, trying to wriggle away. With the second she did nothing anymore, because she was terrified by the cries of her cousin. She knew well that those things happened to

Through different female characters and their stories, Igiaba gives the opportunity to subalterns, colonized women, to express their experience of Italian colonialism. Mar's character discusses the nineteenth-century practice of zoos with the inhabitants of the Afro-Asian colonies and the position of women in the colonies. At that time, a woman was reduced to something that was useful to the colonizers, to "[...] una schiava senza valore che deve dare il suo corpo quando il maschio bianco ha voglia carnale"<sup>4</sup> (ibid. 393). There was created a stereotype of African women as always ready for sexual intercourse with the colonists.

The Italians are responsible not only for economic colonialism, but also symbolic, whose example is the perception of a Somali of the construction of the Catholic cathedral in Mogadishu. It is the manifestation of the opposition between the West and the Other, in terms of Christianity and Islam. Therefore, this cathedral symbolizes the domination of the Italians and the subaltern position of the Somalis: "Un monumento grande e fastidioso quella cattedrale. Quelle due torri che si erigevano sfacciate verso il cielo. «Una grande erezione» così l'aveva definita il suo collega Yousuf, la grande erezione fascista. [...] la cattedrale era guardata con un certo fastidio, nessuno pensava di costruirla in armonia con gli edifici circostanti"<sup>5</sup> (Scego 2008: 320). Nowadays, in Italy, Somalis "experience alienation on two fronts: on the one hand, they are not seen as white in a society that is commonly imaged as white and, on the other, they are regarded with suspicion for being Muslim" (Carroli and Gerrand, 2011: 86).

Scego discusses about the period after the collapse of fascism. The character Maryam describes the period after World War II, which actually brought new types of colonialism: "Quindi dopo quella grande guerra, la seconda, il Nord grasso aveva detto al Sud povero fa' pure quello che vuoi, io non ti ostacolerò. Però non era proprio così. Erano ancora loro a decidere chi doveva essere liberato, in che tempi e con quali modalità. La Somalia sotto tutela."<sup>6</sup> (Scego, 2008: 114). Somalia's fate was ruled by the United Nations, which decided to give the task to Italy, "[...] un paese uscito con le ossa rotte da un regime fascista ventennale e da una guerra mondiale, che aveva perso la guerra e anche un mucchio di denaro, un paese distrutto nell'animo [...]"<sup>7</sup> (ibid. 259),

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women. But how was it possible that they also happened to males? She believed that men could annihilate them with bullets, not with cock."

<sup>4</sup> "[...] a worthless slave who must give her body when the white male wants sex."

<sup>5</sup> "A great and irritating monument that cathedral. Those two towers that shamelessly stood towards the sky. "A great erection" as his colleague Yousuf had called it, the great fascist erection [...] the cathedral was looked at with a certain irritation, nobody thought of building it in harmony with the surrounding buildings."

<sup>6</sup> "So after the Great war, the Second war, the rich North had said to the poor South do whatever you want, I will not hinder you. But it wasn't quite like that. They were still the ones to decide who was to be freed, in what time and in what ways. Somalia under protection."

<sup>7</sup> "[...] a country that came out of a fascist regime after twenty years, and a world war, a country which had lost the war and also a lot of money, a country destroyed in the soul [...]"



to guide Somalia towards independence and democracy. Maryam indicates that after the Second World War, Italy continued to produce the discourses that presented the Italians as *brava gente*<sup>8</sup>, noting: „Le riviste neocoloniali – Africana, Oltremare, Riconquista – fecero numeri speciali dove si esaltava, al solito, il ruolo civilizzatore della stirpe italiana”<sup>9</sup>(ibid. 260). During the period of the Italian trusteeship in Somalia, the Italians did nothing; they only imported the practice of corruption. It is important that Maryam also mentions that the future dictator Said Barre was trained by the Italian secret services (ibid. 262). In sum, Italy's role in the political situation in Somalia does not end with the collapse of Italian colonialism, but continues in several more refined ways.

This entire historical period of Somalia, in which Italy had played a great role, influenced the lives of Somalis in various ways, so some were affected by war and violence or by economic or political migrations, but even today it influences the lives of Somalis or the second generation diaspora living in Italy. Orientalism, which is based on the cultural representations of Africa as barbaric, primitive and fanatic (Mellino, 2005: 45), has led to racism and the superior sense of Europeans and is still very actual, which is evident in various types of discrimination of immigrants. Many examples of racism and discrimination in micro situations are described in this novel. Zuhra mentions the police problem that first suspects a Black person of having committed a crime and points out that the skin color is enough to be suspicious: “Ci vuole niente a essere scambiati per pericolosi sovversivi. Un attimo per diventare un terrorista. Basta una barba, uno straccio addosso, un'idea in testa. Poi se sei nero, sei sempre il primo sospettato.”<sup>10</sup> (Scego, 2008: 14). This police behavior has its root precisely in the cultural representations of Africans as barbarians which have produced the stereotype of Black people as deviant, while White people, who represent Europeans, are perceived as superior and progressive. In the story of the Mar there is an episode, which happened in elementary school, which indicates several elements that are connected with the colonial discourse:

«Perché sei nera, se tua mamma è bianca?».  
 [...] «E poi quei capelli sono brutti, sai?».  
 «Dici?».  
 «Bruttissimi, Mar. Brutti come la cacca».  
 «Dici che sono una cacca? »  
 «Tu sei nera. Negra come gli africani».  
 «Cosa sono gli africani?».  
 «Sono dei poveri. Non hanno neppure le scarpe ai piedi».  
 «Ma io ce le ho le scarpe. E ho anche le calze».

<sup>8</sup> Good people

<sup>9</sup> “The neo-colonial magazines - Africana, Oltremare, Riconquista - made special numbers in which was glorified, as usual, the civilizing role of the Italian lineage.”

<sup>10</sup> “It takes nothing to be mistaken for dangerous subversives. A moment to become a terrorist. All you need is a beard, a rag on you, an idea in your head. Then if you're black, you're always the prime suspect.”

«Ma quando tua madre ti ha trovato non ce l'avevi... eri nuda. Tua madre è bianca, ha i soldi, ti ha comprato le scarpe. E anche le calze ti ha comprato» (ibid. 123).<sup>11</sup>

From this conversation between Mar and a schoolmate, it is possible to detect the Eurocentric ideals of beauty, the stereotype of hungry and naked Africans in need of European help, the discourse of the civilizing role of Europeans in Africa and the stereotype that an Italian cannot be a Black person. In other words, one of the characteristics of "Italianism" would be to coincide with a white skin color that becomes a norm and this perception is the consequence of the sediment of colonial racism (Camilotti, 2014: 2).

Furthermore, Scego discusses the problem of the identity of the second generation. The process of identity construction and identity insecurity are more explicitly expressed through the characters of Zuhra and Mar, that is, the young women of the second generation of immigrants. Their conflict is not between the two cultures, but between the void of identity and the multiple identities (Kleinert, 2012: 206), which brings to light the problem of inadequacy of fixed or absolute national identities. As already mentioned, in Italian society there is a stereotype that all Black people are immigrants from Africa and that they are not citizens of the Italian Republic. In other words, only a fixed national identity is accepted, that corresponds with the color of the skin. Zuhra's character contrasts with this stereotype, saying: "Non conosco l'Africa. E dire che mi scorre sangue negro nelle vene. E che ci sono nata. Ma non è come conoscerla, in fondo. Non è proprio la stessa cosa. [...] io quindi in Africa ci sono nata e basta"<sup>12</sup> (Sego, 2008: 35). Zuhra does not accept the identity that is imposed on her by society, she does not feel really African and not even Italian. Therefore, she builds it by herself. In the epilogue, Zuhra defines her identity through linguistic identity, indicating its hybridization that goes beyond national borders:

"In somalo ho trovato il conforto del suo utero, in somalo ho sentito le uniche ninnananne che mi ha cantato, in somalo di certo ho fatto i primi sogni. Ma poi, ogni volta, in ogni discorso, parola, sospiro, fa capolino l'altra madre. Quella che ha allattato Dante, Boccaccio, De André e Alda Merini. L'italiano con cui sono cresciuta a che a tratti

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<sup>11</sup> "Why are you black if your mom is white?"

[...] «And that hair is ugly, you know? ».

"You say?".

"Very ugly, Mar. As ugly as poop."

"You say I'm a poop? »

"You are black. Black like Africans ».

"What are Africans?"

«They are poor. They don't even have shoes on their feet. "

«But I have shoes. And I also have socks ».

"But when your mother found you, you didn't have it ... you were naked. Your mother is white, she has the money, she bought you the shoes. And even the socks she bought you. "

<sup>12</sup> "I don't know Africa. And to say that black blood flows in my veins. And that I was born there. But it's not like knowing it, to its core. It is not quite the same. [...] so I was born in Africa and that's it."

ho anche odiato, perché mi faceva sentire straniera. L'italiano aceto dei mercati rionali, l'italiano dolce degli speaker radiofonici, l'italiano serio delle lectiones magistrales. L'italiano che scrivo (Scego, 2008: 443).<sup>13</sup>

Zuhra wants to define herself in an autonomous way, without constrictions, to become the subject, not the object of the Other's stories (Mihaljević and Carić 2019: 24). Thus, she creates her own hybrid space which reveals the historicity and cultural relativity of the identities (Mellino 2005: 127) that are based on the nation-state structures. In other words, these fixed national identities were adequate in the period of the birth of the national states, but these new hybrid identities indicate a new period of a global world full of mixes and migrations.

## ADUA

In the novel *Adua*, as in *Oltre Babilonia*, the starting point for the stories of the lives of two generations is colonialism. The central character, who describes the environment and the consequences of Italian colonialism, is the father Zoppe, who worked as a translator during the period of fascism. While working in Rome, he is imprisoned and molested for an argument in which he did not partake. The fascists' contempt and racism is evident in the way they speak with imprisoned Zoppe: "Siete zecche, inutili pidocchi dell'umanità. A Regina Coeli è facile morire di fame e di sete, imparalo"<sup>14</sup> (Scego, 2015a: 37). Alongside the direct violence and threats expressed by the fascists, Zoppe mentions the racism with which he meets daily:

E pensare che aveva immaginato belle donne bionde a sua disposizione e tanti amici con cui giocare biliardo. Ma aveva scoperto che un negro a Roma doveva far bene attenzione. «Se possibile» gli aveva detto uno dei capi «dovresti far di tutto per sparire». [...] A volte il disgusto nei suoi confronti si palesava in sputi improvvisi che lui schivava con gran maestria (ibid. 23).<sup>15</sup>

Even Adua, who arrived in Rome, is referred to as the *Faccetta nera*<sup>16</sup>: "per festeggiare a bordo dell'aereo mi cantarono cento volte *Faccetta nera*"<sup>17</sup> (ibid. 119). The expression

<sup>13</sup> "In Somali I found the comfort of her uterus, in Somali I heard the only lullabies she sang to me, in Somali I certainly had my first dreams. But then, every time, in every conversation, word, sigh, the other mother peeps. The one that nursed Dante, Boccaccio, De André and Alda Merini. The Italian I grew up with, which at times I also hated, because it made me feel foreign. The sour Italian of the local markets, the sweet Italian of the radio speakers, the serious Italian of the lectiones magistrales. The Italian that I write."

<sup>14</sup> "You are ticks, useless lice of humanity. At Regina Coeli it is easy to die of hunger and thirst, learn it."

<sup>15</sup> "And to think that he had imagined beautiful blonde women at his disposal and many friends to play billiards with. But he had discovered that a Negro in Rome had to pay close attention. "If possible," one of the leaders had told him, "you should do everything to disappear." [...] Sometimes the disgust towards him was revealed in sudden spits that he dodged with great skill."

<sup>16</sup> *little black face*

<sup>17</sup> "to celebrate on board the plane they sang me a hundred times *Faccetta nera* "

*Faccetta nera* refers to a song written in 1935, in the period of fascism. The lyrics of the song absorb all colonial propaganda, describing colonialism as a war of liberation. At first glance, in that context, it was defined as a liberation song with the temptation to unite Italians and Ethiopians, but by analyzing the text it becomes clear that it is only a sexual and carnal union with the African woman (Scego, 2015b, n.p.). *Faccetta nera* is a song that was used to create the stereotype of an African woman ready to satisfy the sexual desires of Italians. Ethiopian women are objectified by colonial discourse, that is, completely desubjected, which can be seen from the words of an Italian count: "Queste piccole etiopi sono come il buon vino delle colline, basta mezzo fiaschetto per stare bene per i dieci anni successivi"<sup>18</sup> (Scego, 2015a: 110). Even the myth of colonialism as the civilizing mission (Luraschi, 2009: 188) is mentioned by the Italian count: "Civilizzare il selvaggio toccherebbe a noi, siamo noi che dobbiamo portare sulle spalle questo pesante fardello"<sup>19</sup> (Scego, 2015a: 86). This conception of Africans as savages and primitives is clear from his opinion on African culture: "Ah, che sciocco, praticherai le danze selvagge dei tuoi luoghi. » C'era nelle sue parole un misto di arroganza e lussuria. «Quelli balli dove siete nudi e agitati. Come bisce, per intendersi»"<sup>20</sup> (ibid. 87). The notion of progress is never value free (Carroli and Gerrand, 2011: 89), in words of Stuart Hall, "the «West and Rest» discourse could never be «innocent» because it does «not represent an encounter between equals»" (qtd. in ibid.). The expression of the supremacy of the Italians is also seen in the change in the names of the streets by the fascists: "Gli italiani gli avevano appiccicato il nome di uno sconosciuto cardinale. Anche a Mogadiscio c'era una via cardinal Massaia, ad Hamarweyne, in pieno mercato per giunta"<sup>21</sup> (Scego, 2015a: 70).

Adua's story refers to the period of the seventies, in which, even if Italian colonialism and the trusteeship are officially finished, there are many traces and influences of the colonial period. The central story is the film *Femina Somala*, a soft porn, which Adua filmed deceived by the Italian director. The name *Femina Somala* refers to the novel of the same name by Gino Mitrano Sani, written in the period of colonialism, which describes the relationship between an Italian soldier and a young indigenous woman, described as a non-heavy body, a beast (Gianzi, 2014/2015: 50). Mentioned example shows the role of the literature's discourse in the creation of the stereotype of the African woman always ready to give her body to the colonizers. This story is an excellent example of the sexualization and objectification of Black women that has its roots in colonialism, as a friend of Adua says: «Ti chiederanno il tuo corpo. Gli italiani

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<sup>18</sup> "These little Ethiopians are like good wine from the hills, half a flask is enough to feel good for the ten following years"

<sup>19</sup> "Civilizing the savage would be up to us, it is we who must carry this heavy burden on our shoulders."

<sup>20</sup> "Ah, what a fool, you will practice the wild dances of your origin." In his words there was a mixture of arrogance and lust. «Those dances where you are naked and agitated. As snakes, to be clear."

<sup>21</sup> "The Italians had pinned it the name of an unknown cardinal. Even in Mogadishu there was a cardinal Massaia road, in Hamarweyne, in the middle of the market."

con mia nonna hanno fatto così. Non credo che questi siano diversi, sai?»<sup>22</sup> (Scego, 2015a: 122). Scego critiques the Italian cinematographic representation of the Black female body as submissive, humiliated, sexualized and fixed in roles mainly related to physicality (Gianzi, 2014/2015: 5), as it is clear from this quote:

«Arturo, è tua, fanne quello che vuoi» disse Sissi con quella voce dura da generale che mi gelava il sangue.

E fu allora che Arturo si accorse della cucitura.

«Questa è tutta chiusa sotto» disse alla moglie.

«Chiusa?»

«[...] Bastano un paio di forbici per aprirti. E poi finalmente Arturo ti potrà assaggiare» (Scego, 2015a: 123).<sup>23</sup>

The influence of the opposite representations of Europe and Africa is seen in the Adua's perception of Rome and the Italians, she idealizes the city of Rome as a *American dream* (Mihaljević and Carić, 2017: 308):

Fra tre giorni non sarò più qui. Già mi vedevo a Roma, una città che conoscevo dai libri. Mi ripeteva mentalmente i nomi delle sue vie e delle sue piazze: via Sistina, via Giulia, piazza di Spagna, piazza Navona, via Veneto... Che meraviglia! Già mi vedevo avvolta in un ambito nero Givenchy come Audrey Hepburn, pronta a spiccare il mio personale volo verso il successo. Ero piaciuta agli italiani. Mi avrebbero fatto fare un film. Mi avrebbero resa immortale. Niente più Magalo, niente più miserie (Scego, 2015a: 105)...<sup>24</sup>

After her arrival in Rome and the experience of recording the film, she completely changed in the sense of self-perception: "È quello che sono ormai. Una puttana, una shermutta. Mi ci hanno fatto diventare. In Somalia ero una ragazzina piena di sogni e voglia di vedere il mondo. Loro in pochi mesi mi hanno manipolata, sevizata, usata, trasformata. Mi sembrano passati anni, no mesi. Mi sento tanto vecchia, quasi

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<sup>22</sup> "«They will ask you for your body. The Italians with my grandmother did so. I don't think these are different, you know? »"

<sup>23</sup> "Arturo, she is yours, do what you want," Sissi said in that hard general voice that was freezing my blood. And it was then that Arturo noticed the stitching.

"She is all closed underneath," he said to his wife.

"Closed?"

«[...] A pair of scissors is enough to open you. And then finally Arturo can taste you. "

<sup>24</sup> In three days I won't be here anymore. I already saw myself in Rome, a city I knew from books. I mentally repeated the names of its streets and squares: via Sistina, via Giulia, piazza di Spagna, piazza Navona, via Veneto ... How wonderful! I already saw myself wrapped in a black Givenchy like Audrey Hepburn, ready to take off on my personal flight towards success. I liked the Italians. They would have made a movie with me. They would have made me immortal. No more Magalo, no more miseries...

decrepita”<sup>25</sup> (Scego, 2015a: 137). Her words may stand as a metaphor for Somalia's colonial history which was raped, used and completely transformed by the Italians.

The novel also discusses the problem of the current migrations, through the story of Adua's husband who desires to leave Italy for life in a country that is not as rigid as Italy towards immigrants: “Basta dire che in Italia ti trattano male e ti lasciano in Germania. Ci tengono ai diritti umani i tedeschi, dopo l'Olocausto fanno i buoni”<sup>26</sup> (ibid. 168). Italian negative attitude towards immigrants can be related to the lack of discussion about its colonial past and its responsibility for the chaotic situation in Africa. For example, the fact that in Rome Piazza del Cinquecento is dedicated to soldiers who died in East Africa (Scego, 2015a: 169), in which Adua ironically meets her husband and describes it as “Piazza dei migranti, dei primi arrivi, di tutte le partenze”<sup>27</sup> (ibid.). She sees it as a symbolical Caput Mundi (Mihaljević and Carić, 2017: 313), which indicates its postcolonial redefinition in which different cultures and languages coexist. This appropriation of public space shows the transition from passive presence of the immigrants to the state of visibility, that is Adua redefines the map of the urban space of Rome (ibid. 314).

Adua's identity was greatly influenced by the Eurocentric culture that defines beauty according to the criteria of White people, evaluating the appearance of Black people negatively. For this reason, Adua did several things to get closer to this ideal of beauty, used bleaching creams, depilated and smoothed her hair (Scego, 2015a: 157). From the position of the object, where Adua was placed, she finds her voice by telling her story to Bernini's elephant statue that becomes almost interlocutor or resident of Rome (Mihaljević and Carić, 2017: 299). Through the character of Adua, Scego notes the power of the word or the potential to become a subject again, when she as a subaltern can express herself.

Zoppe's character represents a very confrontational situation in which some Somalis have been. He, as a translator, worked for the fascists who at that time used the Somalis in the war against Ethiopia. His conscience tried to justify it: “Qualcuno avrebbe potuto dire la stessa cosa di lui, chiamarlo persino collaborazionista. Ma lui non stava tradendo nessuno. Non avrebbe levato mai un'arma contro suo vicino, un uomo con lo stesso suo colore di pelle. Lui traduceva e basta. Era un ambasciatore della lingua, un mediatore, non portava pena”<sup>28</sup> (Scego, 2015a: 19). On the other hand,

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<sup>25</sup> It is what I am now. A whore, a shermutta. They made me become. In Somalia I was a young girl full of dreams and desire to see the world. In a few months they have manipulated, tortured, used, transformed me. It seems to me years, not months. I feel so old, almost decrepit.

<sup>26</sup> “It is enough to say that in Italy they treat you badly and they let you in Germany. The Germans care about human rights, after the Holocaust they do the good.”

<sup>27</sup> “Piazza of the migrants, of the first arrivals, of all departures”

<sup>28</sup> “Someone could have said the same thing about him, even called him a collaborationist. But he wasn't cheating on anyone. He would never have raised a weapon against his neighbor, a man with the same skin color. He just translated. He was an ambassador of the language, a mediator, he did not bring pain.”

he felt like the Judah of Christians (ibid. 151), feeling guilty for the massacre of the Ethiopians. His internal conflict is manifested when Adua's name is mentioned: "Dovresti ringraziarmi, ti ho dato il nome della prima vittoria africana contro l'imperialismo. Io, tuo padre, stavo dalla parte giusta. E non devi mai credere il contrario"<sup>29</sup> (ibid. 49). Italian colonialism, which used and forced the Somalis against themselves or neighbors, influenced the identities of the Somalis, complicating their perception of themselves as a Somali, that is, a non-fascist and a non-traitor to the homeland. Like Adua, Zoppe also speaks his story to a baboon and tells his experience of history, that is, the story of a subaltern. From their narratives, Scego shows how the story can be a necessary act to dig deep into one's self and rebuild identity (Gianzi, 2014/2015: 57).

## LA MIA CASA È DOVE SONO

The protagonist of the novel is Scego herself and the plot is the period of first twenty years of her life. Therefore, most of the plot is located in Rome in the seventies and eighties. However, several episodes are intertwined with the Italian colonial past in Somalia. With the story of her grandfather, who worked as a translator for the Italians, Scego describes the beginning of Italian colonialism, before fascism. By then, the Italians had objectified the Africans and used the children as soldiers of the colonial troops: "Nella triste verità dei fatti non erano altro che carne da cannone che gli italiani facevano combattere in prima fila. Ed erano bambini soldati. Venivano reclutati a tredici anni e invecchiavano in schiavitù"<sup>30</sup> (Scego, 2012: 83). The horrors that happened during the period of fascism in Africa are described mainly through the fascist Rodolfo Graziani. Scego notes the episodes of the reconquest of Libya and the Ethiopian war, in which Graziani founded the concentration camps and used the chemical weapons prohibited by the Ginerva convention: "Tra le molte atrocità la più terribile furono i trasferimenti coatti nei lager. Donne, bambini, giovani, anziani venivano presi, brutalizzati, picchiati e veniva abbattuto il loro bestiame. Il tutto poi era corredato da fucilazioni e impiccagioni di massa"<sup>31</sup> (ibid. 85). Since the fascists were the dominant group that had power in their hands, they produced the knowledge (Mellino, 2005: 67) about Somali descent and imposed Italian culture in Somali schools. Scego also mentions the presence of Eurocentrism in Italian and

<sup>29</sup> "You should thank me, I gave you the name of the first African victory against imperialism. I, your father, was on the right side. And you must never believe otherwise."

<sup>30</sup> "At that time the Italians were trying to strengthen their settlements in the ancient land of Punt (as Somalia was called by the ancient Egyptians) and they soon made use of the services of the local population for their purposes. Many were recruited as soldiers. [...] In the sad truth of the facts, they were nothing but cannon fodder that the Italians made fighting in the front row. And they were child soldiers. They were recruited at thirteen and aged in slavery."

<sup>31</sup> "Of the many atrocities, the most terrible was the forced transfers into the camps. Women, children, young people, the elderly were taken, brutalized, beaten and their cattle were killed. The whole thing was accompanied by mass shootings and hangings."

Somali schools in the 1980s as the extension of colonialism, “Eravamo cresciuti in due paesi diversi, loro a Mogadiscio, io in una periferia di Roma, e avevamo studiato il Pascoli. [...] Forse sia io che lui avremmo dovuto studiare altre cose: la nostra storia africana, per esempio.”<sup>32</sup> (Scego, 2012: 28).

The ideology of fascism is demonstrated through the Stadio Olimpico in Rome, which served to celebrate the pomp of the fascist regime and enhance the physical model that the regime wanted to impose on the Italians. Although it was its purpose to be a symbol of fascism, today it is ironically famous for the world record and the marathon won by Abebe Bikila. Scego underlines the importance of this victory for all Africans as a symbol of the absurdity of the ideology of the superiority of Italians towards Africans “L’Olimpico era nato per celebrare lo sfarzo di un regime fascista che tra i suoi piani ebbe la sfrontatezza di umiliare le genti di Africa, e invece celebrò la vittoria di un piccolo grande uomo che non aveva paura di presentarsi al mondo con i suoi piedi nudi. [...] È bello pensare che è stata vinta proprio a Roma, proprio all’Olimpico”<sup>33</sup> (Scego, 2012: 125).

The period of the trusteeship, after the Second World War, Scego (2012: 45) names as a paracolonial domain. That is, the continuation of a relationship of dependence, and indicates the bizarre role of the former colonial master as a teacher of democracy. If we take into account that they were veterans of the Ethiopian war, the irony of the Italians as teachers of democracy becomes stronger. Scego compares this situation with the Nazis and Israel: “Gente che aveva massacrato etiopi nella valle del Faf veniva mandata in quell’antico impero a insegnare la libertà repubblicana. È un po’, passatemi l’esempio, come spedire un kapò a insegnare al nuovo stato di Israele come vivere nel deserto. Qualcosa di completamente assurdo”<sup>34</sup> (ibid. 49).

Scego deepens her critique of Italian colonialism and argues that all the other colonizing countries have faced their colonial history, while in Italy there was nothing but silence, colonial amnesia, in the sense of crimes. This situation leads to the perpetuation of the myth of colonialism as a civilizing mission and, therefore, is very significant, and also dangerous. Scego’s critique is clear from these words:

Gli italiani hanno stuprato, ucciso, sbeffeggiato, inquinato, depredato, umiliato i popoli con cui sono venuti in contatto. Hanno fatto come gli inglesi, i francesi, i belgi, i tedeschi,

<sup>32</sup> “We had grown up in two different countries, they in Mogadishu, I in a suburb of Rome, and we had studied Pascoli. [...] Maybe both he and I should have studied other things: our African history, for example.”

<sup>33</sup> “The Olimpico was born to celebrate the glitz of a fascist regime that among its plans had the brazenness to humiliate the people of Africa, and instead celebrated the victory of a great little man who was not afraid to present himself to the world with his feet naked. [...] It is nice to think that it was won in Rome, right at the Olimpico.”

<sup>34</sup> “People who had massacred Ethiopians in the Faf valley were sent to that ancient empire to teach republican freedom. It’s similar, if I may use the example, to sending a kapò to teach the new state of Israel how to live in the desert. Something completely absurd.”



gli americani, gli spagnoli, i portoghesi. Ma in molti di questi paesi dopo la fine della Seconda guerra mondiale c'è stata una discussione, ci si è accapigliati, gli scambi di vedute sono stati aspri e impetuosi; ci si è interrogati sull'imperialismo e i suoi crimini; sono stati pubblicati studi; il dibattito ha influenzato la produzione letteraria, saggistica, filmica, musicale. In Italia invece silenzio. Come se nulla fosse stato (ibid. 20).<sup>35</sup>

In the novel the problem of silence on colonial history is addressed as a social problem, that is as a structural problem. Instead of the discussion on colonial crimes, the myth of the Italians as *brava gente* continues to spread: “[...] a scuola mica le impari queste cose. Siamo stati bravi, ti dicono, abbiamo fatto i ponti o le fontane. Il resto lo si ignora, perché non lo si insegna”<sup>36</sup> (Scego 2012: 30). Scego also expresses the desire and the need for a monument dedicated to the victims of colonialism that would remind what was the Italian role in the history of East Africa (ibid. 95). Italy's indifferent and silent attitude is also evident in current migration situations. In this light, Scego describes the story since 2003 when a boat with the Somali migrant group had sunk, after which they only reported about it on the news without any discussion about this problem and the role of Italy in it: “Al telegiornale non importava se quei corpi sarebbero stati seppelliti in grazia di Dio invece di marcire in pieno sole. Il telegiornale, come Ponzio Pilato, se ne lavava le mani”<sup>37</sup> (ibid. 99). Furthermore, Italy doesn't just remain silent, but also continues to define immigration as subject of fear in media, which perpetuates the outdated conceptions of a monocultural Italian identity and the exclusion of migrants, many of whom have lived in Italy for decades (Carroli and Gerrans, 2011: 85-86).

Silence sparked a funeral that symbolized a Somali diaspora protest against the entire colonial past and the difficult situation they find themselves in today. Scego indicates her privilege in comparison with other immigrants because she managed to obtain Italian citizenship, addressing the absurdity and racist character of the citizenship law. “In a *jus sanguinis* jurisdiction, where Italian citizenship is determined by blood ties rather than place of birth (*jus soli*) (Einaudi qtd. ibid. 85)” to be officially recognized as Italian is denied to persons with no Italian blood lines (ibid.). By excluding big part of society from political community, Italy puts on them the community's burdens without giving its benefits (ibid.). As quote address, “Qui se sei figlio di migrante nato in Italia devi dimostrare di essere italiano, hai un anno di tempo per portare la tua

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<sup>35</sup> “The Italians raped, killed, mocked, polluted, plundered, humiliated the peoples with whom they came into contact. They did like the British, the French, the Belgians, the Germans, the Americans, the Spaniards, the Portuguese. But in many of these countries after the end of the Second World War there was a discussion, they fought over each other, the exchanges of views were harsh and impetuous; questions have been raised about imperialism and its crimes; studies have been published; the debate influenced literary, non-fiction, film and music production. In Italy instead silence. As if nothing had happened.”

<sup>36</sup> “[...] you don't learn these things at school. We were good, they tell you, we made bridges or fountains. The rest is ignored, because it is not taught.”

<sup>37</sup> “The news did not care if those bodies would have been buried in God's grace instead of rotting in full sun. The news, like Pontius Pilate, washed their hands.”

documentazione, deve essere tutto in regola, residenze continuative e soggiorno dei genitori compresi. Invece se sei arrivato piccolino qui, a tre mesi, un anno, tre anni, a diciotto sei considerato straniero. Vivi come un estraneo del paese che hai sempre considerato tuo<sup>38</sup> (Scego, 2012: 110).

By narrating her life, Scego offers several examples of racism, but it is very directly expressed in the school environment. The remnants of colonialism are present in the stereotypes that are expressed by the colleges of Scego and their parents. A boy at her school told her one of the stereotypes about Black people: “«Tu hai la pelle nera e questa porta i germi e le malattie. Mamma mi ha detto di non giocare con te, se no mi viene una brutta malattia e muoio»”<sup>39</sup> (ibid. 152). This stereotype has roots in Orientalism because it is the dirty / pure opposition that is linked to the African / European opposition, whose base is a superior look of Europeans on Africans (Mellino 2005: 45). This problem is present in Italian schools, parents express a very racist attitudes, masking them with concern for the success of their children. Scego, in a very direct way, names it as racism:

“Oggi alcune mamme si lamentano della presenza di bambini di origine straniera nelle scuole. Non vogliono far sedere i loro figli nella stessa classe. Ma se qualcuno le chiama razziste, loro negano. «Non è razzismo. È solo che questi bambini limitano la produttività della scuola. Noi vogliamo il meglio per i nostri figli, non vogliamo farli diventare zulu .» Il meglio per loro è inteso come bianco, naturalmente (Scego, 2012: 152).<sup>40</sup>

Very disturbing episode is referred to the situation in which the professor continually asked her: “«Ma come fai a essere così abbronzata, Igiaba? Cosa usi la mattina prima di venire a scuola?»”<sup>41</sup> (ibid. 146). This situation shows that even representatives of a state institution have no regard for racism and indicates how accustomed this racism is to micro situations.

The social situation described above, in which Scego was growing up, has greatly influenced her identity, mainly in childhood and adolescence. As a child, Scego decided to stop talking in Somali because of the school environment where she met with the Eurocentric perception of African languages as something wild: “«Voi non parlate, fate

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<sup>38</sup> “Here if you are a child of a migrant born in Italy you must prove that you are Italian, you have one year to bring your documentation, it must be all in order, continuous residences and the parents’ stay included. On the other hand, if you came here, when you were three months old, a year, three years, eighteen you are considered a foreigner. You live like a stranger of the country you’ve always considered yours.”

<sup>39</sup> “You have black skin and this brings germs and diseases. Mom told me not to play with you, otherwise I get a bad disease and I die.”

<sup>40</sup> “Today some mothers complain about the presence of children of foreign origin in schools. They don’t want their children to sit in the same class. But if anyone calls them racists, they deny them. «It is not racism. It’s just that these kids limit school productivity. We want the best for our children, we don’t want them to become Zulu.» The best for them is understood as white, of course.”

<sup>41</sup> “But how can you be so tanned, Igiaba? What do you use in the morning before coming to school?”

i versi di scimmie. Non si capisce nulla. Siete strani. Siete come i gorilla»<sup>42</sup> (Scego, 2012: 151). Not speaking the Somali represented for her the proof of integration or her way of saying "love me" (ibid. 152). The people who helped her to embrace her Somali origins were the mother and the teacher; the mother with her stories and the teacher with the books and the interest in Somali culture. The mother's stories "enabled her to rise above the daily racist humiliations to which she was subjected as the only child with African origins at an elementary school in Rome (Carroli and Gerrand, 2011: 88). However, the negative influence of the environment is still evident when Scego describes her adolescence: "A sedici anni la mia differenza mi pesava. La mia pelle, i miei capelli, la mia chiappa decisamente africana erano ostacoli. La mia differenza era un macigno. Avrei pagato per poter essere come gli altri, anonima" <sup>43</sup> (Scego, 2012: 139). She brings out the identity question and expresses the constraints of the identities defined by the society:

"Sono cosa? Sono chi?

Sono nera e italiana.

Ma sono anche somala e nera.

Allora sono afroitaliana? Italoafricana? Seconda generazione? Incerta generazione? Meel kale? Un fastidio? Negra saracena? Sporca negra? (ibid. 33).<sup>44</sup>

Scego wonders if you can be a Black Italian, but, as Camilotti points out, it is apparent right from the title that Scego sees belonging as linked to the spaces in which you grew up and been socialized, not to the color of your skin (Camilotti, 2014: 5). Now as a woman, Scego unites those two identities: "L'Italia era il mio paese. Pieno di difetti, certo, ma il mio paese. L'ho sempre sentito profondamente mio. Come del resto lo è la Somalia, che di difetti abbonda"<sup>45</sup> (Scego, 2012: 19). "Scego represents herself as a subject who inhabits cultural affiliations" (Carroli and Gerrand, 2011: 83) and she moves between societies in nomadic way – "fluently across and between cultures, without needing to choose one affiliation over another (Carroli and Gerrand, 2011: 83). Through different places in Rome, story of her family, she creates a map of her city: hybrid version of Rome and Mogadischu (Fiucci, 2019: 5). The crossroad of these two cultures is always present in her mind and it is manifested mostly through her use of languages (ibid. 9). Thus, her hybrid identity is based on her linguistic identity,

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<sup>42</sup> "You don't speak, you produce the verses of monkeys. Nothing is understood. You are strange. You are like gorillas."

<sup>43</sup> "At sixteen my difference weighed on me. My skin, my hair, my decidedly African butt were obstacles. My difference was a boulder. I would have paid to be able to be like the others, anonymous."

<sup>44</sup> "What am I? Who am I?

I am black and Italian.

But I'm also Somali and black.

So am I African-Italian? Italoafricana? Second generation? Uncertain generation? Meel kale? A bother? Saracen Negra? Dirty Negra?"

<sup>45</sup> "Italy was my country. Full of flaws, of course, but my country. I've always felt deeply mine. As indeed is Somalia, which abounds in defects."

speaking Italian and Somali, she confirms her hybrid identity, as she writes: “Ora posso dire di avere due lingue madri che mi amano in ugual misura. Grazie alla parola ora sono quella che sono”<sup>46</sup> (Scego, 2012: 157). “Scego’s Somali heritage, religion and Italianness are all integral to her subjectivity and are not mutually exclusive qualities of her being” (Carroli and Gerrand, 2011: 93). At the end of the novel, Scego describes nowadays Rome as a great mix, conditioned by globalization, in which fixed identities, structured according to state borders, become inconveniences, while hybrid and deterritorialized identities become alternatives.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the novels *Oltre Babilonia*, *Adua* and *La mia casa è dove sono*, written by Igiaba Scego, offered a postcolonial analysis of Italian colonialism and of the relationship between Italy and Somalia today. The starting point for the story of each character (the colonized Somalis or the first and second generation of immigrants in Italy) is connected in some way with the Italian colonial history. The life of the colonized is strongly defined by direct Italian violence before and during the period of fascism. With various examples, Scego denaturalises the myth of colonialism, such as the civilizing mission and the expression *italiani brava gente* (Luraschi 2009: 188). Furthermore, several stereotypes are exposed about Black people, whose origins can be traced back to the colonial period. Scego shows that these images are created through various discourses to justify the conquest of Africa and she reveals their ideological nature. In addition, she shows their relevance through the descriptions of the different situations in which Black people encounter racism in nowadays Italy, underlining that colonialism has never ended, but has only changed its form. With these stories, Scego gives voice to subalterns and also to subalterns among subalterns, to Black women, and denaturalizes the discourse of Orientalism, offering the experience of the colonized and discriminated.

The presence of stereotypes that evaluate Black people negatively, while White people as neutral, i.e. normative, influenced the identity of the characters in a way that they refused their identity of origin. However, in the end, the identities of her protagonists, but also Scego’s identity, manage to fight the colonial discourse and become subjects again, by showing another possibility of identifying themselves in a national sense, that erases the boundaries of fixed and absolute national identity. By resisting categorization, Scego’s protagonists “complicate preconceived notions of Europeanness and Islam” (Carroli and Gerrand, 2011: 92) and they embody “the

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<sup>46</sup> “Now I can say that I have two mother languages that love me equally. Thanks to the word, I am now who I am.”

«different ways in which a subject can have multiple belongings, multiple ways in which ethnicity and citizenship can be combined» (Braidotti qtd. in ibid.).

It can be concluded that Igiaba Scego writes to stop the silence that is present in Italy on the subject of colonial history and aims to claim the voice of Somalia through her novels, intended for the new generations born in the diaspora, but also for the Italian public, descendants of the empire (Benini, 2014: 481). In other words, she addresses “Italy’s colonial legacy with the Horn of Africa while simultaneously challenging attitudes towards migrants in Italy who often appear in the mass media as a threat to Italian society” (Carroli and Gerrand, 2011: 83) and also creates “new forms of Italianness, and with them, understandings of identity as complex, dynamic and nomadic.” (ibid.).

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## **THE JEREMY KYLE SHOW: THE DEMONIZATION OF THE WORKING-CLASS**

### **Summary**

*In the wake of a participant's suicide this past year, the cancellation of The Jeremy Kyle Show, a British daytime television mainstay, has renewed debates in the UK regarding how the poor are presented in the media. This paper looks to position the popular programme within the wider context of economic Austerity, discussing the ideological ramifications of the show's portrayal of its guests within this milieu. Played out before a live and televised audience, the show set itself as a public stage where personal matters are resolved, with the dialogue between the guests' intimate lives and external judgement forming the content of the programme. As such, the programme relied on the poor and vulnerable to populate its schedule, providing them DNA profiling tests and specialised medical care beyond their means in exchange for their participation. The paper discusses the programme's content as a means of delineating social boundaries, specifically demonising Britain's working-class. Jeremy Kyle, as eponymous host, maintained a narrow Neoliberal worldview while acting as a supreme moral arbiter over the lives of his guests. Being portrayed/Identifying himself as/Positioning himself as the sole authority in the show, he proselytised a message of puritanical individualism that was not left unchecked but was in turn validated by his live audience. The paper thus analyses the programme's position as a constructor of the 'legitimate' public: othering the lumpenproletariat in a spectacle that reminds its viewership of the consequent shame that comes from a failure to adjust to the Austerity agenda.*

**Keywords:** Neoliberalism, Propaganda, Poverty, Social Norms, Othering

### **INTRODUCTION: POVERTY SAFARI**

2019 has been a turbulent year for the United Kingdom, one whose discursive sphere has been dominated by the news of Brexit and all its concomitant political fallout. It also happens to be the same year that one of the country's most watched television programmes, *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, was cut from the ITV television network after fourteen years of its weekday broadcast. To fully understand why this happened we must look at the shifting political climate behind the move, as well as the tragic events that led to its removal from the schedule.

Due to the attendant controversy surrounding the programme, its back catalogue of episodes has been wiped from its broadcaster's archives and as such can no longer be found either on television as reruns, or on any streaming platforms. I have been able to source a dead-stock DVD copy of the programme but, due to it being intentionally edited

for the home DVD market, it neither reflects the programme as it appeared on broadcast television, or how the programme changed over its run.

Cynically it must be noted that the broadcaster's disavowal of the programme in this way prevents closer, more methodologically rigorous attention to the programme's damaging messages at this time. As such, this paper will remain a theoretical review of *The Jeremy Kyle Show* and its themes. I will be making use of sources reporting on its content while using secondary research to elucidate my comments and evince how I have been pushed to these ideas.

Taking the form of a confrontational talk show, *The Jeremy Kyle Show's* format would be familiar to nearly all television audiences, with its closest counterpart being the US talk show *The Jerry Springer Show*. Played out before both a live and televised audience, the show set itself as a public stage on which to resolve personal matters. The dialogue between the guests' intimate lives and external judgement from the mediating host, Jeremy Kyle, forms the content of the programme. Due to the nature of such subject matter, the show relied on the poor and vulnerable to populate its schedule, often drawing them on-screen by providing them DNA profiling tests and specialised medical care beyond their means.

To receive such help the participants were required to reveal their interpersonal issues for public dissection, with Jeremy Kyle presiding as the supreme moral arbiter over those put before him. Considering this authoritative position, he notably adhered to a narrow Neoliberal worldview, preaching a message of puritanical individualism that was left unchecked by his live audience who further validated it through their mob-like responses.

Consequently, many critics condemned the programme for its gladiatorial content, with a UK court judge directly describing it as "human bear-baiting" (Dowell, 2007). An apt description given that the shows entire entertainment value was seemingly derived from individuals' emotional reactions to the host's verbal denigration of their dysfunction.

In terms of its position as a reality tv programme, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* mostly did away with the compassionate undertones of its forebears, like *The Jerry Springer Show*, instead taking a more disciplinary approach (Palmer, 2003: 132). Rather than drawing attention to the misery of the poor and choosing to give them an emancipatory voice to vocalise their struggles, their narratives were engineered by the programme to fit broader narratives of fecklessness, indiscipline, and dependency. The show repeatedly presented its guests as deserving of their suffering: portraying their situations as anomalies and a direct consequence of their moral failure to adhere to middle-class social mores (Skeggs and Wood, 2008: 570). It must be noted that the concepts of selfhood and responsibility are ideologically constructed (Skeggs and Wood, 2011: 15),



and as such this programme explicitly coded humanity as the product of one's ability to contribute to the nation's economy.

Steadily growing its viewership throughout its run, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* enjoyed an audience of around a million viewers a day ("The Jeremy Kyle Show Axed by ITV After Death of Guest"), existing within a milieu that was becoming increasingly sceptical of all forms of state welfare. Wielding such a draw in viewers, its influence over public discourse was both diffuse and substantial, with studies showing that such pessimistic attitudes were altering how British children interacted and played with one another at school (Marsh and Bishop, 2014: 17).

### NEOLIBERALISM: CREATING PERSONAE NON GRATAE

Most often the coding of valid humanity is ensured through a process of 'othering', whereby the rejected individual or group is placed in opposition to the constructed 'legitimate' public (Straszak 2). In *The Jeremy Kyle Show* this dynamic is created through not only its narrative content but its framing. The camera of the programme places the viewer on the side of society, as embodied by the live audience and the authority figure of Jeremy Kyle himself. In this a difference is engendered as the gaze of the viewer is inherently one separate to its subjects, with the guests of the show being physically ostracised and placed centre-stage for the purpose of scrutiny. Making such a spectacle of individuals in this way is an exercise in norm enforcement, censoring those behaviours that do not conform to the self-policing Neoliberal agenda of wider society, while commending those that do. For instance, haranguing the unemployed for their perceived laziness while praising those who explicitly refused the state-welfare they were entitled to.

It has been posited that such blaming of the individual for all social ills first became a respectable assumption in the 1980s under then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (Jones, 2016: 74), the original harbinger of British Neoliberalism. While these thoughts were commonly accepted socially, it was not until after the Financial crisis of 2008 that they became central to the political discourse of the United Kingdom. Unusually then, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* predated the financial crisis in 2008 but was already attempting to provide solutions to it (Hill, 2015: 567).

It is within this context of economic downturn that the show rose to prominence, an element of television that offered a televisual punch to the political *bête noire* of the day, those in society living on state welfare.

Pandering to the political centre reformed by Thatcherism in the preceding decades, the incumbent British Labour party of the 2000s (the country's largest left-wing political party) had transformed itself into a Neoliberal institution. Their measures for recuperating the economy following this crisis of 2008, however, were not deemed to

have been radical enough. Voters began to look for an alternative and opted for the Conservative party with their platform of economic Austerity in coalition with the more rhetorically subdued Liberal Democrats. While the Liberal Democrat party looked to moderate some of the more severe aspects of Conservative government policy, it was the Austerity agenda that was found to resonate most with voters. As the British Social Attitudes Survey indicates, when the nation's rate of employment and wages are increasing, people generally tend to be more generous in their attitudes towards others (The Economist, 2019). As such, with employment down and wages in a sorry state, the following election in 2015 saw the Conservatives win a comfortable majority that would allow them the freedom to enact their policies to the full extent: repealing the state in the name of "fairness" (Cameron, 2011). Considering this goal, they opted to place the 'chav' myth, as portrayed by *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, at the heart of political discourse (Jones, 2016: 80), dividing the population using an 'us versus them' paradigm which sought to make a national enemy of the workless poor.

Given this political context, it is no surprise that *The Jeremy Kyle Show* became ubiquitous on British daytime television. Culturally validating the political zeitgeist and reflecting it into homes across the nation, it had a profound effect both on how we approach poverty as well as one another. The programme can be understood as Neoliberalism distilled into theatre, at once entertaining people while setting them a behavioural course to follow. For that reason, it has been conceived of as the frontrunner in what is sometimes known as "Austerity television" (Hill, 2015: 568). A set of reality TV shows that served as a technology of Austerity, restricting the social purview by reifying the world in certain Neoliberal terms that render anything beyond them inconceivable and irrational (Hill, 2015: 577). While this ideological message may not be entirely intentional, by placing it within the realm of reality television it has a genuine real-world effect because of the distinct interpenetration of structured narrative into external life.

In viewing the programme like this, as propaganda, it is much easier to recognise the ideological underpinnings of the host's various statements and interactions. From the offset Jeremy Kyle would mould his audience's opinion through his introduction of each guest, setting them each within implied theatrical roles in the pursuit of melodrama (Fitzgerald, 2012: 152). Such a casting of roles, with villains, heroes, and victims maintains and reinforces a moral framework around the guests, and by extension, the audience watching them. These moral narrative frames are used to generalise the participants' behaviour in order to conjure up a communal understanding of accountability in the external audience (Fitzgerald, 2012: 158). Typically, this means blaming individuals for the issues at hand, thereby forwarding the idea that systemic inequalities play no role in the causation of social deprivation. A message further facilitated by the show's highly editorialised nature. As has been revealed in an ongoing House of Commons inquest, the host's active provocation of his guests was intentionally removed from the final cut of the programme ("Jeremy Kyle Show Guests Treated like

Criminal Suspects, MP Claims”), thus reinforcing participants’ positions as villains in the televised drama.

### **A BLACK AND WHITE WORLD: US VERSUS THEM**

The programme’s overall narrative presented a Manichean reality: reducing the world to a rigid dichotomy between absolute right and absolute wrong. To add a faux-empiricism to the determination of these two moral categories the programme employed the use of drug, paternity and polygraph tests. While the scientific validity of the former two is well founded, the same cannot be said for the latter. The use of polygraph tests (or lie-detector tests as they are more commonly known) to discern the absolute truth in the complex situations presented on the show caused a large share of the controversy surrounding the programme.

While each individual use of a lie-detector was attended by an on-screen disclaimer about their inconsistent level of accuracy, Jeremy Kyle apparently swore by the test and as such treated their outcome as categorical fact (Sweney, 2019). Rather cynically, this hard-line acceptance of polygraph tests as irrefutable evidence was pivotal for *The Jeremy Kyle Show*’s content; Kyle’s moral outrage could either be justified by the test results or turned more widely towards those that might be guilty externally beyond the show. As drug use affects polygraph test results, it also had the added benefit of revealing drug problems that may have been otherwise hidden from the host’s ire. For these reasons its place in the show became sacrosanct as the spectacular narrative turns it could create were manifold.

The lead spectacle of each episode, however, was what Andrew Tolson described in his analysis of the programme as the host’s “harangues” (2013: 274). Harangues, put more simply, are Jeremy Kyle’s frequent shouting attacks against the present parties found to be guilty of moral infractions. A spectacularly impolite gesture of aggression that often acts as the narrative denouement of each individual story, an act that concretises the host’s authority over the participants as the live audience joins him in these moments through cheering and jeering. The intention of such speech events is to shame those on screen, demarcating social boundaries through the stigmatisation of those deemed inadequate.

The programme itself had an issue with class. Jeremy Kyle himself has experienced many of the issues that have appeared on the show: be it his gambling addiction and subsequent divorce (“Jeremy Kyle’s Controversial Talk Show Made Him a Daytime TV Stalwart”), or his third marriage to his children’s nanny (Kazi, 2018). He, however, is not the individual on trial. These behaviours remain undiscussed because they jeopardise the binary between him and his guests. As has been noted by Pierre Bourdieu, “the antithesis between culture and bodily pleasure (or our nature) is rooted

in the opposition between the cultivated bourgeoisie and ‘the people’” (1986: 490). That is to say, class is performative. While Jeremy Kyle and many of his guests’ behaviour is not unsimilar, their different abilities to express and conceal this behaviour are dictated by their respective access to economic, social and cultural capital.

*The Jeremy Kyle Show*, as such, serves as a microcosm for class as negotiated under late capitalism. While the show’s guests are willing to participate, they hold little control over how they are portrayed or used, with the show’s producers allegedly going as far as to give them outfits to wear on stage (Morris 2019).

The cartoonish character of so many stories on the programme serves to reinforce class stereotypes and dehumanise those living in poverty by presenting them in a freakish manner. This is instanced in stories such as “Have I been having Sex with my Brother?” when a homosexual couple found out via DNA profiling that they were half-siblings, an extremely sensitive trauma that could have remained private had the men been able to finance the test themselves (Barrie 2016), and “I was Trolled on Twitter because of my Teeth!” (“The Jeremy Kyle Show: Gemma Shows Off Her New Teeth”, 2019). Ironically, it must be mentioned that this second story about the woman’s teeth was a direct result of an earlier appearance on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* itself. In this example, the individual had not received any dental work following a childhood accident that caused significant damage to her teeth. Given that all dentistry services are free of charge for children in the UK this might indicate that the woman was subject to neglect. As an adult, however, such procedures were beyond her financial means, so the show paid for her corrective surgeries and brought her back onto the stage to demonstrate the care they provide their guests.

Crucially, such a case as this concerns the explicitly physical. Due to the nature of how mental health is expressed and treated, the programme could not visually present radical recoveries in the same way they could with physical injuries. As such, the sometimes-poor mental health of guests was downplayed in many cases for the dual purpose of filling the programme’s schedule while forwarding the narrative that those issues are a result of an individual’s own lack of fortitude (Reynolds, 2019). This worryingly paralleled the government’s approach to mental health at the time, with cuts to welfare significantly more likely to discriminate against those with non-physical ailments (Campbell, 2019). As such, the inability of guests to follow the mantra of self-help, be it due to mental illness or otherwise, meant that the only course of action available to them was to be ritually humiliated by the host and his self-described “hard-truths”.

Further to this strict adherence to the Neoliberal metanarrative of health, the private sector was presented as the answer to any problem that could not be solved by the individual alone. Excoriating his detractors for accusing him of exploiting his guests, Jeremy Kyle would offer his rebuttal by providing private health care solutions for his guests’ issues: his means of ameliorating the humiliation doled out for entertainment

purposes. In this, the private sector became increasingly represented as the only answer to a failing state health service, aptly complementing the ethos of the Conservative party in their pursuit of a privatised economy (Stratton, 2019).

The humiliation of those rendered ‘useless’ was what popularised the programme. Working as a visual reminder that your lot in life could in fact be worse while redirecting widespread discontent with the state of Britain away from those in power and towards the newly-stereotyped image of the workless poor.

*The Jeremy Kyle Show* actively normalised Austerity measures, presenting the working class as different to you as the viewer in a manner that looked to hide its classist foundations behind the notion of a classless society. In the pre-welfarist discourse of Neoliberalism one must be sufficiently entrepreneurial to mitigate a reduced level of opportunity (Tolson 2013, 285). The socially excluded are not meant to vocalise their suffering because it may humanise those unfortunate enough to not be favoured in such a system. *The Jeremy Kyle Show* enables this discourse by presenting the voice of the excluded in a warped manner that validates rather than refutes the hegemonic system.

Ultimately, however, it is the show’s use of personal trauma to entertain that generated its demise. Appearing on the programme to convince his fiancée he had not been unfaithful to her, Steve Dymond took a polygraph test that found he had lied and had in fact slept with someone. A week after the programme was recorded, he had taken his own life (Taylor 2019). It is this tragic event that finally pushed the programme’s broadcaster, ITV, to reconsider *The Jeremy Kyle Show*’s position in their schedule. Under increasing backlash from the public and media regarding their treatment of reality television participants, ITV sought to ringfence their other popular reality production, *Love Island* by ending its daytime flagship that had become too flagrantly unpalatable.

## CONCLUSION: A FORMAT RENEWED

The present timing of *The Jeremy Kyle Show*’s cancellation is particularly salient given that it mirrors an overall change in mood currently ongoing in the UK’s political discourse. With Brexit looming large on the landscape, welfare cheats and petty fraudsters are no longer the polemic punching bags of British politics that they once were. The new victim of the British political zeitgeist is the foreigner, more specifically the migrant worker.

The highly visible effects of the Conservative party’s regime of economic Austerity are found nationwide in the proliferation of food banks (*Trussell Trust*), the massive rise in homelessness (*Shelter*), as well as the increase in the rate of suicide and preventable deaths (Hiam, Dorling, Harrison, and McKee, 2017). An increase that according to the ‘Institute for Public Policy Research’ amounts to more than 130 000 deaths since 2012 (Helm, 2019). Between 2010 and 2015 direct cuts to welfare amounted to around £30

billion, the equivalent of more than 1% of the UK's Gross Domestic Product (The Economist 2019). Cuts following the 2015 election subsequently increased in severity resulting in over one in five Britons now living in poverty as of this year (Social Metrics Commission, 2019).

Such a scathing reduction in spending has resulted in a cultural shift. The damage wrought by cuts across the nation has made our society recognise that welfare safety nets do not cultivate dependence. As we do not live in a utopia, a level of dependence will always be present within society; ignoring this fact only creates a more divided and unhappy nation.

Denying the existence of class obstructs attempts to confront it openly. Rather than promote dialogue, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* had the converse effect of silencing it. As times changed the programme did not, which consequently has left this ideological behemoth dead in the water. While this has been a cause to rejoice for those protesting its very existence from the start, Jeremy Kyle's career looks to recover with a new programme commissioned for television as early as next year (Rosseinsky, 2019). *The Jeremy Kyle Show* has become a tainted property, but not so much as to taint the man himself.

With the public becoming increasingly cognisant of the government's discriminatory attitude towards poverty the media passed the burden of guilt to the new bogeyman, the European Union. The issue became not the existence of welfare, but of who should be able to access this welfare; not the perceived uselessness of the poor, but that immigrants had taken the country's jobs. As such, Jeremy Kyle's new programme may look to capitalise on this new train of hegemonic thought. A typical assumption being that it will be more like his other television series *The Kyle Files*, a series of current affairs investigations that usually centred around topics enveloped in mass hysteria, ostensibly adding to it.

Through the course of this essay I have described the ways in which *The Jeremy Kyle Show* constructed the concept of the 'legitimate' public and how its parameters are directly tied to, and negotiated by, the socio-political conditions of their time. The programme itself functioned as a means of further narrativizing our world as portrayed by the media, and as such should be understood as an important cultural text in its refraction of the day's status quo.

The Jeremy Kyle Show's complete removal from the archives impedes deeper empirical investigation into the programme presently, pushing us to move more into the discussion of its sociological impact. For content analysis one can turn to Atkinson and Sumnall's paper 'Neo-Liberal Discourse of Substance Use in the UK Reality Show, *The Jeremy Kyle Show*'. Written a year before the programme's cancellation, it holds an important experimental purchase on the series. The authors of the research plot the ways in which those using recreational drugs are stigmatised and 'othered' through the representation of substance users by *The Jeremy Kyle Show*.

Sampling footage over a month-long period, they found that the show overtly problematised drug users: associating them with a narrow set of characteristics such as being jobless and prone to criminality (Atkinson and Sumnall 2018, 19). They were dehumanised by framing their substance use as a rational individual choice while obscuring structural causes found behind such choices (Atkinson and Sumnall 2018, 21). As such, those willing to accept that addiction was their choice were those treated most favourably by both Jeremy Kyle and his audience (Atkinson and Sumnall 2018, 20). Atkinson and Sumnall's content analysis ultimately reveals that *The Jeremy Kyle Show* proselytised a reductionist understanding of substance use, acting as a 'cultural resource' for its viewers to draw on in their own dealings with drug users (2018: 24).

Conceptualising the programme as a cultural resource importantly highlights its very-real effect on society and discourse. The behaviours scrutinised on the show were always shown to be acted out by those from lower socio-economic groups, thereby stigmatising such people and strengthening class boundaries.

Reflecting further on the public response to the programme reveals how entrenched such dim views about the poor were at the time, with the programme only receiving eleven viewer complaints worthy of investigation during a run of over 3300 episodes on TV (Martinson, 2019). What we can now take away from this programme's run is the ease with which reductive arguments are accepted in the public domain. Kyle's childish moral framework regarding social dysfunction made sense to many exactly because it ignored the social dimensions of poverty and offered easy answers to it during pressing economic times. Some might argue that the show's cancellation marks a cultural turning point but with a new Jeremy Kyle programme already commissioned, I would not be so sure.

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## PROBLEM SJEĆANJA U ROMANU ČRNA MATI ZEMLA KRISTIJANA NOVAKA

### Sažetak

*Roman Črna mati zemla Kristijana Novaka otvara pitanje sjećanja kao središnjega problema radnje romana. Glavni lik romana, Matija Dolenčec, upleten u vlastitu zbrku laži kojima otkriva postojanje iskrivljenih i lažnih sjećanja nastoji pronaći put do vlastite istine. Strašni događaji i traume iz djetinjstva prouzrokovali su emociju straha te ujedno bijeg od samoga sebe, društva i vlastite prošlosti što je ostavilo znatan trag u Matijinim sjećanjima. Da bi postao ispunjena osoba sposobna nositi se sa sadašnjošću, Matija mora pronaći samoga sebe. Tako bolan prekid veze postaje poticaj za dosjećanje djetinjstva te rad na vlastitim sjećanjima jer su upravo sjećanja, iskrivljena i potisnuta, razlog neprepoznavanja vlastitoga sebe i ujedno sastavnica koja onemogućava Matijino osobno ostvarenje. Rad analizira element pamćenja, odnosno sjećanja te ga nastoji povezati s povijesti, mjestom sjećanja, strahom i lažnim sjećanjima.*

**Ključne riječi:** dosjećanje, lažna sjećanja, mjesta sjećanja, sjećanje, strah

### UVOD

Problematika sjećanja i pamćenja ima dugu tradiciju proučavanja najprije u psihologiji, ali i sociologiji te antropologiji koje se bave proučavanjem čovjeka i društva. Naime, pamćenje je jedan od temeljnih mehanizama kako bi se održala međugeneracijska komunikacija kojom se temeljne vrijednosti i društvene norme prenose sa starije generacije na mlađe članove zajednice. O suvremenome odnosu prema prošlosti i pamćenju piše Joško Božanić (2014) bilježeći kako postupak prisjećanja djeluje kao nastavak i aktualizacija prošlosti, a njezinim prekidanjem „prošlost nam se nadaje kao radikalno drugo, kao svijet od kojeg smo zauvijek odsječeni“ (Božanić, 2014: 343). Odmak od prošlosti pojedinac može nadoknaditi u kontinuumu kolektivne memorije u obliku „papirnatoga pamćenja“ koje nadoknađuje gubitke ljudske memorije. U slučaju kada nema pisanoga traga, pamćenje je podložno varijacijama, dodavanjem i

izostavljanjem detalja ili pak pamćenjem fragmenata na kojima se svaki put iznova gradi nova priča. Pamćenje i prošlost neodvojivo su povezane s pripovijedanjem, a pisane tragove pripovijedanja pronalazimo u književnosti. Djela nastala u određenim književno-povijesnim razdobljima u teorijama književnosti povezuju se s većom ili manjom povezanošću s istinom i/ili fikcijom, odnosno paćenjem i sjećanjem. Prema tome ključu možemo čitati i djelo *Črna mati zemla*.

Roman *Črna mati zemla* Kristijana Novaka otvara pitanje sjećanja kao središnjega problema radnje romana. Upleten u vlastitu zbrku laži kojima otkriva postojanje vlastitih iskivljenih i lažnih sjećanja glavni lik romana, Matija Dolenčec, nastoji pronaći put do vlastite istine. Matija, mladi pisac, proživljava traumu zbog prekida s djevojkom Dinom, a u isto vrijeme pati od spisateljske blokade i nemogućnosti osmišljavanja priče. Traumatična prošlost obilježena tragedijom očeva gubitka dovela ga je do rastrojenoga stanja zbog kojeg još kao dijete s majkom i sestrom odlazi iz malenoga međimurskog grada u Zagreb. Nikada dokraja ispričana priča prošlosti, puna sjećanja na tragične događaje, dovela je do potrebe za iscjeljenjem. Prisjećanje vlastite povijesti obilježeno je tuđim pričama kojima treba doći do vlastite istine. Matija tako postaje primjer kako pojedinac pamti, kako na njega utječu događaji koji se oko njega zbivaju, osjetljiva dječja dob i trauma te fragmentalnost sjećanja. Pojam istine, odnosno njezine odsutnosti, usko je povezan s „heterogenom strukturom“ romana (Matek, 2016: 46) u kojima se propituje istinitost događaja ovisno o tome tko je percipira, interpretira te kakve su okolnosti. S istinom je tako usko povezano pamćenje zajednice, ali i pojedinca, u ovome slučaju Matije Dolenčeca. U ovome se radu tako analizira element pamćenja odnosno sjećanja u Novakovu romanu te ga se nastoji povezati s povijesti, mjestom sjećanja, strahom i lažnim sjećanjima.

## PAMĆENJE I(LI) SJEĆANJE

Odrednica koja čovjeka čini čovjekom upravo je sposobnost pamćenja. Pojedinac ima potrebu pripadati široj zajednici kako bi se s njome mogao poistovjetiti što može postići ima li izgrađeno zajedničko pamćenje. Za Halbwachsa pojedinac je nositelj ili subjekt pamćenja (u Assmann 2006: 52). On ujedno razlučuje individualno od kolektivnoga pamćenja, premda su u biti neodvojivi jedno od drugoga. Individualno je utoliko individualno ukoliko stvara jedinstvenu vezu kolektivnih pamćenja unutar samoga kolektivnoga pamćenja kao mjesta pamćenja koja su na poseban način povezana i koja tvore cjelokupno kolektivno pamćenje (Assmann, 2006: 53). Assmann (u Bašović, 2015: 284), govoreći o individualnome sjećanju, naglašava kako su za stvaranje vlastitoga identiteta nužna vlastita sjećanja koje se temelje na iskustvima i odnosima koji se potom grade i učvršćuju u komunikaciji te posljedično sudjeluju u stvaranju kolektivnoga pamćenja.

Pamćenje je uvijek temeljeno na stvaranju slike koja se sastoji od mjesta događaja i/ili osoba (Assmann, 2006: 54) jer se tako očituje istinitost situacije o kojoj se govori te ona tako dobiva svoj vremenski i prostorni okvir, ima svoje aktere i stoga se može rekonstruirati. Kako bismo pripadali jednima, moramo se odvojiti od onih drugih, a to činimo tako što stvaramo zajednicu koja ima svoja uvjerenja, značajke, vjerovanja, moral i pravila temeljena na ranijim artefaktima. Težnja za pripadanjem najjasnije se očituje u potrebi za grupiranjem, a potom iz njihova zajedništva saznajemo što je vrijedno pamćenja: „Budući da je potreba za grupiranjem elementaran oblik ljudskoga ponašanja, društvena i humanistička propitkivanja pamćenja oslanjaju se na pojedinčevu involviranost u zajednicu“ (Smolčić, 2019: 83). Na tome tragu oblikuje se sjećanje u romanu Kristijana Novaka, *Črna mati zemla*. Novakov roman gotovo da arhivira autobiografsko sjećanje glavnoga lika, koje je u „relaciji s određenim kolektivnim i kulturnim pamćenjima društvene sredine“ (Smolčić, 2019: 83) unutar koje je egzistirao, a kojoj se treba vratiti. Da bi njegovo sjećanje bilo potpuno i da bi tvorilo istinsko pamćenje, potrebno je shvatiti što je to kolektiv u kojemu je odrastao smatrao vrijednim pamćenja, što su dijelili pojedinci i koji su artefakti ostali kao podsjetnik na razdoblje njegova odrastanja. Kako se Matija nastojao svojim životom odmaknuti od kolektiva, tako su njegova pamćenja raspršena, odvojena od kolektiva i tu je nastao jaz koji se ne može prevladati ne vrati li se na početak. Vraćanjem u kolektiv i pamćenjem onoga što ta zajednica smatra važnim prešutno se prihvaćaju i sve norme, djelovanja i rituali. Glavni junak, Matija Dolenčec, svoju pripadnost kolektivu međimurskoga sela potisnuo je u dubine koje je uzrokovala trauma. Naime, njegovo individualno sjećanje fikcija je koju samostalno oblikuje kao odrasla osoba jer je dječja trauma stvorila prevelik procjep. Kako bi pripadao drugima, svijetu odraslih u kojemu živi kao suvremeni pisac, mora se odvojiti od onih prvih, mora se odvojiti od prošlosti i stvoriti novu, onu koja će mu više odgovarati, a svoj pomalo neodgovoran i nejasan odnos prema sjećanju definirao je jednom jednostavnom izjavom: „Moja sva sjećanja su takva. Potrgana. Zato smišljam priče, jebi ga“ (Novak, 2017: 59). Nora (2007: 153) naglašava kako se do otkrića vlastite istine dolazi baš onda kada se spozna kolika je otuđenost od vlastitih sjećanja. Stoga je samo priznanje potrganosti vlastitih sjećanja pravi put k istini, odnosno otkrivanju vlastite povijesti.

## PAMĆENJE I POVIJEST

U novije se vrijeme sve češće postavlja distinkcija između pojma povijesti i pojma pamćenja. Upravo u tome odmaku Pierre Nora vidi razliku i u svojem članku *Između pamćenja i historije; Problematika mjesta* (2006: 24–25) piše kako povijest počinje ondje gdje prestaje pamćenje. Zato pamćenje čini uvijek onaj socijalni vid interakcije koji je podložan promjenama potreba društva, sklon različitim interpretacijama i manipulacijama, ali i povremenim amnezijama. Povijest je pak ona koja rekonstruira ono čega više nema i zato pripada samo prošlosti. Pamćenje, za razliku od povijesti, pripada sadašnjosti koja se vezuje uz prošlost čime postaje jedan vid kontinuiteta i

stalnost u ovome nesigurnom svijetu. Pamćenje je zato uvijek sumnjičavo prema povijesti jer povijest lišava prošlost osjećaja kako bi bila što objektivnija i realnija, no za pamćenje to predstavlja gubitak dijela identiteta.

Danas gotovo da ne možemo govoriti o pamćenju u strogome smislu te riječi. Kada govorimo o današnjemu pamćenju, ono je više povijest nego li što je istinsko pamćenje jer iako se ne može odvojiti od pamćenja, sva današnja događanja i iskustva manje su internalizirana u ljudskoj nutрини nego ikada ranije. Danas je malo toga vrijedno i bitno pamćenja, ali je zato vrlo dobro zabilježeno u fotografijama, snimkama i drugim multimedijским pristupima. Stoga je istinu moguće potražiti upravo u materijalnim dokazima, „papirnatom pamćenju“, koje je prava brana od zaboravljanja prošlosti. Matija je vlastitu povijest mogao pronaći u crtežima i slikama koje je kao dijete crtao i pisao, a koje je njegova sestra sačuvala i kojih se on uopće nije sjećao. To se najbolje vidi u sljedećemu citatu: „Matija pogleda u crteže i u njemu se, nakon prvog tupila, iz sekunde u sekundu javlja sve jača jeza. Bili su to dječji prikazi brutalnih scena sakaćenja, maltretiranja, vjerojatno smrti, ali sasvim sigurno fizičke patnje i bola“ (Novak, 2017: 75). Iz navedenoga je citata jasno kako Matijino pamćenje nije internalizirano, ali ostali su slikovni zapisi kako se osjećaji i zbivanja iz prošlosti ne bi zaboravili, no Matiji je i to pošlo za rukom. Trauma je bila toliko snažna da su i skriveni crteži, koji prikazuju prošlost, ostali davno zakopani i zaboravljeni. Matija je svoju prošlost oduvijek iznova kreativno opisivao različitim izmišljenim pričama, no okidač koji ga je potaknuo na preispitivanje vlastite prošlosti bio je prekid s djevojkom Dinom. Freud objašnjava kako se događa „da ljudi zbog nekog traumatičnog događaja koji uzdrma temelje njihova dotadašnjega života dospijevaju u stanje obamrlosti, da u njima nestaje svako zanimanje za sadašnjost i budućnost, te da ostaju trajno duševno zaokupljeni prošlošću“ (Freud, 2000: 293).

Mogli bismo zato reći da današnja sjećanja postaju arhivistička građa do koje će nekad u budućnosti biti puno lakše doći, a samim time postaju i više kolektivna nego li individualna. Svijest o potrebi arhivističke građe jača je zato no ranije jer bi nam mogla u određenome trenutku zatrebati, ali to je i razlog zašto vrlo loše ili slabo pamtimo. Ponekad se zato čini da uzorke događanja možemo primijetiti tek kada o tome postoje zapisi koje će tko pronaći i analizirati, ali rijetko tko će ih se sjetiti. Čovjek svoje misli i znanja zapisuje u knjigama koje su alat pamćenja. Pamćenje se vezuje za sjećanja koja pak impliciraju pripovijedanje, kazivanje/prikazivanje, stoga se može smatrati da je „književnost pamćenje, te pamćenje/sjećanje može biti književnost; a pamćenje književnosti postoji kroz kanonizaciju“ (Pavlović, 2011: 113). Navedeno nas navodi na zaključak da se pamćenje traži u pisanoj riječi, a upravo je u svojim riječima Matija mogao iščitati prošlost te dokučiti vlastita pamćenja. U kutiji crteža i zapisa, sestra je pred njega stavila sljedeći zapis: „Preveć čuda sega je okoli mene i bojim se ka bum se zgubijo v našoj hiži ali v našemo vrto jer su stvari i namješta i drejva i životinje već nej takše kakše su predi bile. Ve mi saka stvar oče neka reći. Stalno samo povejdajo vmes. Nega nemrem tau već poslušati, pomorjo bom“ (Novak, 2017: 75). Pročitavši vlastite

riječi, Matija je osjetio nagon za povraćanjem, a ta je nesvjesna reakcija dokaz prisjećanja neželjene prošlosti.

## POVIJEST I MJESTA SJEĆANJA

Halbwachs (2011: 148) pamćenje definira kao rekonstrukciju prošlosti podacima iz sadašnjosti. Sjećanja, kako ne bi bila samo fantazija, povezuje s mjestom ističući kako bi bilo vrlo teško opisati događaj ne zamisli li pojedinac mjesto događaja. Premda sjećanja mogu biti fantastična, mjesto je stvarni konstrukt njihova ostvarenja. Dakle, mjesto je stvaran konstrukt koji omogućuje lokaliziranje i potvrđivanje sjećanja. Roman započinje policijskim zapisom o osam samoubojstava koja su se dogodila u jednome međimurskome selu uvodeći nas tako, na prvi pogled, u zbiljski svijet ističući kako je o spomenutim samoubojstvima bilo riječi i u televizijskim emisijama te su čak bila predmet znanstvenih istraživanja. Topos sjećanja Matije Dolenčeca njegov je rodni kraj Međimurje u koji nas Novak uvodi odmah u prvoj rečenici *Proslova*: „U jednom je međimurskom selu na južnoj obali Mure od sredine svibnja do konca lipnja 1991. godine zabilježeno ukupno osam samoubojstava“ (Novak, 2017: 11). Postupkom lokalizacije Novak ističe da je riječ o istinitoj priči što sama lokalizacija potvrđuje svojim postojanjem. Novak je Međimurje odmah na početku romana postavio u kontekst ubojstava i samoubojstava te je negativnost ambijenta potvrdio iskazima žitelja:

Kao prvo, vjeruje se da su depresija i suicidalno ponašanje češći u područjima između dviju rijeka, gdje ima mnogo podzemnih voda koje u razdobljima obilnih kiša odnosno suše mogu značajno utjecati na promjenu raspoloženja stanovnika. Međutim, svjetska istraživanja epidemiologije suicida do sada nisu potvrdila tu tezu. Drugi je mogući uzrok koji spominju ispitanici učestala magla koja se osobito u jesen i proljeće gotovo svakoga jutra diže od rijeke Mure i za lošijeg vremena ostaje u selu izuzetno dugo, ponekad i u popodnevним satima. To u nekih stanovnika može prouzročiti vidni promjene ponašanja. (Novak 2017: 14).

Međimurje je tako specifično mjesto sjećanja u romanu, ono u kojem su proživljeni strašni događaji i traume te posljedično mjesto svih onih negativnih sjećanja od kojih se promjenom lokaliteta nastojalo pobjeći. Osim toga, u Matijinom svakodnevnom životu Međimurje je ostalo mjesto početka, ali ne i povratka što je vidljivo u dijalogu s Dinom:

- Saka rit dojde na šekret. Tak se veli v Međimurju. I to nesmiš pozabiti, ak misliš biti međimurska sneha.
- A ti si mi neki Međimurec. Ti veliš da si Međimurec samo kad opravdavaš što ne znaš pisati č i ć i ije i je. Ili kad su ti purgeri bahati pametnjakovići. Uostalom, kad si zadnji put bio tamo?
- ... (Novak 2017: 41)

Navedeni citat potvrđuje da u Matiji postoji pamćenje na Međimurje kao topos, mjesto odrastanja, koje je zbiljsko iako udaljeno u njegovim sjećanjima, a to potvrđuje Dinin komentar da je Međimurje opravdanje kada ne nalazi ono istinsko. Dininim se komentarom tako gotovo pokušava izjednačiti lokalitet s lažnim sjećanjima u koja se vraća kad mu trenutna stvarnost ne odgovara.

## AUTOBIOGRAFSKO SJEĆANJE I PROBLEM TRAUME

Najveći izazov sjećanja sebe, odnosno autobiografskoga sjećanja koje se uvijek gradi kao konstrukt pojedinca u odnosu s drugima, čine drugi koji su dio sjećanja, ali ujedno i naratori tih događanja. Matijino je prisjećanje, odnosno preispitivanje prošlosti, započelo nesvjesno u snovima što potvrđuje i citat: „Zaboravljene stvari počele su se javljati, jedna po jedna, u slutnjama i snovima. U početku je mislio da dolaze iz sadašnjosti, ne iz prošlosti, i da ne pripadaju njemu nego nekom drugom“ (Novak, 2017: 38) kada bi se iz sna osvijestio „... dezorijentiran bi se uspravio u krevetu i zurio u tamu, nervozno bi tražio prekidač lampe, pokušavao fokusirati bilo koji stvaran predmet i uvjeriti se da to nije utvara“ (Novak, 2017: 38). Upravo te pojavnosti stvarnih (zaboravljenih) slika iz prošlosti u snovima Freud opisuje traumatskim neurozama u čijem se temelju nalazi fiksiranje na trenutak traumatične nesreće. Smatra kako takvi „bolesnici redovito u svojim snovima obnavljaju traumatsku situaciju; tamo, gdje se događaju napadi histerijskog oblika koji dopuštaju analizu, ispostavlja se da napad odgovara potpunom premještanju osobe u tu situaciju“ (Freud, 2010: 292). Tako Matija ne može progovarati o svojoj prošlosti, a da pri tome ne govori o društvenome kontekstu svoje najuže obitelji, a potom i širega mjesnog kolektiva. Relacijama koje su stvorene u društvu osvještava svoje razlike, ali i sličnosti stvarajući svoj personalni i individualni identitet. Personalni se identitet pritom odnosi na „skup svih uloga, svojstava i kompetencija koje padaju na pojedinca tijekom njegova uzgobljivanja u specifičnu konstelaciju socijalnoga ustrojstva“, a individualni je „slika izgrađena i čuvana u svijesti pojedinca koja ga razlikuje od drugih“ (Smolčić, 2019: 84 prema Assman, 2005: 153). Tako se nesvjesna slika o sebi dovodi na razinu refleksivnoga, a Smolčić će to objasniti referirajući se na Boyera koji „epizodičko pamćenje poistovjećuje sa situacijama koje je subjekt doživio u prošlosti, u što se ubrajaju osobna iskustva i specifični događaji, kao i ljudi s kojima je ostvario interakciju na određenome prostoru i tijekom određenoga vremena“ (Smolčić, 2019: 84). U određenoj situaciji koja podrazumijeva interakciju s okolinom, naglašava se osobno iskustvo, a to će Nora nazvati transferom pamćenja. Transfer pamćenja kod Novakova Matije došao je do određene vrste zapreke, odnosno nije se u potpunosti realizirao i zato dolazi do problematike u sadašnjosti jer ga ne revitalizira tijekom odnosa u sadašnjosti, nego ga kao traumatično iskustvo zatamljava duboko u sebi. Stjecanje znanja o osobnome identitetu pod utjecajem je komunikacije s okolinom kako bi se autobiografsko pamćenje procesima narativizacije modeliralo u smislenu cjelinu koja se dijeli s drugima, odnosno u vlastitu životnu priču. Pritom se kod Matije javlja problem

iskrivljavanja autobiografskoga pamćenja iz jednostavnoga razloga – zbivanja su organizirana oko vlastite slike, a ona je nepotpuna i nedovršena (Smolčić, 2019: 85).

Glavni lik, kako smo već naveli, ujedno je i pripovjedač koji doživljava rascjep unutar svojega identiteta, a to dovodi do intimnih kriza sa samim sobom, ali i s osobom do koje mu je stalo, djevojke Dine. Da bi uspio prevladati ljubavnu krizu, svjestan je da mora prevladati krizu identiteta i doći do „pravoga ja“ kako bi mogao ostvariti svoj život. Prevladavanje krize identiteta moguće je samo povratkom korijenima: „Za pamćenje, kojim nastoji uspostaviti odnos prema vlastitome identitetu, nužno je povezivanje s korijenima“ (Smolčić, 2019: 86), stoga se Matija okreće sestri, krvnomu srodstvu koje je činilo najbližu zajednicu kojoj se treba vratiti kako bi ponovno uspostavio ravnotežu. Krvna povezanost prema Jollesu sugerira naslijeđe, stoga se ističu tri važna elementa: podrijetlo, nasljedstvo i osobe koje su povezane u „obiteljsku materijalnu baštinu, koja simbolizira pamćenje i tradiciju te svjedoči o vremenskom kontinuitetu obitelji“ (Smolčić, 2019: 86). Odnosi u obitelji rezultat su individualnih i kolektivnih pamćenja jer se preko ceremonija osigurava da se vrijednosti pojedine obitelji, a potom na višoj razini i društva, prenosi s generacije na generaciju što potvrđuje i citat:

Stoga se obitelj može poimati ne samo materijalnim oblikom pamćenja, što ovjerava svojom demografskom strukturom, nego i funkcionalnim, budući da osigurava prijenos uspomena, kao i simboličkim jer iskustvom koje je doživio manji broj ljudi obilježava većinu koja nije izravno sudjelovala u konkretnome iskustvu, a dijeli iste ili slične prakse. (Smolčić, 2019: 86).

Obitelj se kao zajednica narušava očevom smrću kada Matijina majka ostaje mlada udovica s dvoje malene djece. Ta trauma narušila je obiteljske odnose na mikrorazini, ali i odrazila na razini kolektiva, odnosno potvrdila već narušene društvene norme. Raspadom jedne obitelji prijenos uspomena nije dovršen i utječe na distorzije u sjećanju mladoga člana odnosno Matije.

## LAŽNA SJEĆANJA

U sjećanjima mogu nastati distorzije te tada govorimo o fenomenu lažnoga sjećanja čiji su mogući uzroci nastanka „nejasni tragovi pamćenja, pripisivanje pogrešnog izvora informacija zbog lakoće procesiranja, općenito pogreške u motrenju izvora informacije te upotreba shema pri upamćivanju“ (Vranić, Tonković 2002: 19). Fenomen lažnoga pamćenja sve se češće proučava u vidu svjedoka, no teorija je primjenjiva i u ključu psihoanalitičkoga čitanja kao svojevrstan primjer stvaranja sjećanja na temelju fragmenata koji su tek dijelom proživljenog događaja, ali i plod mašte, prepričanih događaja iz tuđe perspektive i preuzimanja kao svojih ili pak shema preuzeta iz dosadašnjih iskustava kako bi se stvorio događaj vrijedan pamćenja (Yamada i Itsukushima, 2013: 280). Moguće je, ali i nije objašnjivo kako se to događa, da se pojedinac uvjeri da je što ranije vidio, čuo ili doživio, a da se to zapravo uopće nije



dogodilo (usp. Vranić i Tonković, 2012). U tome ključnu ulogu ima početak romana koji stvara okvir za priču unutar koje će se radnja premjestiti u prošlost. Roman započinje rezultatima antropološko-sociološkoga istraživanja po kojem se bilježi da je tijekom 1991. godine u malenome međimurskom selu zabilježeno osam samoubojstava u razdoblju mjesec dana. Time se sugerira da je trauma dio kolektiva, a ne samo pojedinca, i da je kao takva istinita i objektivna konstanta na temelju koje se grade sve priče. Znanstveni diskurs, pripovijedanje u trećemu licu i objektivnost naracije daju „ispriku“ situaciji u kojoj se Matija našao – i kao spisatelj i kao ljubavnik. Početak tako djeluje kao protuteža ostatku svim kasnijim događajima i izmišljenim sjećanjima. Izgubljen u stvaranju svojega izmišljenog svijeta Matija kao da gubi sebe. Dina se zato, u potrazi za pravom istinom, odlučuje poslužiti metodom film/priča iz metaanalize Westermanna i sur. (1996 u Vranić, Tonković, 2012: 29) kojom se od sudionika traži da pogledaju i/ili poslušaju određeni sadržaj koji bi trebao izazvati željeni afekt. Tako Dina, želeći saznati više o njegovoj prošlosti odlučuje ispisati fotografije neke obitelji te ih pokazati Matiji i predstaviti ih kao slike njegove obitelji kako bi vidjela njegovu reakciju. Obiteljske fotografije pokretači su sjećanja koji govore o sadašnjosti jednako kao i o prošlosti (Belaj 2008: 145). No, Matija toliko zavučen u svoj svijet laže: „Čim sam vidio sliku, prve tri sekunde ne kopčam niš, onda vidim svoje lice ili neki poznati detalj, samo mi se pojavi... i ja počnem govoriti“ (Novak, 2017: 58). Ključ otkrivanja onoga što fotografija predstavlja upravo je u njezinu nesvjesnome i trenutnome dekodiranju koje dovodi do njezine promjene kada ona prestaje biti „zbunjujući konglomerat“, odnosno prestaje biti nedefinirana te postaje „stvar, kojoj pripisujemo puni identitet, biće“ (Burgin, 2011: 106-107).

Pogrešno pripisivanje zbog lakoće procesiranja jedna je od teorija koja opisuje nastanak lažnih sjećanja. Naime, prema ovoj teoriji distorzije u sjećanju nastaju zbog „naizgledne lakoće obrade neke informacije“, odnosno zbog osjećaja poznatosti nastalom zadavanjem kritične riječi (Jacoby, Kelley i Dywan, 1989 u Vranić, Tonković, 2012: 20). Navedenim možemo objasniti i Matijine distorzije u pamćenju. Dakle, Matija kako bi sastavio svoju priču mora se koristiti poznatim te tako preko „poznatoga detalja“ uspijeva složiti konstrukt svoje priče lažnih sjećanja. Stoga se Matija oslanja na osjećaj poznatosti te tako prepoznavanjem već otprije znanih motiva u svakodnevnom životu nastoji složiti svoju životnu priču. Motive poznatoga uočavamo i u sljedećemu citatu: „Ugledam crnu zemlju na tenisici, kao onda kad smo šetali pokraj nasipa i znam da je to povezano s očima muhe, ali nemam pojma što to sad znači. Onda drugi dan vidim starinsku drvenu igračku, neku potpunu bezvezariju i budem bijedan, a da ne znam zašto“ (Novak 2017: 59). Matija je toliko potisnuo priče i događaje iz svojega djetinjstva da jednostavno ni sam nije znao kako pronaći sebe, kako povratiti vlastito pamćenje te kako pronaći vlastitu istinu, ako je do prave vlastite istine uopće moguće doći. Baš kao što je „Proustov cijeli život pretvoren u sjećanje koje ima za cilj lakše podnošenje sadašnjosti“ (Tekešinić, 2016: 354) tako je i Matijin život samo nastojanje savladavanja sadašnjosti.

## PAMĆENJE I STRAH

Epistemološki obrati u proučavanju književnosti posljednjih nekoliko desetljeća sve se češće okreću emocijama. Psiholozi smatraju da je strah jedna od osnovnih ljudskih emocija, a potom u primarne emocije ubrajaju još i gađenje, iznenađenje i srdžbu, a drugi ovima dodaju još radost i žalost. Općenito govoreći, primarne ljudske emocije jesu one koje su jasno i nedvosmisleno vidljive i kao takve u ljudima prisutne od rođenja. Različite discipline strah su kao emociju proučavale s različitih aspekata, a mnogobrojni radovi i proučavanja na ovoj su emociji gradili mnoge teze. Evelina Rudan u svojem u radu *Prijevod usmenih strahova* navesti kako je:

upravo (...) predaja žanr koji je, prema Lutzu Rörichu (1984/2018), među svim usmenim pričama najuzorniji izraz straha. Predaji, posebno mitskog/demonološkoga tipa, strah i njegove realizacije, preoblikovanja i utjelovljenja bitan su narativni supstrat. U smislu oblikovanja priče to je u predajama vidljivo na više razina, na razini sižea, tema i motiva, na razini kompozicije, na razini stila i pripovjedačkih (ne samo pripovjednih) strategija. (Rudan, 2018: 275).

Za razliku od bajke, u predajama se odnos *nadnaravnoga* i *normalnoga* ne smatra uobičajenim, štoviše, oko toga sukoba gradi se cijela priča. Tako Rudan zaključuje kako je i roman *Črna mati zemla* u svoju okosnicu stavio predaju kako bi se stvorila priča, a Novak bira strah kao važan kompozicijski element stvaranja te priče što se vidi iz sljedećega citata: „Nemoguće je ispričati priču o neobičnim, dijelom i dosta jezivim događajima moga djetinjstva, a ne početi s legendom koja je preživjela među stanovnicima gornjega Međimurja” (Novak, 2017: 95).

Leksem straha pronaći ćemo u romanu na mnogo mjesta, a ujedno se „pojavljuje i na strateški važnim mjestima u kompoziciji romana” (Rudan, 2018: 281). Otplitanje radnje romana započinje sestrinom izjavom o strahu koji je Matija osjećao i koji su drugi sumještani osjećali zbog njega, zbog čega se čini kao da je sva prošlost natopljena tom jednom ključnom emocijom: „Ja sam ih kupila za tobom jer me je bilo strah kaj će ljudi u selu misliti o tebi. Nisam htjela da te se boje, iako si i mami i meni bio jako čudan nakon kaj je tata umro. Čudno dijete i bok. Ma kurac. Nisi mi bio čudan, bilo mi je strah tebe i bilo me je strah za tebe” (Novak, 2017: 81). Strah se u romanu povezuje s gađenjem i otuđenjem, odnosno strahom od izlaganja javnosti što Matijina sestra potvrđuje svojim izjavama: „Prestao si jesti, sve ti se gadilo, bojao si se sam ostati kod kuće, bojao si se sam izaći u dvorište, a nisi nam htio reći čega te je toliko strah” (Novak, 2017: 82). Posljedice straha različito se manifestiraju na psihosocijalnoj razini čovjeka te tako pojedinac strah može manifestirati bijegom od društva, odnosno izolacijom u vlastiti svijet (Nikić, 1994: 46) što uočavamo i u Matijinom slučaju. Strah tako postaje osnovni okidač reakcija, ali i pamćenja, odnosno potiskivanja pamćenja u odrasloj dobi zbog kojeg nastaju distorzije u pamćenju. Kako bi preživio djetinjstvo, Matija je pronalazio mehanizme kojima bi svladavao pokretačku reakciju, a koji su svojstveni djeci – brojeći ili boraveći s osobama koje smanjuju strah. Sa strahom se različito suočavamo, tako se

primjerice pojedinci pred strašnim situacijama ponašaju posve racionalno, hrabro i smireno, dok se drugi pred istom situacijom izgube, dramatiziraju i budu iracionalni (usp. Nikić, 1994: 51). Prema navedenome, Matiju svrstavamo u drugu skupinu – skupinu onih koji pobjegnu u iracionalnu sferu.

Nikić (1994) ističe kako se na psihofiziološkoj razini očituju različite vidljive posljedice uvjetovane strahom, tzv. psihosomatske reakcije koje uočavamo u Matijinim reakcijama, a kojima vladaju nagoni. Uočavamo tako nesanicu odnosno poremećaj u spavanju: „Ne spavam dobro. Budim se, sanjam neke gluposti“ (Novak, 2017: 74), potrebu za čestim uriniranjem: „Pišao si u krevet, i u školi si se popišao u gaće.“ (Novak 2017: 76), poteškoće u respiratornom sustavu: „Matija je jedva disao.“ (Novak, 2017: 76), povraćanje i razni bolovi u trbuhu: „Matija u dva koraka pronađe put do zahodske školjke i dobro se ispovraća u sedam ili osam snažnih grčeva, dok na kraju iz njega nije izlazila samo žučkastosmeđa kaša“ (Novak, 2017: 75). Svaka fizička reakcija na strah nastala je kao okidač psihološke napetosti zbog osjećaja koji se nije mogao kontrolirati. Nekontrolirane reakcije nastale su pod emocijom straha, a da ih Matija nije mogao racionalno pojmiti i otkloniti. S obzirom na to da se Matija tada nalazio u dječjoj dobi, introspekcija i maštanje stvorili su lažni unutarnji svijet koji je stvorio probleme u kasnijoj dobi. Promatrajući iz pozicije emocija straha, možemo zaključiti kako su strahovi upisani i implicitno i eksplicitno u roman što potvrđuje i sljedeći citat:

U romanu se predajni elementi prvi put uvode već u Proslavu u kontekstu iracionalnih objasnidbenih modela dviju pedantnih istraživačica, i to tako da se najprije fingira (stilizacijom) znanstveni diskurs, a u okviru njega donose se predajne priče postupkom preregistracije (Novak, 2014, 15–16), što istodobno namjerno ili nenamjerno odražava i žanrovsku odliku predaje koja zbog svoje fleksibilne prirode uspješno narativno preživljava u različitim narativnim okolnostima (Rudan, 2018: 282).

Otvorivši pitanje sjećanja kao središnjega problema romana, nezaobilazno je osvrnuti se na strah – strah nastao u ranome djetinjstvu koji je doveo do bijega od samoga sebe, ali i od kolektiva, i koji je zaslužan za distorzije u Matijinim sjećanjima.

## **STRAH I NAČIN PRIPOVIJEDANJA**

Strah kao temeljna emocija utječe na pripovijedanje središnjega dijela romana, ali i pripovjedača. To će u romanu potkrijepiti i sam glavni lik u tvrdnji: „Mislim da, čim su neki osjećaji u igri, osobito negativni, čovjek postane sklon pričati priču drukčije. Sram, strah, krivnja... To su najvrckaviji pripovjedači“ (Novak, 2017: 81). Homodijegetski pripovjedač u odrasloj dobi ne može s vremenskom distancom ispričati strašne događaje koji su ga snašli u prošlosti bez da pripovijedanje započne legendom, jednako tako Matija kao dijete ne može ispričati priču koja je suvisla, a vezana za smrt njegova oca. Nitko u njegovoj okolini, mahom odraslih ljudi, ne može mu dati objašnjenje stoga svoju priču gradi sam na fragmentima koje prikuplja slušajući priče

odraslih i povezujući ih prema osobnom nahođenju (Rudan, 2018: 283). Tumačenje tih fragmenata stvara dodatan proces u priči koja se ovisno o dječjem promatranju svijeta djelomično poklapa s istinom, a većim je dijelom od nje u potpunosti odmakla. Budući da pojašnjenje odraslih izostaje, javlja se uz osjećaj straha i osjećaj krivnje – da je on kriv što njegova oca više nema. Matija s vremenom postaje svjestan straha i manjkavosti informacija zbog kojih je stvorio lažni svijet što je vidljivo u citatu:

Možda bih i shvatio da mi je netko rekao izravno. Tvoj otac je prestao živjeti nakon što su mu otkazali svi vitalni organi. Srce je prestalo pumpati krv, pa su stanice mozga počele postupno odumirati. [...] Eto, da su mi tako rekli, da se to događa, netko umre nešto prije, netko kasnije...ja ga ne bih tražio. [...] Da su mi tako rekli, možda bih i povjerovao. Međutim, ono što su mi govorili stariji bilo je maglovito i ne jasno. Sastojalo se od toga da je otišao, da se druži s drugim preminulim članovima naše obitelji, da nas čeka, da nas može vidjeti. (Novak, 2017: 140).

Sam čin sprovođa pojačava osjećaj igrokaza u njegovim očima: „Bio je to veliki igrokaz čiji sam bio jedini gledatelj. Jecaji su se pojačali kad su Pišta, Vest, Rumenige i Marijo Brezovec počeli spuštati svijetlosmeđi lijes u zemlju” (Novak, 2017: 102). Matija je u činu sprovođa uočavao jasno razrađenu scenu: „...ali je to za mene bila samo velika drvena kutija koja je mogla biti i dobar ormar, mnogo cvijeća i vijenaca, rupa u zemlji i ljudi koji se zbog mene prave da pokapaju mogega oca” (Novak, 2017: 102). Štoviše, samo oplakivanje najmilijih na grobljima doživljavao je kao predstavu: „Svi ti ljudi koji su stajali po grobovima nekih drugih, zaista mrtvih i zakopanih ljudi, ponegdje se i naslanjali na njihove mramorne spomenike i plakali s puno žestine, nisu vidjeli da znam kako je cijela stvar jedna velika predstava” (Novak, 2017: 101). Matija Dolenčec u svojoj dječjoj dobi opterećen je osjećajima straha i krivnje koja se prolaskom vremena pojačava i stvara osjećaj tjeskobe. S obzirom na to da ne može procesuirati očevu smrt, osim što je izvor straha samomu sebi, postaje i izvor straha za sve sumještane koji je najavljen već u istraživanjima nadnaravnih bića na samom početku romana, što se vidi u sljedećim citatima:

Većina je ispitanika uz naoko racionalne, najčešće psihičke, socijalne i fiziološke razloge navela i objašnjenja samoubojstva koja sadržavaju elemente nadnaravnog. (...) Slijede tri objasnidbena modela s istaknutim elementima nadnaravnog:

Samoubojstva su prouzročila bića za koja su stariji mještani vjerovali da žive u šumovitim brdima iznad sela. Riječ je prema predaji o neumrlim tijelima tamošnjih stanovnika koja su mještani pobili u jednom davnom mitskom sukobu (Novak, 2017: 15).

Zbog osjećaja straha i krivnje kod Matije se javlja i osjećaj usamljenosti kojem je podvrgnut ne samo zbog svojih osjećaja, nego i zbog mišljenja zajednice sumještana koja ga na određeni način odbacuje. Samoća (u Matijinu rječniku *ućomas*, opa.) rađa imaginarne osobe, Hešto i Pujtoa, koji djeluju kao prijatelji, ali i neprijatelji. Naime, djeca su sklona imati izmišljene prijatelje u situacijama kada se ne znaju nositi i razumjeti vlastite osjećaje, a „izmišljeni prijatelj često odražava djetetovo unutarnje stanje i smije reći ono što se dijete ne usudi izgovoriti, a iako su većinom dobronamjerni,

ponekad mogu biti zločesti i plašiti dijete“ (Matek, 2016: 50). Da su u Matijinu osamljenome svijetu postojali izmišljeni prijatelji koji su često bili i zločesti te pojačavali njegov osjećaj straha, ali i krivnje, potvrđuju sljedeći citati:

U mojem je ludom svijetu bilo sasvim moguće da svaki čovjek oko sebe ima bića koja nitko drugi ne vidi, pa se o njima ne govori. Svi su (u to jednim dijelom i danas vjerujem) zvali svoje prijatelje iz mraka i s njima potajno razgovarali. Bili smo nerazdvojni. Svuda smo išli zajedno, skoro su i naučili kad moraju biti mirni i tihi, no često su se svađali. (...) Čuo sam kasnije kako joj u hodniku mama objašnjava da sam vjerojatno izmislio prijatelje samo kako ne bih preuzeo krivnju, a sestra je rekla kako me svaki dan čuje da razgovaram s nekim koga nema i kako noću hodam po kući. (...)

Kod drugog zamaha umalo me promašio, ali me ogrebao po licu, od uha sve do brade. Koraćao sam unatrag i htio s leđa otvoriti vrata žičane ograde. (...)

Kaj si mislio ka z nami moreš delat koaj očeš? Kaj nas moreš hititi vum s hiže? Ve buš vidijo kaj je pekel. Ve buš vidijo kaj je črna mater zemla. Mij bumot ti pokazali (Novak, 2017: 151).

U trenutku kada se počinje prisjećati, suočava se sa strahom pa zato verbalizira razlog zaboravljanja – odnosno strah:

Ja sam mislio da sam ih ubio. Zato sam zaboravio. Stvari koje si zaboravio pričekaju neko vrijeme. Prekriže ruke i čekaju te iz prikrajka, guraju jedna drugoj laktove u rebra i podsmjehuju se tiho kako ne bi remetile svetost zablude. Postaju glasnije tek kad prestaneš, kad zaista ne znaš dalje, i tada krenu po tebe, bijesne jer si im uskratio pravo na suživot sa svim novim predmetima i ljudima koje uredno trpaš u skladište koje nazivaš svojim životom. (Novak, 2017: 91).

Strah kao razlog zaboravljanja, trauma i nerazumijevanje ostavile su traga na odraslom Matiji, suvremenome književniku, koji žudi ispričati svoju priču i osloboditi se okova prošlosti koji su mu nametnuti. Kao književnik svoju priču priča povezujući poznate elemente, fikciju i predaju koju je čuo u dječjoj dobi. Predajni elementi koje je čuo u bakinim pričama postaju elementi realnosti kako bi se popunile praznine u svijetu unutar kojeg se nalazi. Očev gubitak, kao najveća trauma u njegovu životu, ostao je nedefiniran i nepojašnjen događaj koji je izazvao mnogobrojne emocije s kojima se nije znao nositi pa su u dječjoj mašti nastale praznine koje su tražile „popunjavanje“. One informacije koje čuje od odraslih „u prolazu“, a nedovoljno su jasne djetetovu shvaćanju, uklapa u bakine predaje, koje mu potom daju priču koju može pojmiti ili barem misli da je razumljiva. Tako o najvažnijemu događaju svojega života koji će ga obilježiti Matija nikada nije dobio važne činjenice.

Drugi dio romana, o Matijinoj odrasloj dobi, donosi novi problem nekoherentnosti priče i „nepouzdano pripovjedača“ kojemu laganje, lažna sjećanja, distorzije iz prošlosti i iskrivljeno shvaćanje djetinjstva donose probleme u ljubavnome odnosu. Tjeskoba odrasle dobi vezana je za raspad ljubavne veze, probleme u radu i vlastitome identitetu. Rješenja počinju otkrivanjem problema iz djetinjstva, „a njihove motivacijske mreže uspješno koriste niti predaja“ (Rudan, 2018: 283). Prihvaćanjem osjećaja tjeskobe koji

„doživljavamo onda kada ne znamo čega se zapravo plašimo“ (Nikić 1994: 49). Matijin psihoterapeut preuzima ulogu naratora te pojašnjava kako funkcionira sjećanje što možemo vidjeti u citatu:

Doći do pravih sjećanja, sumnjam da je to moguće. Ljudi uzimaju zdravo za gotovo da čovjek nešto doživi, pa napravi sjećanje toga događaja koje je kao izravna fotografija događaja, a onda kad govori o tome, iskrivljuje malo, neke stvari prešuti, neke druge doda i to je to. ali čini se da se sjećanja ne iskrivljuju, nego se uvijek nanovo kreiraju. Svaki puta kada prepričaš nešto, najvećim dijelom poništavaš staro sjećanje i sljedeći puta krećeš od zadnje verbalizacije, pa nju modificiraš i tako dalje (Novak, 2017: 80 – 81).

Izvadivši davno zaboravljene crteže i zapise Matijina sestra suočila ga je s vlastitom prošlošću i strahom od davno zaboravljenih događaja i davno zakopanih emocija potaknuvši ga na dosjećanje i promišljanje vlastite prošlosti: „Isuse, ti stvarno živiš u nekom svom balonu. Totalno si zaključao ono kaj se zbivalo prije nego smo se doselili u Zagreb. To je bilo dobro za dijete valjda, uspio si se prešaltati i preživjeti, ali moraš možda polako tamo nazad“ (Novak 2017: 74). Riječima *valjda*, *možda* i *polako* iznosi svoje mišljenje, no ostavlja Matiji prostor za odluku što napraviti s vlastitim sjećanjima. Moglo bi se zaključiti kako se funkcija pripovjedača jednim dijelom može pridati i samomu strahu koji svojim djelovanjem uvjetuje naraciju „s ciljem da otključavanjem pojedinačnih strahova iz djetinjstva rastvori, raščini, osobnu pojedinačnu tjeskobu (i nefunkcionalnost u odrasloj dobi) kako bi uopće mogao uspostaviti i nanovo ispisati koliko-toliko koherentnog sebe“ (Rudan, 2018: 285). Tako sama struktura romana postaje složenija jer gotovo u svakome poglavlju možemo pronaći „novoga“ pripovjedača, a ovisno o kutu gledanja i pripovijedanja pronaći nove načine čitanja romana.

## ZAKLJUČAK

Analiziravši element sjećanja u romanu *Črna mati zemla*, zaključujemo kako je problem sjećanja, odnosno dosjećanja, jedan od aktualnih problema suvremenoga društva. Matija Dolenčec samo je jedan od likova književnosti koji na suvremen način progovara o otuđenju i bijegu od samoga sebe, svoje prošlosti i trauma koje nosi iz ranoga djetinjstva. Za Matijino otuđenje razloge možemo pronaći na mnogobrojnim razinama, kako individualnima, tako i kolektivnima. Uzevši u obzir da svaki pojedinac pripada kolektivu u kojemu raste, čije norme prihvaća i vrijednosti usvaja, možemo zaključiti kako je i kolektiv zakazao. Odrasli koji su trebali svojim primjerom pokazati i prenijeti društveno prihvatljiva ponašanja očitovali su se kao labilni, lažni, puni mana, poroka i grijeha. Ipak, oni se nastoje u kolektivnim događanjima, kakav je sprovod, pokazati autentičnima, a promatrajući iz dječjih očiju sve se doima kao lažno režirana predstava. Zbog procjepa u rečenome i učinjenome, zbog nedostatka pojašnjenja, u Matiji se razvija osjećaj straha, samoće i otuđenosti. Lažnost u svijetu odraslih rađa izmišljene prijatelje i teške traume. Strah i trauma blokirali su dosjećanje, a u trenutku kad Matija odluči

otkriti istinu na površinu dolaze i drugi problemi suvremenoga društva. Iako se nastoji prikazati samo jedna priča o tužnome odrastanju i zaboravu koje s vremenom sustiže odraslu osobu, roman Kristijana Novaka možemo čitati i u drugim psihoanalitičkim ključevima. Osamljenost užurbanoga svijeta ostavlja tragove na svakome pojedincu, a današnja svijest o autobiografskome sjećanju samo je papirnato pamćenje, svakim danom sve više poduprto pisanim, ali još više digitalnim tragom. Roman se i toj činjenici na određeni način ruga – iako Matija gleda tuđe fotografije vidi svoju prošlost te iako postoje „znanstveni zapisi“ o samoubojstvima – sve je fikcija koja rađa traumu. Pa ipak, trauma se ne liječi bijegom, već konačnim suočavanjem sa samim sobom čime sjećanja postaju stvarna, a priča konačna.

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## CONTRAPOINTS – PERFORMANCE AS POLITICS ON YOUTUBE

### Summary

*In today's political landscape, social media and video-sharing websites such as YouTube play an increasingly important role in making people aware of certain social issues, even shaping their opinions and worldviews. Recent years have marked the rise of right-wing pundits, as well as a proliferation of political YouTube channels which use anti-feminist and anti-SJW (social justice warrior, a frequently used pejorative term) rhetoric to unify its audience in a sense of resentment of not only leftist politics, but in some cases of minority groups. However, there has also been an increase of progressive and left-leaning YouTube activity, with several video-essayist channels rising to prominence and gaining large followings. These channels are often collectively referred to as LeftTube or BreadTube, and one of the most popular among them is ContraPoints, a channel dedicated to "sex, drugs, and social justice". Written, directed and played by Natalie Wynn, ContraPoints ranges from (production-wise) fairly traditional video essays to fictional debates with an ensemble cast of characters (all played by herself). The channel is also notable for the fact that it chronicles Wynn's gender transition and deals extensively with her experiences as a transgender woman. Therefore, the paper will argue that in creating ContraPoints, Wynn has found a way to intertwine the artistic, political, and personal purposes behind her performances; this in turn has prompted the viewers to gain sympathy for Wynn as a transgender woman, and her fans to form strong parasocial relationships with her.*

**Key words:** gender identity, parasocial relationships, transfemininity, internet culture, transgender

## INTRODUCTION

In a 2019 profile of Felix Kjellberg, the creator of the massively popular YouTube gaming channel *PewDiePie*, Kevin Roose states,

One crucial thing to understand about YouTube is that there are really two of them. The first YouTube is the YouTube that everyone knows — the vast reference library filled with sports highlights, music videos and old Comedy Central roasts. But there's a second YouTube inside that one. It is a self-contained universe with its own values and customs, its own incentive structures and market dynamics and its own fully developed celebrity culture that includes gamers, beauty vloggers, musicians, D.I.Y.ers, political commentators, artists and pranksters. The biggest of these personalities have millions of subscribers and Oprah-level influence over their fandoms. Many Inner YouTubers never watch TV and develop elaborate parasocial bonds with their favorite creators. For people who frequent Inner YouTube — generally people under 25, along with some older people

with abundant free time — the site is not just a video platform but a prism through which all culture and information is refracted (Roose, 2019: n.p.).

This quote is particularly significant if one takes into consideration the broader context of the article – an interview with Kjellberg, in which he reflects on his history of making anti-Semitic jokes that have led commentators to link him to far-right politics and white nationalism. While Roose emphasizes the fact that the vast majority of Kjellberg's content does exactly what it says on the tin (that is, provides entertainment unencumbered by political and ideological issues), there is a valid reason for taking an interest in his allegedly radical politics. After all, if "Inner YouTube" is indeed "a prism through which all culture and information is refracted" (Roose 2019: n.p.), then even the seemingly innocuous jokes and off-handed remarks by such prominent creators gain significance.

Juxtaposed to this image of a wildly popular entertainer, suddenly and unwillingly implicated in politics, stands the figure of the political commentator. Although political content on YouTube was initially associated with coverage of elections (May, 2010: 499), major news outlets' channels are not exactly what falls under the definition of a political commentary on "Inner Youtube". Rather, political commentators stand shoulder to shoulder to gamers such as Felix Kjellberg, or for instance beauty gurus such as Jeffree Star – only instead of entertainment or specialized practical advice, they offer opinions and analyses.

One such YouTuber is Natalie Wynn, the creator of the channel *ContraPoints*. Dedicated to "sex, drugs, and social justice", the channel has (at the time of writing this essay) amassed over 48 million views and 850 000 subscribers ("ContraPoints: About"). As Wynn herself states,

I'm a PhD dropout who makes videos on the internet, mostly discussing social justice issues and adjacent topics. *My political aim is to counterbalance the hatred toward progressive movements that is so common online.* Stylistically, I try to appeal to a wide audience and avoid merely preaching to the choir. I try to make the videos I'd want to watch: well-produced, informative, funny, and entertaining. („ContraPoints is Creating Video Essays and Short Films ", emphasis mine)

"The hatred towards progressive movements" Wynn cites can be linked to the circumstances in which she started her channel. The year 2020 finds Wynn an influential YouTuber with coverage from traditional media outlets, a very generous audience (she is in the top 15 earners on the crowdfunding platform Patreon ("Top Patreon Creators"), and a network of co-creators affectionately referred to by their fans as BreadTube<sup>1</sup> (Kuznetsov and Ismangil, 2020: 204). However, her success grew directly out of her attempts to counter right-wing talking points circulating YouTube. As Kuznetsov and Ismangil point out, "BreadTube does not exist in isolation. It is part

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to Kropotkin's seminal anarchist text "The Conquest of Bread".

of a larger movement against right wing and populist thought that have dominated the media landscape over the past few years.” (2020: 216) When Wynn started her channel in 2016, she encountered a political landscape vastly different from today’s YouTube.

The year was 2016 and Barack Obama was President of the United States, we were about to elect our first woman president and things were kind of going okay. But the Internet was not okay. I, at this moment, had just dropped out of a philosophy PhD program because the examined life is actually not worth living. I don’t know, I was like an Uber driver, a piano teacher, a paralegal, and just looking for what to do next. Back in 2009, I had been kind of like an atheist YouTuber, or at least had kind of followed that world. So, in my subscriptions box and my recommended videos box in 2016, it was suddenly a lot of, like “Why Feminism Is Ruining the Planet” and “Black Lives Matter Is Trash”. And I was like, hmm, interesting. So, I thought I could use my skills from my education to kind of, like, maybe do a channel that would counter some of these videos and respond to them. That was the original idea for the *ContraPoints* channel. Those were the points it was against (“Natalie Wynn, *ContraPoints* – XOXO Festival (2018)” 2:55–4:17).

Wynn’s assertion that “... things were kind of going okay. But the Internet was not okay” correlates to Rebecca Lewis’s report “Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube”. Just as Wynn, she emphasizes the dangers of making light of the importance of YouTube in establishing and spreading political messages, claiming that “one reason YouTube is so effective for circulating political ideas is because it is often ignored or underestimated in discourse on the rise of disinformation and far-right movements” (2018: 5). Lewis posits that the sort of videos Wynn increasingly began encountering in 2016, such as “Why Feminism is Ruining the Planet”, do not stand in isolation. Rather, she coins the term “Alternative Influence Network”, signifying a media system wherein various “political influencers” emerge, gain a following on YouTube, and connect with each other in order to “promote a range of political positions, from mainstream versions of libertarianism and conservatism, all the way to overt white nationalism” (Lewis 2018: 1). As Stuart Hall once emphasized in the context of television,

[t]he mass media cannot imprint their meanings and messages on us as if we were mentally tabula rasa. But they do have an integrative, clarifying, and legitimating power to shape and define political reality, especially in those situations which are unfamiliar, problematic, or threatening: where no ‘traditional wisdom’, no firm networks of personal influence, no cohesive culture, no precedents for relevant action or response, and no first-hand way of testing or validating the propositions are at our disposal with which to confront of modify their innovatory power (2000: 77).

In the context of the “Alternative Influence Network”, the situations framed as “unfamiliar, problematic, or threatening” are progressive causes, whose activists are characterized through the pejorative moniker “social justice warrior”. Therefore, the lack of “traditional wisdom” that Hall cites can in this instance be easily replaced (and fears of the unknown assuaged) by what Lewis describes as a “reactionary position”.

Many of these YouTubers are less defined by any single ideology than they are by a “reactionary” position: a general opposition to feminism, social justice, or left-wing politics.

One primary example of a shared idea that exists across the network is the concept of the “Social Justice Warrior” (or “SJW”). The term is used by influencers across the network, from libertarians to white nationalists. It is strategically flexible: while it was initially targeted at feminists, it is often applied to any number of movements advocating for social justice, including Black Lives Matter, the LGBTQ movement, Muslims, and immigrants (Lewis, 2018: 8).

The insistence on a shared enemy against which they could assert themselves, enabled right-wing “political influencers” to build an image and attract not only an audience, but *fans*. Lewis emphasizes the fact that YouTube’s very slogan, “Broadcast Yourself”, encourages the creation and growth of “microcelebrities, that is, niche celebrities who are well-known within specific communities” (2018: 4). Her assertions support Roose’s usage of a term such as Inner YouTube to explain the great celebrity, wealth, and influence of creators that are, by and large, unknown to those outside these YouTube communities (2019: n.p.). When she started *ContraPoints*, Wynn seemed like an unlikely candidate to achieve microcelebrity status – her progressive politics, as well as her unusual optics, were not only unlike those of the dominant reactionary “Alternative Influence Network”, but intentionally opposed to it. Unlike “the polished, well-lit microcelebrities and their captivating videos” (Lewis, 2018: 5), Wynn’s early videos were deliberately bizarre, featuring sexual innuendo, over-the-top characters and self-deprecating humor.

One could claim that none of these features of the channel have significantly altered. An aspect of the channel that has changed most drastically is Wynn herself – in 2017, she began what she jokingly refers to “her transgender journey” (“Beauty”, 1:09), transitioning from male to female. In late February 2020, she removed all of her pre-transition videos from the channel, as “[they were] created before my gender transition, and [they] no longer [represent] the person I’ve become.” (“Archives: TERFs”).<sup>2</sup> Even though most of the traditional media coverage of Wynn’s work focuses on her success in “deradicalizing young right-wing men” (Reeve, 2019: n.p.) and “changing alt-right minds” (Fleishman, 2019: n.p.), recent months have seen her work move from disproving popular right-wing pundits to focusing more exclusively on trans issues. As she (always somewhat flippantly) remarks in “Beauty”, “[f]ighting fascists on YouTube was an idea I came up with when I was a male alcoholic. Unfortunately, America needs a *ContraPoints* right now...” (25:57–26:03). This paper aims to reconcile these two aspects of *ContraPoints* – the progressive politics and the personal journey of a trans

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<sup>2</sup> The transcripts for these deleted videos have been made available via Wynn’s website, so her 2016 to mid-2017 content is still partially existent (“Archives”).

woman – as well as offer an analysis of Wynn's complicated relationship with performance and connection with her audience.

## AESTHETICS AS POLITICS

JUSTINE. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is an aesthetic century. In history there are ages of reason and ages of spectacle, and it's important to know which you're in. Our America, our Internet, is not ancient Athens. It's Rome. Your problem is you think you're in the forum when really you're in the circus ("The Aesthetic" 6:23–6:38).

Under pink mood lighting, two trans women sit, drinking tea and discussing the intricacies of trans women's presentation. Justine, in full makeup and in complete control of her arguments, argues for the need of trans women to do their best "to pass", that is, to look like the society's image of a (preferably beautiful, young, and put together) woman. Her interlocutor Tabby, an anarcho-syndicalist girl who likes to dress up in combat boots and cat ears, is having none of it. She disagrees with Justine's insistence that the only way to live a viable life as a trans person is to conform to societal pressures, and insists on the need to fight against oppression and stand up for every trans woman, especially those who do not "pass". In the end, they never reach a solution, instead opting to watch YouTube together. After a series of increasingly disturbing clips in which the selfhood of trans women is called into question, they turn off the TV and conclude they should not fight, because they are "surviving in this shit world together" ("The Aesthetic" 19:32). This *ContraPoints* video – lasting a little over 21 minutes and containing 5 characters and multiple narrative levels, all framed through a TV screen – is a prime example of what Kuznetsov and Ismangil term as Wynn's "discursive-dialectical technique" (2020: 211), as well as a complex argument about the pressures trans people put on each other if they are deemed "not trans enough" (Galupo, Henise and Davies, 2014: 466). But it is also a compelling discussion on the nature of politics. Even though the viewer is aware that Tabby's views are more inclusive and compassionate, one struggles not to be taken in by Justine's pragmatism and savviness. The opening question of the video, "What matters more, the way things are, or the way things look?" ("The Aesthetic" 1:04) is deliberately never resolved. However, just by posing this question, Wynn makes the viewer intensely and uncomfortably aware of its pertinence. If the president of the United States is a reality star, as Justine pointedly reminds Tabby during their discussion ("The Aesthetic" 6:19), where does the spectacle end, and rationality begin?

In "The Aesthetic", Justine makes another offhanded, but cutting remark: "[r]eason is a very powerful aesthetic – if you're a man" (6:46). This may be interpreted as Wynn's nod to the fact that, while the more left-leaning humanities usually approach political and social issues by *critiquing* them (Butler, 2004: 129), conservative circles prefer adopting "an aesthetic of logic" (McCrea and Robinson 2019: n.p.). This is particularly

true of YouTube’s conservative pundits, such as Ben Shapiro. As Wynn emphasized in an interview,

[y]ou’ve draped your public persona, and your presentation style in this cloak of only caring about the facts—which of course, is it true that Ben Shapiro cares about the facts more than anyone else? Absolutely not. But it’s something that you constantly say, and it sort of works, interestingly, to constantly say that you only care about the facts, that you don’t care about anyone else’s feelings. It allows you to frame all objections as coming from some place of fundamental irrationality, which works especially well when the people you are arguing against are, for example, women, or for example, trans people—two groups of people who are sort of stereotyped in people’s minds as being irrational, or delusional (McCrea and Robinson, 2019: n.p.).

Wynn has tackled this fallacy – for instance, she uses her video “Pronouns” to dismantle Ben Shapiro’s claims about the inherent biological nature of pronouns. She manages to demonstrate that, although he claims to only be interested in the “facts” of human biology, and not the “feelings” of trans people, he is deliberately framing a matter of language usage as one of biology, thus obfuscating the actual issue by shrouding it in “an aesthetic of logic”. She humorously uses “[t]ransgender DESTROYS Ben Shapiro” as the description of her video to mock the overly combative tone with which conservative political influencers such as Shapiro appeal to their audience (“Pronouns”). However, Wynn is also implicitly reversing the stereotypes present in popular political video compilations on YouTube, wherein anonymous “social justice warriors” are the ones being destroyed, and a calm and rational (typically male) public figures are the ones doing the destroying.

She reflects on this topic more explicitly in her video “The Left”, which is framed in a similar way to “The Aesthetic”. It begins with a public debate between Tabby and a more prominent public figure (in “The Aesthetic”, it is a trans-exclusionary radical feminist, in “The Left”, it is a fascist). In both cases, these people are better spoken and more composed than Tabby, who either reverts to quoting incomprehensible philosophy, or to literal hissing and threats of violence. After the disastrous attempt at a debate, Tabby meets up with Justine, and they try to come up with a middle ground. Where in “The Aesthetic” the compromise they are trying to reach has to do with the societal pressures on the presentation of trans women, “The Left” finds them discussing a more general issue concerning leftist politics.

JUSTINE. My point is, you can’t just win the war in the street. You have to win the war in the heart and the mind.

TABBY. You mean the propaganda war.

JUSTINE. Shhhhh don’t call it propaganda, there could be liberals listening. Look, what the left needs to get, and what the centrists need to get, and what only I and the fascists seem to get, is that reason doesn’t matter very much.

TABBY. Oh boy. Here we go.

JUSTINE. What is it that centrists hate about social justice warriors? It's not that they don't have good reasons in support of their arguments, it's that they're not cool, right? Social justice warriors are not cool.

TABBY. What do you mean, they're not popular?

JUSTINE. No, no, no. I mean they're not cool. You can be unpopular and still cool. In fact, it can be cool to be unpopular.

TABBY. So, what does it mean to be cool?

JUSTINE. Cool is calm, detached, and in control of yourself. And the leading complaint about social justice warriors is that they're emotional. The social justice warriors who everyone cringes online are people, who I'm sure are nice people, but who are having a bad moment, and they're caught on camera in the middle of an outburst. They're out of control. And that's the problem. It's not cool.

TABBY. Look, this detached, ironic, pretend-not-to-give-a-shit posturing that white men mistake for rationality is really just the self-celebration of comfortable, privileged people with nothing at stake. People on the left are never gonna be "cool," because anger and emotion are rational responses to injustice.

JUSTINE. I thought you'd say that. But what you're failing to consider is that it's possible to be both angry and cool ("The Left" 10:28-11:48).

In her attempts to unite righteous indignation with a critical detachment, Justine is echoing Lagaay's and Koubová's thoughts on "Performing the Impossible in Philosophy". "Western philosophy arose against mythos as the ability to think from a distance and to grasp/formulate unequivocal paradigms. But at the same time each thought is connected to a certain foundational experience, which cannot be easily and directly grasped from this thought." (Lagaay and Koubová 2014: 44). Just as Lagaay and Koubová point out the untenability of keeping a complete critical distance in one's thinking, so does Wynn (through Justine's and Tabby's discussion) disavow the seemingly unbiased "aesthetic of logic" and its antithesis, the emotion-driven combativeness. In effect, Wynn is using *ContraPoints* as a way to provide what Philip Auslander would describe as "critical analyses of mediatized postmodern culture resistantly from within the terms of that culture itself" (1992: 54). She is aware that the line between politics and entertainment is increasingly blurring (Goodman, 2000: 2), and therefore uses her talent as an performer to not only spread her ideas about Internet culture, but also engage in a critical dialogue with the very notion of aesthetics (be it of logic, or of "passable" trans womanhood) as politics.

## PERFORMING (FOR) A COMMUNITY

It has already been established that much of the content on *ContraPoints* is essentially dialogues – Wynn writes, performs, films, and edits conversations between (often recurring) fictional characters and uses them to represent different ideas. Part of the reason for this is caution. As Wynn herself states,

People want to see what they feel is a real person, but there's more than one way to be authentic. You don't have to be a diarist, you can also be a novelist, metaphorically speaking. It's possible to express yourself through lying, or you can be yourself by becoming someone else. This is a technique that I've used on my channel, to discuss extremely controversial issues, where just literally sitting in my bedroom looking at the camera and saying what my opinion is would be a bad idea. ... That's kind of where I'm at with this channel. I do dialogues. It's a way of exploring ideas without necessarily fully committing to them, which sounds cowardly but there's a precedent. To go back to philosophy, all of Plato's philosophy is written in dialogue format between fictional characters and it kind of works, I think, if we're talking about politics ("Natalie Wynn, ContraPoints – XOXO Festival (2018)" 16:20-18:15).

However, Wynn does not resort to such elaborate, time-consuming productions merely because she is circumspect about how her exploration of a certain controversial topic might be received. As Gordon McDougall asserts, "[t]he form in which a work of art is expressed is an integral part of its message: therefore it is not only acceptable but often necessary to use the form to comment, to make of the form *itself* an image of life's means of communication" (2000: 126). This is why, in, for instance, "The Aesthetic" and "The Left", Wynn frames her videos as friends meeting up to dissect how one of them has conducted in a YouTube debate – she is deliberately presenting her audience with a nested doll of public and private expressions of political views.

A particularly good example of this is "Transtrenders", which opens on a Wynn dressed as a parody of herself – an all-knowing, all-powerful Internet goddess. Calling herself "the digital messiah, the online oracle, the social media savior" ("Transtrenders" 0:11-0:16), she acts as the framing device through which the viewers are allowed to watch two separate debates. First, by opening a file on an old iMac, she shows the audience a discussion on *The Freedom Report*, a fictional talk show hosted by a political centrist, Jackie Jackson. Her guests are a conservative trans woman Tiffany Tumbles and Baltimore Maryland, an extremely composed (if somewhat mystical) nonbinary person, and the topic of discussion is "transtrenders" – that is, the idea that some people only claim to be trans to appear "trendy". Their debate lasts almost halfway through the video, at which point the camera zooms out of the iMac's screen and "the digital messiah" reappears to comment on their conversation. She then informs the audience that after the debate, Tiffany went to visit her friend Justine to discuss her appearance on *The Freedom Report*. "The digital messiah" then clicks another iMac file, and the video officially opens with the title "Transtrenders" written on the screen. Thus, fourteen minutes into a thirty-four-minute long video, the audience is implicitly informed that the first debate was merely an excuse for the real discussion – that between Tiffany and Justine.

Tiffany and Justine, just as Tabby and Justine in the previously analyzed videos, function as vehicles for ideas – be they Wynn's unresolved opinions on a topic, or the conflicting views of different members within particular communities. Whereas the first discussion – a talk show debate, at the end of which the host announces the winner – is



a public performance, Tiffany and Justine drinking tea is a private affair, but a politically significant one, nevertheless. *The Freedom Report* pits different worldviews against one another in “the free marketplace of ideas”, but it is in Justine’s living room that *community politics* is discussed. And, as Baz Kershaw emphasizes, it is precisely the notion of community that is “indispensable in understanding how the constitutions of different audiences might affect the ideological impact of particular performances, and how that impact might transfer (or not) from one audience to another” (2000: 137). By demonstrating the in-fighting and political disagreements among the members of a particular community (trans women, leftists, ...), Wynn is not only providing that community with nuanced representation, but also enabling the transfer of understanding “from one audience to another”. For, as Judith Butler emphasizes, “it is not because we are reasoning beings that we are connected to one another, but, rather, because we are *exposed* to one another” (2004: 48).

*ContraPoints*, a channel through which Wynn discusses and playacts a variety of political positions – radical feminism, climate change denial, militant leftism, fascism – ultimately shows “...how different performances for different communities might successfully produce consonant effects in relation to society as a whole” (Kershaw 2000: 140). This is achieved because Wynn does not caricature these political extremes – rather, she shows how they might seem attractive, even logical, and then dismantles them anyway. As she reflects in an interview,

Anyone who writes fiction strives to show characters as more than one-dimensional. ... [Not so with political satire,] even though your villains have interiority — they love, they hate, they feel. ... There’s this artistic drive or something in me that impels me to sympathize with villains, but it’s maybe not a great impulse as someone who wants to do activism as well (Cross 2018: n.p.).

By crafting multi-faceted, conflicting perspectives and framing them through performance, Wynn is not giving easy answers – as a general rule, her characters never come to a definitive solution. Instead, she is using her characters to offer her audience something different; “an epistemology grounded not on distinction between truthful models and fictional representations, but on different ways of knowing and doing that are constitutively heterogenous, contingent, and risky” (Diamond 2000: 66-67). Her gamble ultimately paid off – not only in the success she achieved as a YouTuber, but as a source of inspiration and strength, not only for trans people, but also for the “villains” she satirized and somewhat unwillingly sympathized with. Many of her videos contain comments from individuals who used to be transphobic, and who have had their horizons broadened and minds changed by the content on *ContraPoints*. An equally common narrative is that of the former alt-right supporter, who had fallen into radical right-wing politics through YouTube’s “Alternative Influence Network” (Lewis, 2018: 1), but then managed to extricate himself by being exposed to voices such as Wynn’s. Caleb Cain, a young man from rural West Virginia, created his channel *Faraday Speaks*

so as to tell the story of his “Descent into the Alt-Right Pipeline”, and he credits leftist YouTubers, especially Wynn, for getting him out of it:

Natalie, I mean, I had this aversion to her at first because I had all these goofy ideas about trans people but Natalie, she just, she spoke to me. She spoke my language, she was like one of me, she... [sic]. You know, we were about the same age, and she understood the culture that I was in. She understood the memes, she understood the philosophy, she understood the motivations and she was able to repeat back to me why I found it so compelling.

Whereas when I would talk to most leftists or liberals, they wouldn't know. They would just call me a racist, and to be honest with you – and this is part of the reason I'm making this video, is to help educate people – that didn't work. That pushed me further and further away. The only thing that that made me believe was that *I'm* the red-pilled<sup>3</sup> one, *I'm* the woke one, and that *I'm* the one that is willing to deal with these ideas when they're not. And they just get emotional with me and fight with me, and I wasn't having any of it.

So, when I watched *Contra's* videos, she was very... just *rational* and logical and had these good explanations and... and I realized how fucking wrong I was (20:40–21:59).

Cain's narrative of becoming radicalized online after having to drop out of college and move back to his poor rural community (“Descent into the Alt-Right Pipeline”) echoes Colin Johnson's thoughts on how people become homophobic and transphobic. He points out that “political reactionaries do not emerge from the womb despising gender and sexual difference. They are taught to despise it, often for reasons that have far more to do with their own sense of social, cultural, and economic disfranchisement than anything else (Johnson, 2013: 195). This correlates to Wynn's own analysis, as she sees young men in particular as more vulnerable to radical online movements (“Men” 23:40–23:57). She is, however, not completely at peace with her role as the person responsible for de-radicalizing these men, as she feels they merely exchange their far-right ideology for the far-left one.

There's this media narrative that my role in the discourse is de-radicalizing young alt-right men. And it's true that if you read the leftist YouTube fan subreddits, “I used to be alt-right” posts are so common they're considered cliché. And some of them cite me as an influence in changing their politics, which I love for them and I'm super fucking happy about it, but it's also a lot of responsibility. They're my boys. And I worry about my boys. Because in reality it's not like they go from far-right extremists to complacent centrists. No. Most of them go far-left. A lot of them become communists or anarchists. So, I watch them go from far to my right to significantly to my left. It's not really de-radicalizing, so much as re-radicalizing. (“Men” 24:17–25:04)

Kershaw's idea about the impact of performances travelling through different audiences (2000: 137) seems to ring ever truer in the case of YouTube, as the communities in question get substituted. The far-right racist whose portrayal Wynn

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<sup>3</sup> A reference to „The Matrix“, the term „the red pill“ is often used in online political discourse to signify the hidden truths that a person has grasped after they have disavowed progressive or even centrist politics and started consuming extremely right-wing content (Lewis 20018: 35).

offers in one video might by the next become so entranced by her rhetoric as to surpass her politics and become a baseball-bat wielding anarchist. Even though she strives for balance and finding a middle ground, the question of “will the center hold” seems, at least in the context of some parts of her audience, one for which there are no clean-cut answers.

## TRANS IDENTITY AND SEXUALITY

Other than the viewers, her work has helped politically de- (or, as we have seen, re-) radicalize, another very important portion of Wynn’s audience are trans people. Much of Wynn’s recurring characters are trans women and some of them – such as the skull-obsessed aristocrat Lady Foppington and the swastika-wearing fascist Freya – have transitioned alongside her. In this way, Wynn is demonstrating how “the discourse of performance can take its place as part of a larger political personal strategy of representation” (Adshead-Lansdale, 2000: 185). For, as Esa Kirkkopelto emphasizes,

[t]he possibility of ‘having’ a character does not contradict the notion that our bodies are always somehow exposed to other bodies: on the contrary, the latter constitutes the condition of the former, nor could one be perceived or thought of without the other. We can escape our qualities, but we cannot escape them altogether. In other words, the scenic transformation is always *partial* (2014: 135)...

This assertion is doubly true of a creator such as Wynn, who uses her channel to – through characters or by directly addressing them – lay herself bare to her audience. Even though this may be more obvious in the videos where Wynn foregoes the characters and simply speaks to the camera, it is possible to interpret some of the recurring characters as embodiments of her fears or doubts. Two excellent examples of this tendency can be found in the characters of Tiffany Tumbles and Justine. Both are trans women, and both have changed significantly throughout their appearances on the channel. Tiffany first appeared in “TERFs”<sup>4</sup> as a newly out, progressive trans woman debating a trans-exclusionary radical feminist (or TERF) Abigail Cockbane on Jackie Jackson’s *Freedom Report* (“TERFs” n.p.). However, by her next appearance in “Tiffany Tumbles”, she has had a change of heart, “taking the red pill” after she had been shunned by the online trans community over some problematic tweets (“Tiffany Tumbles” 2:25–2:43). “Transtrenders” finds her as an established conservative, transmedicalist<sup>5</sup> figure, thus solidifying her character arc. Justine, on the other hand, is presented as a figure whose opinions have softened – presented in “The Left” and “The Aesthetic” as a person

<sup>4</sup> “TERFs” is one of the videos Wynn has removed from her channel.

<sup>5</sup> „Transmedicalism refers to the understanding of transness as an essentially medical condition. A critical implication of transmedicalism is the supposition that experiencing gender dysphoria is necessarily a part of being trans, which is inconsistent with the lived experiences of many trans people. A diagnosis of gender dysphoria (GD) requires “clinically significant distress” or “impairment in the functions of daily life,” and such a diagnosis is a pre-requisite to receiving most forms of gender-affirming care.” (Zhang 2018: 258-259)

who values performance (and, in the case of the gender presentation of trans women, performativity) to such an extent that she is deaf to any other arguments, in “Transtrenders” she concedes that she may not have all the answers.

“Transtrenders” is in effect Wynn’s attempt to confront the appeal both of these positions to a trans woman – both the “uncomplicated solution to the ‘question of the body’” (Salamon, 2010: 39) expressed through Tiffany’s transmedicalism, *and* Justine’s dependence on Judith Butler’s ideas about gender as an “identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (1988: 519). By showcasing the intricate representational politics of a marginalized community, she is instructing all her viewers on the anxieties which prompt trans people to “theorize themselves for themselves” (Bettcher, 2014: 384) in the first place.

TIFFANY. Justine, I think you’re a good person, maybe too good, and that’s why you’re trying to have compassion for everyone. But at some point, you have to protect yourself. We live in a world of Jackie Jacksons, who don’t understand trans people and don’t think we’re real. So, we need to have an explanation of what it is to be trans that is based on facts and not feelings (“Transtrenders” 22:02–22:21).

Tiffany tries to win Justine over to the side of transmedicalism as the only viable explanation for transness, while Justine persists in philosophizing her way through the problem. But, in the end, as is always the case in Wynn’s videos, neither of them triumphs. As Gayle Salamon claims, “[t]o offer the category of real gender in an attempt to discipline what are perceived as the excesses of theoretical gender is to domesticate gender as it is lived and to deny its considerable complexity, which often outpaces our language to describe it” (2010: 72). The conclusion of the discussion, delivered by Justine, seems to support this notion.

JUSTINE. Well maybe we don’t need a theory. Maybe we don’t need to prove anything.

TIFFANY. Bad things, Justine, bad things!

JUSTINE. Well do we have a theory about why people are gay? No. They just are. The only reason we even feel like we need a theory about trans people is that society is so unaccepting of us that it’s constantly demanding us to justify our own reality.

TIFFANY. Okay, so what am I supposed to tell Jackie Jackson then? What am I supposed to tell the TERFs? That I’m a woman because reasons?

JUSTINE. No, not even because reasons. Just because you are.

TIFFANY. So it’s what, a leap of faith? Oh great, I’m sure that’s gonna convince all the rational skeptics. Justine, it makes us sound completely delusional.

JUSTINE. Well. Tiffany, delusion is what separates us from the animals. Who do you think built the pyramids and the cathedrals? Clearly not people with a perfectly rational worldview. But why do you care anyway? Aren’t you the one who thinks being trans is a mental disorder?

TIFFANY. Well I wouldn’t describe it as the height of sanity. But I would prefer to think that my whole life and identity is based on something I can rationally explain.

JUSTINE. Well what are we, Tiffany, men? Isn’t the single most obnoxious thing about men that they think they have to wrap up the entire world in a little rational box? Maybe the

most important things in life can't be logically proved. Can you logically prove that you love your own children? No. And the attempt to prove it is as degrading as it is futile. Maybe gender identity is one of those things.

TIFFANY. Okay but then how do I prove I'm more valid than Baltimore Maryland and the star genders and the cat people?

JUSTINE. Well, maybe we should stop getting so caught up in proving our validity to ourselves that we end up being horribly cruel to other people. What if we just accept all the freaks of the world? At the end of the day maybe it's not just as important to have logical proofs as it is to be empathetic, and open-minded, and compassionate. ("Transtrenders" 29:05–30:56)

This insistence of Wynn's – that both sides of the argument are right in some respects and wrong in others, because there exists no *one* perfect solution, other than willingness to listen and sympathize – is the guiding force behind *ContraPoints*. This is not only the case with regard to Wynn as the creator, but also to the audience.

By engaging in in-depth discussions and confessions on deeply personal topics such as gender identity and sexuality, she is demanding her audience to extend to her the same kind of understanding she has for her fictional characters. For instance, Wynn's video "Are Traps Gay?" is a forty-five-minute long rumination on the sexual anatomy of trans women, and the sexual orientation of men attracted to them. Even though she employs some characters (a framing character called Lenora LaVey and Lady Foppington for exposition and comic relief) and at times styles herself so as to appear eccentric, she introduces herself as Natalie Wynn ("Are Traps Gays?" 3:05) and addresses the viewers directly. In the video, she essentially argues that trans women *are* women, and that attraction to them in no way makes men gay. In order to do so, she forces her audience to "think sexual difference in other than binary terms", thus enabling the very concept to "become unyoked from 'natural' materiality in a way that makes it easier to resist the temptation to posit genital morphology as essentially determinative of the self" (Salamon 2010: 151). One of the ways in which she achieves this is to talk at length about "the feminine penis" ("Are Traps Gay?" 27:30–31:06), including a sketch of herself as a wine-swirling sommelier, determining the mouthfeel of cis and trans people's genitals. She also includes an in-video video of herself lying on a chaise longue, detailing her sexual exploits since her transition ("Are Traps Gay?" 39:10–41:50). This kind of frankness may seem incongruent with Wynn's use of dialogue as a way to abscond responsibility and distance herself from the content of her videos.<sup>6</sup> But the matter of sexuality, and the way it relates to gender, is an issue Wynn has been very open about on the channel. Videos such as "Autogynephilia", "Are Traps Gay?" and "Shame" all show Wynn analyzing broader issues (theories on trans identity and their social impact; trans

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<sup>6</sup> "If you can present yourself as a more abstract figure, a more abstract author, creating these characters, then you can ease some of the burden of being held directly accountable for every opinion you express" ("Natalie Wynn, ContraPoints – XOXO Festival (2018)" 19:03–19:14).

women's sex lives; compulsory heterosexuality), but in essence, they are a way for Wynn to explore her own identity.

Self-identity, at the heart of which is sexual identity, is not something that is given as a result of the continuities of an individual's life and the fixity and force of his or her desires. It is something that has to be worked on, invented and reinvented in accord with the changing rhythms, demands, opportunities, and closures of a complex world; it depends on the effectiveness of the biographical narratives we construct for ourselves in our turbulent world, on our ability to keep a particular narrative going. (Plummer qtd. in Weeks, 2000: 164)

A particularly good explanation of the tenuousness of Wynn's ability to "keep a particular [biographical] narrative going" can be found in her video "Shame", in which Wynn relates her difficulties in coming to terms with her identity as a trans lesbian.

There's two problems that kind of multiply together. One, I'm ashamed of being trans. Two, I'm ashamed of being a lesbian. And whatever one times two is, I'm really ashamed of being a trans lesbian. Ew.

It's difficult and risky for me to admit these feelings, because visible queer people are supposed to perform pride. Why is no one talking about the shame? Because we're ashamed of the shame. But we shouldn't be. The shame is a natural result of shaming.

I grew up in a media era where trans women were usually represented as vomit-inducing monstrosities who deserve the violence they bring upon themselves by existing. And I started my transition in the first year of the Trump administration, where there's been constant vilification of trans people in the press, invading women's bathrooms, forcing our insanity on children, and destroying Western civilization with our authoritarian pronouns. It's hard to express just the daily humiliation of being a trans woman under these conditions ("Transcripts: Shame" n.p.).

"The baseless but pervasive suspicion that trans people are dangerous, and dangerous in [a] way that violates women in particular" (Salamon, 2010: 107) that Wynn cites severely impacted the ways in which she was able to think about her own sexuality.

[I]t doesn't help that most forms of transphobia are harsher on gay trans women than they are on straight trans women. Like, take this trope that trans women are men who transition to creep on women in bathrooms. In response to that, it feels really good to be able to say, "I'm not even attracted to women. I'm just a petite heterosexual biogirl. I'm surely not some kind of six-foot monster who likes women." ... It does make me feel like a monster sometimes, like a mutant that has no place in society. And this shame has actually made it more difficult for me to accept that I'm a gay woman, than it was for me to come out as trans in the first place. It's like I made a kind of subconscious bargain where I traded my sexual orientation for my gender identity, and so I finally transitioned only to spend the next couple years living with a different kind of denial. And that denial got pretty deep and pretty dark. ("Transcripts: Shame" n.p.)

Wynn's struggle serves as a perfect illustration of Salamon's thoughts on trans people's sexuality. On the one hand, the "trope that trans women are men who transition to creep on women in bathrooms" ("Transcripts: Shame" n.p.) is the direct consequence of the

“danger in overstating the confluence of sexuality and identity” (Salamon 2010: 45). But, on the other hand, Wynn’s subconscious bargain, wherein a normative sexuality was the price of nonnormative gender, shows “what sort of contortions result when trans subjects are required to suppress or deny their sexuality” (Salamon 2010: 45).

## PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CANCELLING

It is perhaps difficult to understand why Wynn would feel the need to reflect on such personal matters in front of an audience that has nominally gathered there to consume videos on internet culture and online activism. The explanation partially lies in the thesis of this paper – *ContraPoints* is not only an outlet for Wynn’s creativity and a way for her to politically engage her audience, but also a space for her to work through aspects of her identity and personal life. However, there is another possible impetus behind this kind of frankness; perhaps a more cynical one – the development of parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationship is a term used to describe the feelings of affection and sustained connection that individuals develop for people they have never met, such as celebrities or even fictional characters (Kurtin *et al.*, 2018: 236). Kurtin *et al.* further point to research stating that the platform’s very slogan “Broadcast Yourself” signals the fact that YouTube is the perfect place for creators to first engage the viewership in initial parasocial interaction, and then establish long-term parasocial relationships with them (2018: 237; 238). But parasocial relationships are not only a good way to create what we would essentially call fandoms. “Parasocial Contact Hypothesis” focuses on the way parasocial interactions can work as extension of real-life social interactions, and “reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members” (Schiappa *et al.*, 2005: 92). A study by Galinec and Lauri Korajlija found that, among students who were exposed to information about trans people, the most significant positive change in opinions came in the group who were shown YouTube videos containing more personal transition narratives (2017: 287). In the words of Judith Butler, “Certain faces must be admitted into public view, must be seen and heard for some keener sense of the value of life, to take hold” (2004: XVIII). *ContraPoints* is an interesting channel in this regard because it could be posited that one of the driving forces behind the entire channel is to reduce prejudice through exposure to a trans woman, so its success absolutely depends on its viewers feeling some sort of a genuine connection with Wynn. But at the same time, this sort of intense investment in a YouTuber can prove to be a double-edged sword, both for the creator, and for their audience.

When we consider the ordinary ways that we think about humanization and dehumanization, we find the assumption that those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance of being humanized, and those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk as being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all. ... [But] it would seem that *personification does not always humanize*. (Butler, 2004: 141, emphasis mine)

In December 2019, Natalie Wynn got cancelled on Twitter. “Canceling is online shaming, vilifying and ostracizing of prominent members of a community by other members of that community”, and in Wynn’s case, this meant a Twitter harassment campaign lasting weeks, and targeting not only her, but also her friends and associates (“Transcripts: Cancelling” n.p.). The incident occurred because a part of her viewership felt deeply betrayed by the fact that in her October 2019 video “Opulence” she used a voiceover by Buck Angel, a prominent trans public figure who is considered to be a transmedicalist (“Transcripts: Cancelling” n.p.). Even though only a few months prior, she had released “Transtrenders” as a nuanced rebuttal of transmedicalism, the 10-second voiceover by Buck Angel was enough for a section of her audience to turn against Wynn and denounce her completely. Part of the reason they reacted so forcefully indubitably has to do with the more unpleasant aspects of parasocial relationships. By becoming emotionally invested in Wynn and finding in her a role model, her fans open themselves up to possible disappointments and a sense of betrayal should Wynn ever do anything they perceive as morally reprehensible. Such a feeling may be especially strong for fellow trans people who look to Wynn as a prominent and publicly visible member of their community. But this kind of a personification of Wynn as an all-powerful, detached representational ideal decidedly “does not humanize” (Butler, 2004: 141).

People on Twitter don’t try to persuade me like I’m a human being. They order me around, they tell me what to believe, they demand that I say exactly what they want me to say, or else. It’s extremely objectifying. They don’t treat me like a person with my own opinions and feelings. They treat me as this brand of moral commodity to be consumed or denounced. And this is all terribly ironic because of the conflicting demand that creators be authentic all the time (“Transcripts: Cancelling” n.p.).

The problem is compounded by the precarious power relations inherent to celebrity status, which obfuscate the level of influence her viewers can collectively exert on Wynn.

There’s not really anything ambiguous about this. It’s just abuse. But I don’t think it feels like abuse to the people who are doing it. They feel like they’re punching up because I’m a “celebrity” with a platform and lots of Twitter followers. And it’s true that I do have more power than any of them individually. But as a collective, they have a terrifying power that they don’t seem to be aware of as individuals (“Transcripts: Cancelling” n.p.).

Wynn’s experience shows how changes in the functioning of media determine the level of power an audience has over the creator. Writing about the radio almost 30 years ago, Auslander remarked that

[t]he mass-media audience exists as a collective only by virtue of each individual member’s relation to the medium; that relation in itself ensures that the collective will never be more than a grouping of isolated individuals whose only common bond is their relation to the medium and who will never be able to respond collectively to the medium. (1992: 79)



This assertion, while perfectly logical in the context of the media landscape in the 1990s, proves to be almost comically inapplicable in a world where entire progressive movements spread through the use of hashtags. “Responding collectively to the medium” has become the norm, and everything from YouTube comment sections to sharing political content on Facebook is predicated on the willingness of individuals to shape themselves into a powerful collective force.

In order to reflect precisely on these issues, Wynn filmed “Cancelling”, a 100-minute-long video in which she, using both the cancellation of James Charles (a prominent beauty vlogger) and her own negative experience as examples, breaks down cancel culture into “tropes”. In a way, she managed to turn an emotional and reputational adversity into an ultimately very well-received video (“Cancelling”). She ends her video on a defiant note, sarcastically claiming,

YouTubeing! This is a healthy profession. This is great! Anyone want my job? Step right up! All you have to do is make informative and entertaining videos about extremely controversial topics while, of course, representing the full range of experiences in the LGBTQIAA+ spectrum and being perfectly woke and irreverently funny. Well, go on. I’m waiting to be entertained. Feed me, mother. Oh, don’t mind me, I’ll just sit back and pour another glass of wine.

Oh, and I will, of course, be obsessively scrutinizing every word you say for any hint of moral transgression, as well as critiquing your look, ya third-rate crossdresser. Zero out of 10, get off my stage (“Transcripts: Cancelling” n.p.)!

The trials Wynn went through, as a result of being shunned by a section of her fanbase, ensured she attained a sort of ironic metacognition on her own role as a YouTuber. The fact that she decided not to film “Cancelling” in the form of a fictional dialogue, however, points to the fact that she understands, and is still willing to utilize, the emotional force of direct communion with one’s audience – precarious as the effort may be.

## CONCLUSION

*ContraPoints* is a YouTube channel that is characterized perhaps most obviously by its inherently contradictory nature. The topics it covers are at once explicitly political and incredibly private; it is simultaneously a vehicle for creative expression and a minefield of potential parasocial blunders. Therefore, this paper did not aim to present either the channel or its creator Natalie Wynn as a simple Internet success story, wherein a combination of easily identifiable factors led to the creation of a (micro)celebrity. Rather, it focuses on several distinct characteristics of Wynn’s approach as a creator, and tries to establish where performance, political activism, and personal confessions intersect.

In “The Left” and “The Aesthetic” Wynn tackles the importance of appearances – how an activist might be taken more seriously if they *appear* cool and detached, or how a trans person might be granted more dignity and safety if they visibly *appear* to be of the gender with which they identify. She simultaneously emphasizes and deconstructs the importance of aesthetics (be it of logic or womanhood), exposing it to be something which is deliberately constructed and wielded. A video such as “Transtrenders” demonstrates Wynn’s preoccupation with representing different spheres in which politics is conducted. She reminds her viewers that public debates are merely performances staged for general audiences, and that the really nuanced discussions happen behind closed doors, within the marginalized communities themselves.

While much of her work relies on characters as vehicles for ideas (be it her own conflicting views on an issue, or different sides in an ongoing, broader political conversation), the videos in which she directly addresses her audience also serve an important purpose on the channel. On the one hand, they make her appear more personable and straightforward, which appeals to new, sometimes even initially hostile, viewers. Even more importantly, however, such “traditional” formats in which performances do not take the central stage give Wynn the space to talk directly about deeply private issues. A video such as “Shame”, for example, is certainly entertaining, educational, and political – but more than anything else, it is a personal exploration of Wynn’s sexuality and romantic history. By forgoing characters and completely laying herself bare to her viewers, Wynn ensures *ContraPoints* is not merely a channel dedicated to discussions of political and social issues, but an online space centered around *Natalie Wynn* as a person in her own right. While this kind of engagement ensures her audience feels sympathy for Wynn (and by proxy, for all the trans women Wynn is in effect representing in the eyes of many of the viewers outside this marginalized community), it also exposes her to the more pernicious aspects of parasocial relationships – impossibly high standards, harassment, and vilification.

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## **HAVE A COLA AND SMILE, BITCH! COMMODIFICATION AND REVOLUTION IN BOOTS RILEY'S *SORRY TO BOTHER YOU***

### **Summary**

*The 2018 film Sorry to Bother You marks the directorial debut of American hip-hop artist and activist Boots Riley. The film focuses on and critiques many different aspects of contemporary capitalism, from the destruction of the welfare state, a new management style with a friendly face, the reification of humans under late capitalism, and the dissolution of the difference between wage work and slavery to the numbing effect of the media and their tendency to either fully deface or commodify various forms of protest. In this paper I intend to analyze the latter aspect of the film, the commodification of protest and of potentially revolutionary acts on the examples of the TV spectacle created from the protests at Regal View, including the popularity of the "Have a Cola and smile, bitch!" incident, and the destiny of the supposedly revolutionary art made by the protagonist's girlfriend Detroit. Furthermore, taking a step back and considering the rise in popularity of socialism among young Americans, I intend to analyze the possibility of the film itself being a revolutionary act, and what kind of shift that could create in the current cultural hegemony.*

**Key words:** commodification, recuperation, interpassivity

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 2018 film *Sorry to Bother You* marks the directorial debut of American hip-hop artist and activist-become-director Boots Riley, a well-known activist for workers' rights and self-described communist. The main focus of the film is the current state of the neoliberal economic system, as well as a bleak outlook on where its future might lie. For the main setup of the film Riley chooses a telemarketing company, the kind of work that explicitly connects the key components of contemporary capitalism in the film: human interaction, virtual sales, management 'with a friendly face', and technology. All those elements combine to create an environment of alienation from work and from one another, which leads to both the protests, which are the central point of the film, and to the reaction of the police and the public to those protests. In this paper I intend to analyze the commodification of protest and of potentially revolutionary acts on the examples of the TV spectacle created from the protests at *Regal View*, including the viral popularity of the "Have a Cola and smile, bitch!"

incident, and the destiny of the supposedly revolutionary art made by the protagonist's girlfriend, Detroit. In addition to that, I intent to analyze whether the revolutionary acts in Riley's film can be deemed a success or not based on the inclusion of the sci-fi/fantasy element of *Equisapiens* in the final third of the movie.

## ANALYSIS

In order to begin this analysis, one first has to define the key concept used throughout this paper: commodification. Referring to Karl Marx, Ziółkowski writes that "a commodity is a product or service or, even more broadly, any social relation - which has exchange value and can be bought or sold on the market. In other words, commodification is the process whereby an object becomes a commodity, with a price of its own, and is put on the market." (2004: 387) Following this line of reasoning, the commodification of protest and of revolution would be the placing of the act of dissent on a market where it loses its revolutionary potential and becomes just one of many commodities, perhaps best exemplified by the popularity of T-shirts with the figure of Che Guevara on them. Such T-shirts have become a sign of protest and of opposition to the prevailing regime, but an utterly weak sign, a total commodification of the actions of a popular revolutionary figure with the aim of draining any active revolutionary potential from his figure and his actions – wearing a Che Guevara T-shirt could be considered as much an act of revolt as staging a protest.

The protagonist of the film, Cassius Green, his name a pun on the phrase 'cash is green', works at a telemarketing company called *Regal View* along with his girlfriend Detroit and his friends and coworkers Salvador and Squeeze. Cassius struggles with his job at first, unable to convince any of his customers to buy the products he is selling, until his older coworker Langston reveals to him the secret of *white voice*<sup>1</sup>, described by Boots Riley in an interview with *Democracy Now* as follows: "White people don't even have it. They use it, and it's a performance. There's a performance of whiteness that is all about saying that everything is OK, you've got your bills paid, and that—and, you know, this kind of smooth and easy thing." (*Democracy Now* 1, 2019) The white voice serves as a commodifying instance throughout the film; once Cassius adopts it, he suddenly becomes the top salesman in the office and is soon given the chance to join the upper echelon of telemarketers, the so-called 'Power Callers', a group of elite telemarketers who specialize in selling arms and the labor force of a company called *WorryFree*, where the workers work under lifetime contracts with accommodation and with no pay, a form of work and life arrangement eerily

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<sup>1</sup> The racial suggestion of *white voice* is made explicit in the film, and once Cassius adopts it he starts 'blending in' with the mostly white 'Power Callers.' His superior, Mr. \_\_\_\_, is another black man who uses white voice in the film, and the suggestion is that he has been doing so to the extent that he has lost his own name in the process and what remains is Mr. \*Bleep\*. The racial suggestions of *white voice*, however, are not the topic of this paper and as such will not be discussed in further detail.

resembling that of slavery. However, at the same time as Cassius' career takes an upward turn, his colleagues at *Regal View* form a union and demand higher wages and better working conditions. They stage protests in front of the company headquarters and form a picket line to try and prevent management and the Power Callers from getting inside. With the assistance of an aggressive police squadron, the latter, including Cassius, manage to enter the building. The conflict between the protestors and the police is televised and soon becomes the top news on TV, with the workers' demands and actions trivialized in favor of capturing the physical conflict between the protestors and the police. A similar course of events can also be seen in the TV reports of another protest taking place at the time, the protest against the slavery-like accommodation and working conditions at *WorryFree*. The two protests become TV spectacles and the violence displayed in them is juxtaposed to the most popular entertainment show in the film, *I Got the Shit Kicked Out Of Me*, in which contestants endure various kinds of beatings in exchange for money. In a sense, the news reports of the protests compete for viewership with each other and with the entertainment show, with the show being the clear winner with 150 Million viewers per episode.

Forms of violence are displaced onto the screen and the act of protest becomes a spectacle, a model in which images and representations are accumulated and mediate the relationship between people and which, according to Guy Debord, has become dominant in the contemporary world (2005: 7-8, 11). Following the theory of the spectacle, what happens with the protest once it becomes a TV spectacle – a series of images of violence which at the same time satisfy the displaced desire for violence and create an image of the protest movement as both violent and unable to seriously harm the assaulting police force – is that it undergoes recuperation, a process defined by Chasse et al as “the activity of society as it attempts to obtain possession of that which negates it.” (*Situationist International Online*, 1969) By recuperating<sup>2</sup> the act of the protestors, it becomes part of the existing system instead of being an attempt of its negation. The protestors, the group of telemarketers who want to form a union and demand better working conditions, become active members of the existing system and their actions are recuperated to serve as entertainment to the passive majorities watching the conflict on TV. It is a course of action which, expanding on the situationist tradition, Baudrillard defines as a society of control which replaces the pre-existing society of surveillance and discipline expressed by Foucault. Baudrillard defines it as a “switch from the panoptic mechanism of surveillance (*Discipline and Punish*) to a system of deterrence, in which the distinction between the passive and the active is abolished. There is no longer any imperative of submission to the model, or to the gaze. 'YOU are the model!' 'YOU are the majority (1994: 29)!” Such an analysis follows Baudrillard's analysis of the very fundamentals of the systemizing process which he describes in his first book, *The System of Objects*, as follows: “the system splits into two in order to strike a balance between terms that are formally

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<sup>2</sup> Or coopting, in the more common terminology of the contemporary left.



antithetical yet fundamentally complementary.” (2005: 86) Summarizing that position, Mark Fisher defines it as “a vision of control and communication [ . . . ] in which subjugation no longer takes the form of a subordination to an extrinsic spectacle, but rather invites us to interact and participate.” (2009: 12)<sup>3</sup> That vision of control is quite visible throughout the film, most notably in a scene where Cassius is hit by a can of Cola thrown by a young protestor who yells “Have a Cola and smile, bitch!”. The video of that event quickly becomes viral, and soon the act of protest becomes completely commodified by the film’s version of *Coca-Cola* itself in a TV commercial in which the same young protestor again yells the same words, but this time she walks over to a man resembling Cassius and shares the Cola can with him. Thus, the element of protest is removed from what was originally a revolutionary act, and the young protestor is herself an active participant in the system of her own control. That scene is quite clearly an ironic take on a similar commercial, the 2017 *Pepsi* ad starring Kendall Jenner, in which she walks through a group of happy protestors whose demands appear to be nothing but the abstract ideas of peace and happiness, and gives a can of Pepsi to a police officer. That ad was heavily criticized upon release, and Boots Riley seems to imply that it was the motivation behind the inclusion of the Cola scene in the film. He says in an interview: “there’s a thing that happens with a cola ad, that is somewhat — well, anyway, I don’t want to talk about it, but it kind of paid tribute [inaudible]...” (*Democracy Now* 2, 2019)

After being assaulted by the can, Cassius wears a bandage around his head. With the popularity of the video, he gets recognized on the streets as the guy who got hit by a Cola can. After a while, he notices children walking around wearing wigs resembling his afro with Cola cans glued to them. A whole trend of wearing merchandize themed with the viral act of protest develops, much like the above-mentioned popularity of Che Guevara-themed T-shirts. The commodification of the act of protest and the subsequent popularity of promoting it can be read in terms of Robert Pfaller’s concept of interpassivity, described by Fisher as an act in which, in this example, the wearing of protest-themed wigs “performs our anti-capitalism for us, allowing us to continue to consume with impunity.” (2009: 12) The film, however, subverts that notion as well – at the end of the film, in the final clash between the striking workers and the police, the former all wear those same wigs. And while in the film the protestors manage to win and seem to have their demands accepted, Cassius fails to get out of the grasp of the aggressive capitalism he was part of. After the apparent success of the strike and after he has managed to ‘purify’ himself of the white voice and his habit of viewing everything in terms of commodities, he becomes an *Equisapiens*, a hybrid of human and horse developed by *WorryFree* to serve as a new and improved labor force. The final twist in the film reveals the grand ploy of the very capitalist society Cassius assumed he had defeated – the moment when he thought he finally managed to escape

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<sup>3</sup> While this formulation signals a departure from the situationist tradition, that tradition is still necessary to fully grasp the concept of an interactive form of control through visibility and participation.

it all was the moment when he got completely incorporated into it. Returning to the notion of recuperation, it can be said that Cassius' transformation into a horse-man is the moment in which he fully becomes a part of the system which he almost successfully manages to negate. In that sense, it remains questionable whether the protest in the film was successful or not.

The final transformation from man into an *Equisapien* is, however, not a sign of complete failure of the revolutionary act. The *Equisapiens* are a product of genetic engineering conducted by *WorryFree*, hence they can be considered commodities produced by the company and there to have their labor power consumed by the company's clients. By turning against *RegalView*, and by extension against *WorryFree*, the *Equisapiens* provide an alternative reading of the revolutionary act in the film. Although they are produced by the hypercapitalist system and the act of turning people into horse hybrids is widely embraced by the government and some members of the public in the film, they do not leave their mark on society in the way that was intended. Instead, they help the protestors fight the police and in the final scene of the film they show up at the door of the mastermind behind the *Equisapiens* project, *WorryFree* owner Steve Lift, clearly intending to kill him. Hence the commodity establishes itself within the system, opposes it, and in the end helps change something in the system. The horse-people are therefore an example of the opposite of recuperation, *détournement*, where the commodity is turned against the hegemonic system and manages to break its hegemony and change it from within. Therefore, the *Equisapiens* plotline in the film can be seen as Riley's attempt of providing a somewhat positive ending to the film. What betrays that ending, however, is the fact that it was solely through the intervention of the *Equisapiens* that the protesters managed to win the battle with the police. This element of fantasy, or science fiction, depending on one's belief in technology, is the condition for the success of the protest which regular workers alone are unable to achieve. One reading of that would be Riley's attempt at saying that workers need to undergo a transformation of themselves, of their own subjectivity, to successfully fight for their rights. Another reading would be that the workers have been so dehumanized by the working conditions on the contemporary market that they turn into pure horsepower keeping the system of consumption running. A third, more cynical reading would be in line with Jameson's famous quote that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism." (2003: 76) In this sense, it is easier to imagine human DNA being mixed with that of horses to create a new interbred species than it is to imagine a group of workers winning a strike in America.

The act of strike is not the only form of protest in the film. In fact, the character who could be described as the most revolutionary of them all is Cassius' girlfriend Detroit. Throughout the film she takes part in protests against *WorryFree*, on the picket line at *Regal View*, and she creates artwork with revolutionary implications, most notably sculptures in the form of Africa as a means to protest against the exploitation of

Africa's natural resources. During an exhibition of her art she encourages the visitors to throw balloons full of goat blood and pieces of old cellphones at her as a symbol of the exploitation of Africa, from where many resources crucial for the creation of modern communication gadgets are taken. However, when Cassius enters the exhibition area and spots Detroit, she is talking to a group of upper-class potential buyers and is using her own white voice, the only time in the whole film that she does so. At that moment it becomes clear that regardless of its revolutionary implications and intentions, her art is still for sale – it still functions as a commodity. Jameson points out that “economics has come to overlap with culture: that everything, including commodity production and high and speculative finance, has become cultural; and culture has equally become profoundly economic or commodity oriented.” (1998: 73) It is important to note here that her art, even though it is commodified, still does not belong to what would be considered pop culture. At display in this moment in the film is what Fisher refers to as *precorporation*, on which he writes:

Witness, for instance, the establishment of settled 'alternative' or 'independent' cultural zones, which endlessly repeat older gestures of rebellion and contestation as if for the first time. 'Alternative' and 'independent' don't designate something outside mainstream culture; rather, they are styles, in fact *the* dominant styles, within the mainstream (2009: 9).

While Detroit seems to be convinced of the subversive nature of her art, she is still embarrassed when Cassius witnesses her using her white voice to try and sell her artwork. Her work, however, suffers the same fate that the works of many artists and authors opposed to the commodification of art suffer – in order to get their message across, they need to find an audience, and in order to find an audience they become commodities in the market. It is a tautology from which the film, and indeed the majority of today's whole culture industry, does not seem to be able to break free.

At this point, the question of the revolutionary potential of the film and the commodification of it shifts from the film's content to the film itself. Marshall McLuhan famously claimed that “the medium is the message”, which he explains is “because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.” (1971: 16) If we were to consider the film itself as a medium, more specifically in relation to the genre of the film, described by Boots Riley as an “absurdist dark comedy, with magical realism and science fiction, inspired by the world of telemarketing” (*Democracy Now* 1, 2019), the question arises of how such an unconventional, anti-capitalist film can succeed as much as *Sorry to Bother You* did and what effect can the success of such a film have on its viewers and the culture industry. What makes this film especially interesting is the fact that it was published in a time when the popularity of socialism, or at least what is considered to be socialism to the wider US public, is on the rise. With figures like Bernie Sanders becoming dominant in the US political landscape and teenage magazines like *Teen*

*Vogue* publishing articles on Karl Marx, it would be easy to make the claim that there is a growing sense that change is necessary within the American public, especially among the youth.

Here, however, one can return to the already defined notion of interpassivity: Fisher refers to Žižek<sup>4</sup> and mentions that “anti-capitalism is widely disseminated in capitalism. [...] Far from undermining capitalist realism, this gestural anti-capitalism actually reinforces it.” (2009: 12) It is a similar vision of an interactive society of control as defined by Baudrillard – watching the film has the feel of a revolutionary act in itself, but fails to produce any revolutionary potential outside of the film. Boots Riley describes the role he envisions for the film as “getting a lot of people talking about it.” (*Jacobin Mag*, 2019) Riley’s claim that rebellion has been edited out of the world of film (see interview for *Jacobin Mag*), however, does not ring completely true: one only has to think of the success of Jordan Peele’s 2017 movie *Get Out*, or in fact the viral popularity and critical acclaim of the 2019 Korean film *Parasite*. In addition, in his interview for *Democracy Now* Riley stresses the need to organize people into movements and to perform strikes through work stoppage, both of which are to be seen in his film. He claims that “we’ve gone away from class struggle in favor of spectacle, and hidden in the arts and academia.” (*Democracy Now* 2, 2019) Similarly to how the *Equisapiens* in the film still manage to record some sort of victory, so too does the film manage to break from the constraints of interpassivity, even if only on a very small scale. As reported by *Medium*, the film and its focus on organizing labor unions inspired the Salt Lake Film Society’s front-of-house staff to organize their own union and demand better working conditions, a move supported by Boots Riley himself in a video message to the union organizers. (*Medium*, 2019) Although it is but a small example, it still shows how art, especially film and TV, can be subversive and inspire people to oppose working and living conditions which they consider unacceptable. And while that small victory was inspired by the film, on the greater scale of things, it appears that the film has succeeded only in satisfying the phantasies of those believing that there has to be some change without actively doing much to achieve it, and has been more or less successfully recuperated into the dominant neoliberal hegemony as a means of criticizing hypercapitalism without being able to challenge it. It falls into the same trap Detroit’s art in the film falls into.

Riley’s own life and work have been the subject of attempts of recuperation following the film’s success. The most obvious example of that can be seen in the discourse used in an interview he gave to *CBS*, in which the line of questioning referred less to the film<sup>5</sup> and more to Riley’s life as a typically neoliberal rags-to-riches story of a self-made man. Following Srnicek and Williams’ claim that “neoliberalism creates subjects” who are defined by “perpetual education, the omnipresent requirement to

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<sup>4</sup> Funnily enough, during a recent visit to Zagreb as a guest of “Filozofski teatar” Robert Pfaller complained that Žižek had ‘stolen’ the idea of interpassivity from him without giving him any credit for it.

<sup>5</sup> The moment Riley starts talking about his self-described communist ideas the interview stops.

be employable, and the constant need for self-reinvention" (2015: 47), it is clear that the discourse of the self-made man is in fact a neoliberal discursive strategy. In the *CBS* interview, the questions focus on Riley's own experience as a telemarketer, suggesting his way from telemarketer to renowned screenwriter and director as a story of the individual success of a competitive man, a proper neoliberal subject. The focus on Riley's own persona and the way the interview is basically cut off the moment he starts talking about work stoppages gives away the picture of Riley the viewer is supposed to get from seeing this interview: the ideal of what Dardot and Laval call the *entrepreneurial man* who is "capable of seizing opportunities for profit and ready to engage in the constant process of competition." (2017: 103) In doing so, the film's revolutionary message is reduced to empty signifiers like bold, fascinating, and unapologetically brilliant, and it is substituted for the success-story of a black man who came from nothing to create what is simply referred to as one of the most interesting films of 2018.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Boots Riley's 2018 film *Sorry to Bother You* deals with, among other topics, the commodification and recuperation of protest and revolutionary potential. While Riley's goal was for the film to inspire the creation of movements which would organize people to fight against the dominant economic system, the film itself can be seen as being subject to the same form of recuperation evident in it.

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## ***ON, ONA, ONO*: TRANSLATING GENDER NEUTRAL PRONOUNS INTO CROATIAN**

### **Summary**

*Gender neutral pronouns have become prominent in languages such as English (they/them) or Swedish (hen). They are sometimes used in public discourse in order to indicate that no gender is above one another. However, there is also a group of people sometimes using they/them as their preferred pronouns. This group has embraced the term non-binary as a way to describe their gender, meaning they see themselves as neither predominantly male nor female, but as being outside of the male-female gender binary. The aim of this paper is to examine how non-binary people prefer to be addressed in Croatian in order to determine how a translator should approach translating gender-neutral pronouns from English into Croatian, which uses grammatical gender along with gendered pronouns. Even though the majority of non-binary people prefer to use they/them pronouns in English, Croatian is different because it is a fusional language, and its use of cases means that a speaker has to adjust the verb, noun or adjective they use in a sentence according to grammatical gender. Through interviews conducted with Croatian natives identifying as non-binary, and by analyzing examples of translation of non-binary pronouns into Croatian, this study will try to provide ideas for translators trying to find an accurate and appropriate translation for gender neutral pronouns, as well as look into reasons why some forms of pronouns in the Croatian language may not be the best option for translating the language of non-binary people based on their own responses.*

**Key words:** translation, non-binary, grammatical gender, English, Croatian

## **INTRODUCTION**

Non-binary is a gender identity of people who identify themselves outside of the gender binary of the masculine and feminine gender, as neither male nor female, as both, or as varying degrees of masculine or feminine. It is a fairly new concept, and not much research has been conducted on this issue, especially in the field of translation. The aim of this paper is to examine how Croatian translators might translate gender neutral pronouns, and which pronouns Croatian non-binary natives use. The first section of the paper deals with the pronoun most often associated with non-binary people – the singular *they*. It also deals with grammarians' criticism throughout the years, and why it might be a better alternative to the generic *he* pronoun recommended by some grammarians. In the second section, some historical examples of non-binary gender

identity, as well as the contemporary definition of non-binary gender identity, will be discussed. The following section will be on the typological differences between English and Croatian, namely on the difference in grammatical gender or lack thereof, and how these differences influence the translation process. Furthermore, the results of the interviews with Croatian non-binary natives will be shown. The following sections will deal with the notions of translation equivalence and the various theories behind it, as well as the cultural shift, and how it impacts queer translation. The final section will give an analysis of examples of translating the singular *they* pronoun into Croatian, as well as the text with such examples.

## THE SINGULAR *THEY* PRONOUN

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the singular *they* pronoun emerged in Middle English in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a century after the plural *they* pronoun came into use (Baron 2018). The plural *they* pronoun was borrowed from Old Norse in the 13<sup>th</sup> century ("They"). This shows that there was a need for a singular pronoun used for an antecedent which is unknown or unspecified. The following are examples of early uses of the singular *they* pronoun.

"Eche on in þer craft ys wijs." (Wycliffe qtd. in the University of Michigan Middle English Dictionary)

"Hastely hiȝed eche... þei neyȝbed so neigh ...þere william & his worþi lef were liand i-fere." (William and the Werewolf qtd. in Baron, 2018: n.p.)

In these examples, various authors use the singular *they* pronoun in a way which has been a matter of debate for many centuries after it was first recorded, although it had been in use since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. According to Baron (2018), in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, grammarians started to point out that the singular *they* pronoun is an error because a plural pronoun cannot take a singular antecedent, but the *you* pronoun was also plural before it became singular, which proves that this kind of shift in meaning is possible. One of the possible reasons why grammarians were opposed to the singular *they* pronoun, along with the previously mentioned reasons, is the fact that the singular *they* pronoun was used interchangeably with the generic *he* pronoun, which had also been used for both sexes in Middle English. In fact, many English grammars prescribed the use of the generic *he* pronoun for both sexes instead of the singular *they* pronoun ever since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. One of the first to prescribe this rule was Anne Fisher (1789: 118), stating, "The *Masculine Person* answers to the *general Name*, which comprehends both *Male* and *Female*; as, *any Person who knows that he says*". Her grammar was the first grammar to be published by a woman, and it became very popular, which could have contributed to the popularity of this rule. In 1850, the British Parliament passed on an Act which led to the use of the generic *he* pronoun in all laws (Miller, 1994), possibly due to her suggestion.



## The generic *he* pronoun

The generic *he* pronoun, albeit considered grammatically correct by some, was widely criticized as not being inclusive and showing abject bias toward men, male-centered language, and therefore, a male-centered society. The generic *he* pronoun was also recommended by William Lily in his grammar for English students of Latin, *A Short Introduction to Latin*, stating, "The Masculine Gender is more worthy than the Feminine, and the Feminine more worthy than the Neuter" (Lily qtd. in Baron, 2015, n.p.). This quote on the "worthiness of gender", as he calls it, may seem offensive to the contemporary reader, but it is important to note that this rule was meant to be interpreted only in the context of grammatical gender, not in the context of gender as a social construct, as it has come to be considered today. English grammarians applied this Latin rule to English in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Baron 2015). The 18<sup>th</sup> century was a period when women were not allowed to vote, and were usually considered lesser than men. As the issue of women's suffrage became more prominent, so did the issue of the generic *he* pronoun. Some suffragettes even used this rule to their advantage, with Anna Johnson saying, "[T]he English language is destitute of a singular personal pronoun, third person, of common gender; but usage sanctions the employment of "he," "him" and "his" as of common gender. Therefore, under "he" women can certainly register." (qtd. in Baron, 2015: n.p.)

Even though prescriptive grammars indicate that using the generic *he* pronoun is considered correct and easily understandable, there are some examples which show that constructing a phrase using the generic *he* pronoun may lead to misunderstanding. Consider this example:

"If a student asks politely, the teacher will answer **his** question."

This example shows a typical variation of a classroom rule. This kind of phrase would be perfectly clear in a setting where a teacher is lecturing in an all-male school, in a classroom filled with male students. But imagine a situation where a teacher tells their classroom filled with students of both sexes this phrase. This phrase would probably be clearly interpreted by a classroom filled with older students, who have already learned about the generic *he* pronoun, and who have been told their entire lives that using the generic *he* pronoun for both sexes is correct. But how would younger children react to this phrase? Would girls feel offended? Or would it be better to say "their question" or "his or her question"? Some might suggest we should use the generic *she* pronoun in order to make the girls feel more included. But what if there are students in that class who do not feel comfortable with either pronoun? Would it be better to use the singular *they* pronoun so that the teacher can make sure everyone feels included? Another example where insistence upon the generic *he* pronoun leads to oddity to consider is the following one:

"When we get abortion law repeal, everyone will be able to decide for **himself** whether or not to have an abortion." (Franks, 2012: 206)

The person stating this phrase could have used 'herself' but instead they opted for the generic *he* pronoun, as advised by grammars at the time. If the speaker was to use the singular *they* pronoun and change 'himself' to 'themselves', there would be less or even no misunderstanding at all.

### The contemporary use of the singular *they* pronoun

During the last couple of decades, the singular *they* pronoun has become more and more appropriate to use for referring to someone whose gender is unknown, or when the antecedent is 'somebody', 'no one in particular', or 'everybody'. But recently, the singular *they* pronoun has become the preferred pronoun of some non-binary and genderqueer people. These people identify as outside of the gender binary, and instead of addressing themselves using masculine or feminine pronouns, they prefer to be addressed using the singular *they* pronoun. The Anglophone society is becoming more and more accepting of non-binary people, and therefore, of the singular *they* pronoun being used to address them. However, there is some criticism. Due to a variety of reasons, some people consider it strange to use the singular *they* pronoun when referring to just one particular person, and it sometimes lead to *misgendering*. Misgendering is a type of identity misclassification (McLemore, 2014: 53) which may be intentional or unintentional. In this study, McLemore has shown that the transgender individuals have mostly reported that they have sometimes experienced misgendering, and 30.4% reported being misgendered often. 34.8% have reported feeling very stigmatized when being misgendered (ibid.).

In the recent years, efforts have been made to make the singular *they* pronoun, used by non-binary people as their preferred pronoun, more prominent in society, and in linguistics. The definition of the singular *they* pronoun used to refer to non-binary people was added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary in 2019. The American Dialect Society chose the singular *they* pronoun as their word of the year in 2015, and explained their decision by saying: "While editors have increasingly moved to accepting singular *they* when used in a generic fashion, voters in the Word of the Year proceedings singled out its newer usage as an identifier for someone who may identify as non-binary in gender terms (Mariott, 2015: n.p.)."

However, the singular *they* pronoun was not and is not the only pronoun used by people who identify as non-binary. The following section will look into the concept and the history of gender non-binary more closely, and delve into other pronouns possibly used in the same context as the singular *they* pronoun when referring to someone identifying as a gender non-binary.

## NON-BINARY GENDER IDENTITY

Nowadays, it is widely accepted that 'sex' refers to biological sex, and it is related to all of the biological characteristics we associate with sex (primary and secondary sexual characteristics). Gender identity, however, refers to "an individual's sense of their gender, which may differ from their sex assigned at birth, from their gender expression, and from the way other people perceive their gender" (Beemyn and Rankin, 2011 qtd. in Davidson, 2016: 4). It is distinct of sex, but also related to it, a "translation of biological realities into social expectations for "men" and "women" ". (Beemyn and Rankin 2011; Sausa 2002, qtd. in Davidson, 2016: 4)

*Non-binary, genderqueer, agender, Two-Spirit, genderfluid, bigender or gender non-conforming* are some of the terms used for and by people who identify outside of the gender binary of the masculine and feminine gender, as neither male nor female, as both, or as varying degrees of masculine or feminine. What makes a non-binary person non-binary is the fact that they do not see themselves as having a gender identity of a "man" or a "woman", but as being outside of the gender binary set by social expectations for men and women.

### Examples from historical records

One of the earliest written records of humanity, Mesopotamian myths, reference types of people who are neither male nor female. These included eunuchs, women who could not and would not have children, men who live as women, intersex people, and gay people, among others. It seems that anyone who did not fit into the traditional role associated to either masculine or feminine gender was considered neither male nor female. Leick mentions a hymn to Inanna, a Mesopotamian goddess of love, sensuality, fertility, procreation, and war, described as "the ritual of acceptance of liminal sexuality under the aegis of the goddess" (1994: 159), which features the *sag-ur-sag*, who emphasize their ambiguous gender by wearing male and female clothing and ribbons. The Egyptian story of the creation of gods starts with Atum, who is male and female, who through asexual reproduction creates two other being. According to *Merriam-Webster* (2019: n.p.), "in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, English laws concerning inheritance sometimes referred to people who did not fit a gender binary using the pronoun it". The term Two-Spirit is used as an umbrella term that encompasses sexual and gender diversity in the Indigenous Americas. In India, the *hijra*, who are born with male reproductive organs or intersex, who have a feminine gender expression, have a third gender marker in their documents. In Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro, women who take the vow of chastity and wear male clothes in order to live as men in a patriarchal society are called *burrnesha*.

These examples show that people have always existed outside of the gender binary, but it is not always easy to determine who should be considered non-binary throughout

history. "Conceptualizing non-binary history is inherently problematic. Not only do identity terms change rapidly, but gender as a concept is fairly new. Behaviors and styles that might be labeled non-binary today had no such labels even in the fairly recent past (McNabb, 2017: 13)."

### Other contemporary gender-neutral pronouns

Non-binary people today often usually use gender neutral pronouns, such as the aforementioned singular *they* pronoun, but some of them use masculine and feminine pronouns, or other pronouns with which they feel the most comfortable. Along with the singular *they* pronoun, there are other pronouns suggested or recorded throughout history, which may be used by some people who identify as non-binary. In 1789, William H. Marshall recorded the existence of the singular pronoun *ou*, and traces it to the Middle English epicene *a*, the reduced form of the Anglo-Saxon *he* (he) and *heo* (she) (Baron 2018). Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there have been many proposals of pronouns which might be used in this context. Baron mentions *thon*, coined by Charles Crozat Converse, meaning "that one", which was included in certain dictionaries and still has some users (ibid.). The pronoun *ze/hir*, and its slightly less productive derivatives *ze/zir* are also used. Other less productive pronouns include Spivak pronouns *e* (older version) and *ey* (newer version), humanist *hu*, *per*, *ve* and *xe*.

The blog Gender Census has an annual survey of people who do not identify in terms of the gender binary. In 2019, they got 11,242 responses to a survey that ran from 25 February to 30 March. The participants were given checkboxes to choose from. The majority of the participants said they identify as non-binary (66.6%). 79.5% of participants said they would be happy if people used the singular *they* pronoun for them, 30.8% opted for the pronoun *he*, 29 % chose the pronoun *she*, and 10.3% said they avoid pronouns. *Xe*, Spivak *e*, *ze*, and *it* were chosen by less than 8% of the participants, with *xe* having the highest percentage – 7.2%. Neopronouns such as *ne*, *ve*, *ey*, *ae* and *thon* were all selected by less than 1% of the participants. The results of this survey show that even though there is no unilateral third gender option, non-binary has been chosen by two thirds of the participants, and that the singular *they* pronoun is the closest to the standard pronoun that could be used for those who identify as non-binary. We should not rush to conclusions and expect every person who does not identify as masculine or feminine to use the singular *they* pronoun, but data show that this pronoun is prevalent in the majority of the cases. However, the participants of this survey were only given questions on their preferred pronouns in English, which has a range of previously mentioned gender neutral pronouns. The following section will examine the typological differences between English and Croatian and possible reasons why Croatian has no equivalent for the singular *they* pronoun that might be used in the same context.

## GRAMMATICAL GENDER IN ENGLISH AND CROATIAN

Linguistic typology deals with the study and classification of languages, focusing on the structural and functional features of languages. Criteria for classification include syntax (word order), morphology (word structure) and phonology (sound pattern). Linguistic typology differentiates between analytic languages, which have a lower morpheme to word ratio, as well as a higher use of helping words, and a less flexible word order, and synthetic languages, which may use inflection or agglutination to express syntactic relations between sentences. Inflection means adding morphemes to a root of the word in order to assign grammatical property to that word, and agglutination is the combination of two or more morphemes into one word, which may give information on the grammatical category of the word. The four subtypes of synthetic languages are agglutinating languages, fusional languages, polysynthetic languages, and oligosynthetic languages.

Along with other Slavic languages, Croatian is classified as a fusional language. Fusional or inflected languages use a single inflectional morpheme to denote multiple grammatical, syntactical or semantical features. As a fusional language, Croatian has declension (seven cases – nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, locative, vocative and instrumental), as well as conjugation. Since fusional languages are morphologically rich, they do not require a strict word order. The word order in Croatian is not fixed, but it is also not entirely free. English, a mixed language, has one fusional ancestor, German, but it has lost many fusional characteristics over the years, and it is now considered closer to analytic languages. However, some fusional characteristics have remained, such as the conjugation of verbs, where the difference is only in the third person singular/first and third person singular for the verb "to be". Pronouns in English also show fusional characteristics of cases, as they still have both genitive and accusative forms. Since English is not a morphologically rich language, word order is fixed.

Each language has its own challenges when it comes to gender neutral language. English, as it has been previously discussed, has the singular *they* pronoun, as well as other possible pronouns which could be used when referring to a non-binary person. Croatian, however, does not have a pronoun which can be used in the same way the singular *they* pronoun is used when referring to a non-binary person. Since Croatian is a morphologically rich fusional language which uses many inflections showing grammatical gender, it is more difficult for a speaker in a certain situation to construct a sentence in Croatian that has just one instance of grammatical gender.

### Croatian

Croatian differentiates between masculine, feminine and neuter nouns. Usually the masculine and feminine is used for people and other living beings, and the neuter is usually used for inanimate objects. Nouns are used to express the gender of a person in

Croatian. According to Babić (1995, qtd. in Mihaljević 2013: 361), in order to express the gender of a person, the suffixes *-ica*, *-ka*, *-inja*, and *-kinja* are used to form feminine nouns, and the suffixes *-ac*, *-ak*, and *-an* are used to form masculine nouns. This is called motal word formation. The products of motal word formation are called motal pairs, and the only difference in meaning is the gender of the person they denote. The meaning of the noun remains the same. Examples of motal pairs are *učitelj – učiteljica* (teacher-MASC/teacher-FEM), *psiholog – psihologinja* (psychologist-MASC/psychologist-FEM), *mačak – mačka* (tomcat/cat). Some motal pairs in Croatian are not created using the aforementioned suffixes, but rather, they are completely different, such as in the example of opposites *otac – majka* (father/mother). Adjectives in Croatian agree with the nouns they describe in case, number, and gender, which means they are also susceptible to motal word formation.

Third-person pronouns in Croatian are gendered, just like in English. There are three third-person pronouns in Croatian. The pronoun *on* is used to denote third-person, singular, masculine, in the nominative case. The pronoun *ona* is used to denote third-person, singular, feminine, in the nominative case. Finally, the pronoun *ono* denotes third-person singular, neuter, in the nominative case. These pronouns also have a plural form – *oni* (third-person plural, masculine, nominative), *one* (third-person plural, feminine, nominative), *ona* (third-person plural, neuter, nominative).

Some of the Croatian tenses are gendered, the most commonly used one being the Croatian perfect tense, *perfekt*. It consists of two verbs, the auxiliary verb, which is the present tense of the verb "to be", and the past participle of the main verb. The past participle has different gender-related endings: the nominative, singular, masculine *-o*, the nominative, singular, feminine *-la*, and the nominative, singular, neuter *-lo*. The plural forms are also different. There is the nominative, plural, masculine *-li*, the nominative, plural, feminine *-le*, and the nominative, plural, neuter *-la*. A male Croatian speaker might utter a sentence "Spavao sam", meaning "I slept", and the female Croatian speaker might utter: "Spavala sam", with the same meaning. The only difference is the gendered past participle.

Speakers of fusional languages such as Croatian, as well as other synthetic languages which are morphologically rich and express grammatical gender, may have more difficulty in determining how to refer to a person who identifies as non-binary since they do not have a formal equivalent of the singular *they* pronoun. Some languages have tried to come up with their own gender inclusive pronouns which may be used for non-binary people as well.

### **Gender neutral expressions in other languages: Swedish and Spanish**

Swedish has an alternative gender neutral personal pronoun *hen*, which may be used instead of the feminine *hon* (she) and *han* (he). It was first proposed in 1966, and once

again in 1994. Modeled after the Finnish pronoun *hän*, a gender neutral personal pronoun used in Finland since Finland does not have gendered third-person pronouns. In 2015, *hen* was included in the 2015<sup>th</sup> edition of The Swedish Academy Glossary (SAOL) "constituting the (unofficial) norm of the Swedish language" (Benaissa 2014; Fahl 2014 qtd. in Sendén et al. 2015). However, it took a very long time for the pronoun to become accepted and come into widespread use, and some manuals of style still advise against it. The Language Council of Sweden recommended that *hen* should not be used, "since it could be irritating and conflict with the content in the text" (Sendén et al. 2015: 2).

But Swedish is not a fusional language like Croatian. Typologically speaking, Spanish is much closer to Croatian, as it is also a fusional language. There have been some attempts to make Spanish more gender neutral, and at the same time, more gender inclusive. Spanish also has grammatical gender, just like Croatian. In Spanish, the suffix *-o* is usually used for masculine pronouns, nouns and adjectives, and the suffix *-a* for feminine pronouns, nouns and adjectives. When a person is referring to a group which consists of both men and women, or when referring to someone whose gender a speaker does not know at the time of speaking, the masculine form is preferred for nouns and pronouns (the pronouns *el/ellos* are used, as opposed to the feminine pronouns *ella/ellas*). This way of address is also preferred in Croatian, although there have been some attempts to make language more inclusive.

One of the suggestions to make Spanish more inclusive was using the suffix *-x*, which is often seen in the gender neutral neologism *Latinx* (plural *Latinxs*), used to refer to people of "(...) Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to *Latino* or *Latina*)" ("*Latinx*"). This term is used by LGBTQ and feminist *Latinxs* who use it as an inclusive term. As Frances Negrón-Muntaner describes it, "(...) *Latinx* is calling attention to issues of gender and LGBT inclusion and marginalization in a broad way" (Armus 2015, n.p.). Along with the suffix *-x*, people also use the @ sign (*Latin@*). But it is only possible to use this sign in writing. Its shape, which looks like both the letter *o* and the letter *a*, is very inclusive, but this sign has no official pronunciation. The other issue with the @ sign is that it is still very binary. The feminine and masculine suffixes *-a* and *-o* are the only ones being used, which possibly reinforces the gender binary. One other possible solution is saying both the masculine and feminine nouns/pronouns/adjectives, but this takes time to pronounce or write, and it may turn out to be a very clumsy solution when used in a longer text which contains many instances of grammatical gender. This issue is also present in Croatian as well, and it can also be observed in English (hence the replacement with the shorter and more practical singular *they*).

## Difficulties

There have been no initiatives such as the ones described above in Croatia, and therefore, no measures were undertaken in order to make Croatian more gender

neutral, and therefore, more open toward non-binary people. There have been some regulations, such as the European Union issues guidelines ("Rodno neutralni jezik u europskom parlamentu") for avoiding using only the masculine forms when referring to an unknown antecedent or when the antecedent is 'everyone'. This is a great step forward, but just as we can see from the example of Spanish, gender neutral language, as well as gender neutral pronouns, are very difficult to realize in fusional languages.

That being said, grammatical limitations do not stand in the way of a person's identity. Despite the fact that the Croatian language does not have a gender neutral pronoun like English does, there are still people in Croatia who identify as non-binary, and who are looking for a way to express their gender identity through language. The following section will explore some of the possible linguistic solutions.

## HOW NON-BINARY PEOPLE EXPRESS THEIR GENDER IDENTITY IN CROATIAN

As it has been discussed in the previous section, Croatian is a fusional language that has no formal gender neutral expressions which could be used by the non-binary community in Croatia. In order to approach translating gender neutral pronouns into Croatian, it was important to see what expressions Croatian non-binary natives use to express their gender identity, as well as which pronouns they use in Croatian. Therefore, we conducted detailed interviews with three Croatian non-binary natives.

The interviews were conducted during June 2019. Two separate interviews were conducted, one with the first and second participant (P1 and P2), and the second one with the third participant (P3). The participants were told the interview is anonymous, and that the findings from the interview will be given in a way that does not reveal their identity. The interviews lasted for 90 minutes, and they were recorded. The recordings are stored in a safe location in order to maintain the participants' anonymity. All of the participants are between 20–30 years of age.

All three participants are native speakers of Croatian. They confirmed they speak English, and that they use the singular *they* pronoun when referring to themselves in English, but that, since Croatian has no gender neutral pronoun like singular *they* in English, they use gendered pronouns in Croatian.

The first participant (P1) said that their biological sex is male, and used the masculine pronoun *on*. When asked on their opinion about other pronouns, they said that they also believe that 'ono' would make a good gender neutral pronoun, noting that in Croatian, *ono* is often used in the context of describing a child, giving an example that can often be found in teacher's notes when describing how a child understood the task at hand:

P1: "Ono je savladalo gradivo."



This can be translated as "They [the child-NEUTER] understand the material". This is further corroborated by the fact that in Croatian, the noun "dijete" (child), is in neuter, even though neuter is usually used for inanimate objects. However, other participants did not agree with them, and stated they feel the pronoun *ono* is derogatory and used to describe inanimate objects.

The second participant (P1) said their biological sex is male, and used the feminine pronoun *ona*. They noted they tried to use the plural form *oni*, but it often led to confusion when speaking for a longer period of time, and therefore opted for the feminine pronoun *ona*. They noted, however, they still feel comfortable using the pronoun *oni* as well. This participant also expressed they use the archaic verb forms aorist and imperfect referring to past events, which are not gendered in Croatian. This was the only participant who explicitly stated they use these verb forms as a way of avoiding gendered language. From Žic-Fuchs and Tuđman-Vuković (2008: 118), we know that aorist and imperfect are being used in texts. It is quite possible that this form is returning to wider use in Croatian and using this form would not be strange to hear. During the interview, the participant did not use these archaic verb forms.

The third participant (P3), whose biological sex is female, uses the masculine pronoun *on*. Their replies were similar to the replies given by P2. Both P2 and P3, which use pronouns that describe a gender identity different from their biological sex, described instances where they were misgendered, both accidentally and on purpose. They said being misgendered causes them a great deal of discomfort and sorrow, especially when coming from a person who is close to them. This indicates that there is still unwillingness toward acceptance of non-binary people into society, especially when they use pronouns for genders different from their biological sex. They also noted people do not even accept their gender identity, as they are often told it is made up, not real, or "something off of Tumblr", as P3 described it.

All participants suggested trying to avoid using gendered language by using nouns, and according to the other forms to the noun that was used, such as the noun "osoba" (person-FEM), which corresponds to feminine grammatical gender, and therefore, using it in a phrase means agreement in feminine grammatical gender when needed. This may take some adjustment, because when writing a longer text or speaking for a long time, the person has to make sure to use the feminine grammatical gender every time it is required. In the case of previously mentioned mortal words, using the noun "osoba" is not always possible since mortal words also require agreement in their respective grammatical gender.

When the participants were asked whether or not they think a new gender neutral pronoun which would be used by non-binary people in Croatia should be developed, they said that they would probably try to use it, but that they think not all people would accept it. Pronouns are a closed group of words, and changing them takes time and effort, since new words are rarely added. But, as it can be seen from the case of the Swedish

pronoun *hen*, it is possible if given enough time and effort. So far there have been no recorded attempts in creating a gender neutral pronoun in Croatian. This makes a translator's job very difficult when translating gender neutral pronouns from a source English text into Croatian, which will be discussed in the following sections.

## TRANSLATION EQUIVALENCE

In order to think about possible solutions for translating English gender neutral pronouns into Croatian, we must first discuss the theory of equivalence. Equivalence, although considered controversial by some, is important in translation. In theory of equivalence, the main notion is that the source text and the target text have the same value, or that they are equivalent on some level. A text is considered equivalent when it has the same value in both the source and the target text (Pym 2007). There are multiple definitions of equivalence which will all be considered when analyzing examples of translation.

Nida and Taber (1982) claim that, as no two languages are identical, either in meaning of symbols or in the way these symbols are organized into phrases and sentences, there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. The overall effect can be relatively close, but there can be no sameness in detail. Nida distinguishes between formal correspondence, which "(...) distorts the grammatical and stylistic patterns of the receptor language, and hence distorts the message, so as to cause the receptor to misunderstand or to labor unduly hard" (Nida and Taber 1982: 201), and dynamic equivalence, where the impact of the wording should be the same on the target and source audience, noting: "Frequently, the form of the original text is changed; but as long as the change follows the rules of back transformation in the receptor language, the message is preserved and the translation is faithful" (ibid.: 200).

Catford (1965), who had a more linguistic approach to translation than Nida, argues that there are two kinds of equivalence, formal correspondence and textual equivalence. "A textual equivalent is any TL form (text or portion of text) which is observed to be the equivalent of a given SL form (text or portion of text). A formal correspondent, on the other hand, is any TL category (unit, class, structure, element of structure, etc.) which can be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the 'same' place in the 'economy' of the TL as the given SL category occupies in the SL" (Catford 1965: 27). This approach is not very useful when analyzing translation, as it is not really relevant when assessing translation equivalence given the fact that formal correspondence does not take context into account. Catford was criticized by many for his linguistic way of approaching translation equivalence, and ignoring other factors important for translation, such as text, culture or situation, notably by Snell-Horby (1988: 19-20), who said Catford's definition of textual equivalence is "circular".

## CULTURE, IDEOLOGY AND TRANSLATION

In their essays *Translation, History and Culture*, Bassnett and Lefevre dismiss more linguistic theories of translation, which "have moved from word to text as a unit, but not beyond" (Bassnett and Lefevre 1990:4). They reject "Painstaking comparisons between originals and translations" (ibid.: 11) outside of their cultural environment. They look at the interaction between translation and culture, the way culture impacts and constraints translation, as well as the larger issues of context, history and convention.

Lefevre focuses on "(...) issues such as power, ideology, institution and manipulation" (Lefevre 1992: 2), and how those forces influence rewriting a translation, which can be out of "ideological" (conforming to or rebelling against the traditional ideology) or "poetological" (conforming to or rebelling against the dominant poetics) motivation (ibid.: 9). He also adds that the literary system in which translation functions is controlled by the two main factors, the professionals within this system, and patronage outside of it (ibid.: 15). He identifies three elements to this patronage – the ideological component, the economic component, and the status component (ibid.). He states that patronage has most power in the operation of ideology, whereas the professionals have most influence in determining the poetics (ibid.), and then says: "On every level of the translation process, it can be shown that, if linguistic considerations enter into conflict with considerations of an ideological and/or poetological nature, the latter tend to win out." (ibid.: 39) Therefore, we can conclude that Lefevre believes the ideological component is the most important one, which, in the end, determines the direction a translation will go.

## Queer translation

In his study, *Translating Camp Talk*, Keith Harvey analyzes the French translation of Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*, and remarks a significant number of lexical and textual changes in the French translation, such as: 1) using the same pejorative word (*tante*) for the pejorative 'pansies' and more positive 'queen', 2) translating the phrase 'to be gay' by using the pejorative *en être* ('to be one of them'), avoiding using the French word meaning gay, 3) either not translating or using a negative collocation for hyperbolic camp collocations (1998/2012: 354-9). The TT uses negative collocations for positive concepts denoting gay identity, or even completely avoids using them. Harvey believes that this issue lies in the target culture, and how it shows a "(...) relative absence of radical gay (male) theorizing in contemporary France." (ibid.: 359). Another example that Harvey analyzes is a translation of a French novel into American English, the novel by Tony Duvert (ibid. 360-364), where the translator's additions and lexical choices intensify the camp language, suggesting that the reason for such changes lies in

commercial pressure from US publishers, who support gay writing, and who wanted to assure that the book got better reception.

We can conclude that the target culture and its current ideology is also reflected in queer translation and that queer translation may suffer some changes, both positive and negative, based on the dominant ideology at the time. Both of these cases show translator's interventions which are not purely a result of linguistic differences, but also, to a greater extent, a form of censorship conducted by the translators in order to make their translations more commercially available by adapting to the dominant ideology at the time, conforming what Lefevre has stated on the conflict of linguistic and ideological/poetological considerations.

### **Possible issues**

When a translator encounters a source text which contains elements of source culture different from those of the target culture, they often find themselves in the midst of a dilemma. On the one hand, they must ensure that the message comes across to the recipients of the target text, and therefore, that dynamic equivalence is ensured. On the other hand, due to the lack of these concepts in the target culture, more often than not due to the influence of the dominant ideology, which may be less liberal in the target culture than the source culture, a translator must make sure that their translation does not lead to confusion among the target text recipients who have not seen this concept. At the same time, if a translator wishes to be ethical and inclusive, they must not censor the message or else no equivalence will be achieved, and it would no longer be translation, it would become adaptation. Since there is no concept of a singular, gender neutral pronoun like *they* in Croatian, when a translator encounters this pronoun, or any other gender neutral pronoun, they must strive to get the concept across, and not simply look for the corresponding category in the target language, but it is more difficult than it may seem at first. The following section will look into specific examples of gender neutral pronouns, and how they were or could be translated.

## **EXAMPLES OF TRANSLATIONS**

### **Examples from journal articles**

When singer Sam Smith came out as non-binary in 2019, many Croatian news portals reported on it. But these news reports pointed out one crucial difference between English and Croatian, the fact that Croatian does not have a gender neutral pronoun, equivalent to the singular *they* in English. When Croatian news portals reported on their coming out as non-binary, they regularly reported that their pronouns are now *they* and *them*, and they took the liberty to translate the singular *they* pronoun into Croatian *oni*,

third person plural, which could work as a literal translation of the pronoun *they* when used as third person plural, but which is not typically used as a gender neutral pronoun the same way the singular *they* pronoun is used. It seems that they achieved formal correspondence, as Catford puts it, and placed the TL category in the same place as it was previously occupied by the SL category, but they have in no way achieved dynamic equivalence, as it seems they managed to achieve formal equivalence, which leads to misunderstanding or difficulty in understanding.

Further evidence for this can be seen in the comments, in which some people started poking fun at the fact that they "asked" to use the pronoun *oni*, asking if they want to pay more taxes since they are more than one person, or saying that *oni* can only be used in the plural. These articles provoked many insults on the basis of them wanting to be special, not knowing whether or not they want to be male or female, calling them a "special snowflake", as well as other insults and instances of hate speech, which are not appropriate for academic discourse (the reader may look them up themselves, if they possess sufficient knowledge of Croatian).

The case of Sam Smith and the way their coming out was reported shows that people do not respond lightly to using the pronoun *oni* outside of third person plural, as well as the fact that Croatian people are either less familiar with the concept or non-binary, or are less open toward it, which was also confirmed during the interviews with the participants, who stated they get offended based on their gender identity. The participants also noted that using the pronoun *oni* often leads to confusion when speaking. Since these articles caused a primarily negative reaction, one possible reason for them doing so could be the fact that the authors of these articles simply chose to give the pronoun *oni* a new usage, a usage which has not been previously sanctioned by the Croatian-speaking public. It is a sign that simply replacing the pronoun *they* with a more generic pronoun *oni* might not work. Another issue is the fact that the pronoun *oni* is not entirely gender neutral. It is used to denote either groups of men or mixed groups, therefore it is used predominantly for men, and it still shows grammatical gender.

One other important issue that these articles shed light on is the fact that, even though the press explicitly stated that Sam Smith uses the pronoun *oni*, the authors of these articles used masculine grammatical gender whenever they talked about them in the article, which can be seen from this line: "Britanski pjevač Sam Smith zatražio je da se o njemu govori rodno neutralnom zamjenicom 'oni' navodeći da je 'cijeli život u ratu sa svojim rodom'." (Hina, 2019). The reporters probably felt it was easier to construct sentences in Croatian using masculine grammatical gender, in order to avoid confusion. Maybe it would have been better if they stuck to using the pronoun they decided upon, *oni*, in order to show its possible use for a non-binary person.

Another example of reporting on gender neutral pronouns in Croatian was when London Aquarium Sea Life posted about a baby penguin, the child of a lesbian penguin couple, Marama and Rocky, who adopted it. They stated that the penguin is non-binary.

When Croatian press reported about it, they wrote that "he" is very cute. Instead of using the word "mladunče" (chick-NEUTER), the author used "mladunac" (chick-MASC). The author did later use the word "mladunče". In this case, it would have been possible to use the pronoun *ono* throughout the article, since English also sometimes uses the pronoun *it* when referring to animals, but it seems the author shifted between using *on* and *ono*. As some participants stated they found this pronoun derogatory, it might not always be the best choice, but it would show that it is possible to fully use the pronoun 'ono' in this context.

When Merriam-Webster chose the singular *they* pronoun as their word of the year in 2019, Croatian news reported on it, saying that the singular pronoun *oni* is Merriam-Webster's word of the year, along with the explanation that non-binary people mostly use this pronoun. They also mentioned Sam Smith coming out as non-binary, addressing them using masculine grammatical gender. Once again, we see that the singular *they* pronoun was translated using *oni*, but there are no examples of its use.

## Examples from film

*John Wick Chapter 3: Parabellum* has a non-binary main antagonist called the Adjudicator. The actor, Asia Kate-Dillon, who is also non-binary, asked for the character to be non-binary, and to use the singular *they* pronoun. In the movie, there are no indications as to whether or not the character of the Adjudicator is non-binary. This is one possible reason as to why, when this movie was subtitled for Croatian cinemas, the translator used feminine pronouns and feminine grammatical gender in their subtitles for this character. In the Croatian version of the movie, the Adjudicator is translated as 'Sutkinja' (judge-FEM). In the English version of the movie, there are no instances of gendered language, and no character uses a singular *they* pronoun when talking about the Adjudicator. They have managed to avoid gendered language in English, but in Croatian, grammatical gender was impossible to avoid from the very first line that this character says on screen.

As stated earlier, there are no explicit indications that the Adjudicator identifies as non-binary in the movie, and the plot of the movie never places their gender identity into focus, so the translator chose to use the pronoun *ona* and feminine grammatical gender. According to the preferred pronouns of Croatian non-binary natives who also use gendered pronouns, opting for the pronoun *ona* is not necessarily a bad choice. Since the Adjudicator's gender identity was never the focus of the movie, if the translator were to opt for the pronoun *oni*, which had already proven to not always be the best choice, it might have led to confusion, and the focus of the viewer would be shifted from the movie to the fact that the translation has the plural pronoun *oni* used in a previously unsanctioned way.

Another possible translation that the translator could use, given the fact that there is no gender neutral expression for adjudicator in Croatian, would be to use the archaic aorist and imperfective forms when given the chance. Instead of translating "Adjudicator" with "Sutkinja" (judge-FEM), the translator could have avoided using the same lexical category and replace the noun "sutkinja" with "Dođoh vam presuditi." This is an example where aorist, the archaic verb tense that was mentioned by P2 during the interviews, is used. Since there are multiple occasions when the word adjudicator appears, such as in the line "There is an adjudicator here to see you" (00:32:18-00:32:21), aorist would not work in all of the cases.

When it comes to Croatian translation, both the Adjudicator and Sam Smith were addressed using masculine or feminine pronouns, which matched their biological sex, even though they could have also been addressed using feminine and masculine grammatical gender, respectively, or even using the plural pronoun *oni*, which was stated to be Sam Smith's preferred pronoun. We know this is possible from the results given by the interviews, where two participants used pronouns gendered differently from their biological sex.

## Reactions from speakers

Since it seems that the first instinct Croatian speakers have when encountered with the singular *they* pronoun is to proclaim it is translated as *oni*, it seems that it might be possible to add another meaning to this pronoun. However, since the majority of the people does not encounter this pronoun used in any other context outside of the translation as the singular *they* pronoun, and since pronouns are a closed group of words, to which is it hard to add new words, it seems that the pronoun *oni* does not serve as a dynamic equivalent of this pronoun. It also seems that, due to the dominant ideology which does not really pay much attention to non-binary people, even in cases when the news report on non-binary people or when non-binary people appear on television, reporters and translators find it easier to avoid using the plural pronoun *oni*, followed by resorting back to using gendered language. This is an indicator that, before we can start talking about translating gender neutral pronouns such as the singular *they*, which will probably become more and more prominent as more and more non-binary people are becoming visible in Anglophone society, we must also consider making non-binary people more visible in our society as well. If we do not try to educate the public on who non-binary people are and how to talk to them respectfully, we can only resort to either using gendered language with varying degrees of luck, or completely avoiding gendered language.

## CONCLUSION

Evidence that the singular *they* pronoun has existed in the English language dates back all the way to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and evidence of non-binary people dates back to 2000 BCE, when Mesopotamian and Egyptian myths talked about people who are neither male nor female, or those who are both. Despite prescriptivist efforts to make the generic *he* pronoun a replacement of the singular *they* pronoun under the influence of Latin, the singular *they* pronoun has prevailed, and it is now used both as a gender neutral pronoun for an unknown antecedent, or as the preferred pronoun of many non-binary people in the United States. Since Croatian is a fusional language which has more traces of grammatical gender than English does, and uses inflections denoting grammatical gender in more instances than English does, and since there is no official gender neutral pronoun in Croatian, Croatian non-binary people resort to using gendered pronouns *-on* or *ona*. This, however, does not mean that they are not non-binary, as non-binary people do not necessarily have to use the singular *they* pronoun.

When a translator is faced with translating the singular *they* pronoun used by a non-binary person, they also often resort to using gendered language, even in cases when, elsewhere in the text, it explicitly stated that the person is non-binary and uses the singular *they* pronoun. This is not necessarily wrong, but there are other possible ways to avoid gendered language. A translator could use the archaic verb forms, aorist and imperfective, which do not have inflections denoting grammatical gender in Croatian. Some translations of the singular *they* pronoun also suggest that the singular *they* pronoun translates to *oni* in Croatian, but it is not always the best choice as it sometimes elicits confusion, or even anger, of the target text recipient. Non-binary gender identity, especially non-binary gender identity of Croatian natives, is still a topic that is not often represented in scientific research. There are many possibilities for future research of this topic, both in the field of translation and language studies in general.

There is no perfect, correct way to translate gender neutral pronouns into Croatian. The most important aspect a translator needs to take into account is context. Each translation is different, and it is impossible to state which lexeme is the perfect translation for gender neutral pronoun. A translator should keep in mind that they are representing a marginalized group, and by avoiding the fact that the translated text is about a non-binary person, they are adhering to the ideology that suppresses those people, and it may lead to more discrimination.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview questions

1. Please introduce yourselves.
2. How do you see your gender identity?
3. Which pronouns do you use and why did you choose them?

4. Do you speak English? If you do, is the pronoun *they* your preferred pronoun in English?
5. What is your opinion on Croatian pronouns? Which and how many do you consider appropriate?
6. If a new, gender-neutral pronoun was created in Croatian, would you be willing to use it?
7. Do you think others would be willing to use this new pronoun?
8. Have you experienced situations where you use pronouns other than the preferred pronouns you stated? Why?
9. How does that make you feel?
10. Have you ever experienced misgendering? What do you do in situations like that?

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## THE CREATION OF THE INTERCULTURAL SPACE IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S SHORT STORIES

### Summary

*The paper studies the position of the South Asian community in the U.S. society by providing a detailed analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories from her two collections – The Interpreter of Maladies and Unaccustomed Earth. The focus is first placed on the two concepts – that of immigration and that of diaspora. These concepts are then used to further illustrate the South Asian diasporic identity and observe how this state of never fully belonging affects their process of (self-)identification and assimilation. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's notion on the third/hybrid space, it is claimed that South Asian immigrants strive to create a new kind of space – the intercultural space – which would be a progressive space that would bear the potential for cultural negotiation, communication and understanding. Since Jhumpa Lahiri's two short-story collections focus on the first, the second and the third generation of South Asian Americans, depicting their experience in great detail, these stories are then used to analyse how the processes of South Asian (self-)identification, their (un)successful attempts at assimilation and the creation of the intercultural space manifest themselves in different ways through each of these three generations.*

**Key words:** diaspora, immigration, intercultural space, Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Interpreter of Maladies*, *Unaccustomed Earth*

## INTRODUCTION

Being a second-generation Bengali-American, Jhumpa Lahiri attempts to portray the quotidian lives of the members of the South Asian community within the context of the U.S. society. Her fiction problematizes the diasporic backdrop – that is, how the sense of both belonging to and being alienated from the American context affects the process of diasporic (self-)identification. She also places a great emphasis on the notions of *home* and *nation*, questioning the possibility of their redefinition. However, this paper argues that Lahiri, by addressing both the perks and the pitfalls of the complex migrant experience within the scope of predominately white U.S. environment, also observes the possibility of intertwining these opposing cultural experiences and creating a new kind of space – the intercultural space that would bear a great possibility of

transcending these differences. This is exemplified with the stories from her two short-story collections, *The Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*.

## **SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA WITHIN THE U.S. CONTEXT**

As I-Chun Wang and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek suggest, “[m]igration and diaspora are results of social, political, and economic circumstances which, in turn, result in social, economic, and cultural marginalization” (2010: 2). Therefore, in order to better understand the diasporic backdrop and the question of their (marginalized) position within the society of residence, it is first necessary to distinguish between these two concepts – that of *immigration* and that of *diaspora*. Eithne Luibhéid defines *immigration* as “a permanent move [...] across a political boundary” (2007: 127). In this sense, Luibhéid suggests the voluntary nature of such a movement. Consequently, Brent Hayes Edwards defines *diaspora* as a “state of dispersal resulting from voluntary migration” (2007: 82). In other words, the process of *immigration* precedes the status of belonging to a *diaspora*. Upon the arrival into the foreign country in which one is to settle, through the process of documentation “the ‘immigrant’ [is] defined as a person who crosses a nation-state boundary and takes on a legal status of ‘alien’, with associated regimes of identification, surveillance, rights and constraints” (Luibhéid 2007: 128). Following this legal process, the immigrant is then immediately associated with other immigrants of similar cultural, racial or ethnic background, who have all undertaken a similar journey across political boundaries and who mostly share similar experiences. Through these processes, the immigrant’s identity, albeit legally homogenous on paper, in fact, becomes doubled and hyphenated. In this sense, as Vijay Mishra suggests, diaspora can be viewed as a group of people who do not feel comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities on their passports and who want to explore the meaning of the hyphen (2008: 1). In other words, these people strive to affirm their doubled identities. Consequently, this sense of alienation that they feel, as well as the process of exploration of their hyphenated identities, has a great effect on the process of (self-)identification. For that reason, Anju Rastogi claims that diaspora “can be a positive sight for the affirmation of the identity or conversely, a negative sight of fears of losing the identity” (2015: 1). The immigrant subject, therefore, struggles on both sides – on the one hand, to undergo the process of assimilation or integration into the new surroundings, and on the other hand, to preserve the language, religion and tradition of his/her homeland and preserve the ties s/he has with his/her culture of origin.

The diasporic experience is also characterised by yet another process – that of acculturation. Donnetrice Allison defines acculturation as an occurrence in which “an individual becomes immersed in a different culture and, as a result, begins to take on cultural characteristics of that group” (2010: 4). She also states that as “one is

acculturated into one group, one is deculturated from another" (2010: 5). Therefore, the diasporic subject struggles to balance the two sides of this process – to become more acculturated into his/her new surroundings, while also preserving the traits of his/her origin culture. In a similar manner, Débora B. Maehler, Martin Weinmann, and Katja Hank define acculturation as "a broad process of psychological and sociological adaptation following intercultural contact" (2019: 2). To put it differently, once the diasporic subject has settled into the new territory, s/he is confronted with culture(s), rituals, practices, languages, religions, etc., completely different from his/her own and s/he undergoes the psychological, or inner, and sociological, or outer, process of balancing these cultural differences within himself/herself and in contact with his/her new surroundings. The question remains if the diasporic subject will be able to balance these two opposing cultures and to what extent. According to John Berry, there are four acculturation profiles that result out of this intercultural contact: (1) *assimilation*, marked by a mild orientation towards the culture of origin and a strong focus on the culture of the residence country; (2) *separation*, marked by a strong orientation towards the culture of origin and a weak orientation towards the culture of current residence; (3) *integration*, marked by a strong orientation towards both of these cultures; (4) *marginalization*, marked by weak orientation towards both cultures (qtd. in Maehler, Weinmann, and Hank 2019:2).

Acculturation is, then, a long, and often complicated process which results in various degrees of attachment and different kinds of orientation towards these two opposing cultures. Any of this four acculturation profiles greatly affects and shapes the immigrant's future. Moreover, the acculturation process is further amplified by the fact that the diasporic subject may also undergo the process of naturalization – that is, the legal process in which the non-citizens become citizens or nationals of a given country. The process of naturalization, in this sense, may come up as an outcome of the entire acculturation process, but it can also function vice versa – that the diasporic subject, through the process of naturalization, is enabled to acculturate more easily into the new surroundings. Therefore, the naturalization process, according to Priscilla Wald, signals "the possibility of adaptation and the promise of transformation" (2007: 171), which "implies an environment that can accommodate the introduction of a foreign element" (2007: 171). That is, the process of naturalization the diasporic subject undergoes implies not only his/her own willingness to assimilate or integrate and become a member of a given nation, but also the willingness and legal preconditions of his/her surroundings to legally accept the foreign subject into their community.

Nevertheless, even though the predominant society tends to view and categorize diasporas in a very simplistic manner, neglecting complex divisions that exist between these different groups of people, it is important to notice that there can never be clear divisions between diasporas. As Rastogi suggests,

migrants cannot be conveniently grouped into clear-cut 'diasporas' because the realities of cultural dynamics are much more complex than those envisioned in simplistic models of 'multiculturalism', which wrongly attribute homogeneity and cultural stasis to groups of people from particular parts of the world (2015: 2).

That is particularly the case with the South Asian diaspora. South Asians are often grouped within the same category, which is highly problematic. As Rajan and Sharma claim, South Asia consists of numerous countries, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka (2006: 4). All of these countries are marked by great religious, national, traditional and ethnic differences, and they have also often been torn apart by tensions of different kinds (Rajan and Sharma 2006: 11). The birth of these nations, as Susan Koshy claims, has coincided with the formation of the two kinds of diaspora – "‘endo-diasporas’ resulting from the scattering groups to neighbouring countries in South Asia and ‘exo-diasporas’ resulting from the scattering of populations to distant countries outside the region" (2011: 596). Albeit South Asian endo-diasporas have been marked by even greater sense of violence and conflict, among the South Asian exo-diaspora within the U.S. context, these differences have seemingly melted away. Nevertheless, there are great nuances and even greater differences between the members of this community. As Rajan and Sharma suggest, "it is a deeply divided population, split along cultural [...] lines, [but] while within mainstream US culture, they are constructed as a homogenous group, [...] within [which...] the schisms are deep indeed" (2006: 18). The history of these inner tensions often continues to permeate through the lives of South Asians in the States. Albeit probably not the cause of direct conflict, it is often the source of minor tensions and greater misunderstandings within their community.

However, within the American context, despite the fact that diasporas are no longer, as Appadurai claims "small, marginal, or exceptional" (2005: 10), the South Asian community, along with other ethnic communities, is generalised and positioned as the foreign element struggling to become more integrated into the society. In her short stories, Lahiri attempts to depict this kind of *othering* experience. The term *othering* was coined by Gayatri Spivak to describe "the process by which imperial discourse creates its 'others'" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007: 156). In other words, through the process of *othering*, the colonial subjects – the colonizers – shape the image of the others by assigning various negative or inferior attributes to the people they are colonizing, and in this way they also construct the image of themselves as superior. This process inevitably affects both their own sense of self, as well as the identity of the colonized. In this sense, within the diasporic context, the *othering* experience connotes the process in which the diasporic subjects are automatically positioned as the others by the predominant population, which then greatly affects the process of their (self-)identification.

By focusing on this *othering* experience, Lahiri depicts the experience of the first, the second, and sometimes even the third generation immigrants. Lahiri's first generation is mostly defined by the need to assimilate as much as possible, but also stigmatised by a great incapability of entirely escaping its alien status. The members of this generation are either enchanted with the prospects of the "New World", or are constantly longing for home, but they never manage to assimilate entirely, due to the strong influence of their origins. On the other hand, the second generation encounters themselves in "a particularly vexed position in regard to identity" (Field 2004: 165). They are in contact with their cultural heritage, due to the proximity of their parents and relatives, but they are also further distanced from it. And since they have been brought up in the States, their identities are "inextricably tied to their national affiliation as Americans" (Field 2004: 166). They are, therefore, in a constant struggle to balance their double identities and come to terms with the fact that they are "irretrievably heterogeneous" (Spivak 1988: 284). According to Field, diasporic subjects are also confronted with the fact of having "two homelands" (2004: 166). As Lahiri herself has claimed, as a member of the second generation of South Asian immigrants, she has often felt illegitimate in both cultures (qtd. in Bahri 2013: 40). The majority of Lahiri's second-generation characters, however, never manage to go past that point of constant negotiation between their two identities and a different kind of alienation emerges out of that. Nevertheless, it is in the third generation that Lahiri places all hopes of creating something new out of that cultural negotiation, as it will be observed further.

Consequently, by blending different cultural traits into a new cultural compound, the second and third generation of immigrants might, in fact, be attempting to create a new cultural space. Such a space would rely greatly on Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the *third* or *hybrid* space. Bhabha's term stems from the postcolonial context and he describes that such a space "though unrepresentable in itself, [...] constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (1994: 37). In other words, if the postcolonial identity is hybrid – a compound which emerged out of the contact between the colonizer and the colonized – it challenges the essentialist view on identity as fixed and invariable, and, in consequence, creates a kind of dynamic, variable space of no fixity in which two opposing cultures meet, translate, intertwine, and are negotiated. This new kind of cultural space is productive and looming with new possibilities – it does acknowledge its cultural predecessors, but no longer relies on them and *continues* down its own path. This space also represents hope for the future, representing the possibility of the space free from cultural misunderstandings, misinterpretations, tensions, and conflicts. Nevertheless, bearing in mind that Bhabha's concept is strongly tied to the postcolonial context, and the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, this paper opts for the notion of the *intercultural space*. This *intercultural space* would then be created by the hybrid migrants through their process of self-identification and negotiation of their double identities. It would be a progressive space that would bear the potential



for cultural negotiation, communication and understanding. Such a space would then greatly resemble Edward Soja's notion of Thirdspace, which Soja describes as:

a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible, uncombinable. It is a space where issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other. [...] In this critical thirding, the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to creative process of *restructuring* that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives (1996: 5).

In other words, within this space of constant negotiation, opening and critique, binaries would not be overlooked nor overcome, but combined and restructured in such a way that new alternative cultural combinations would be made possible. However, such a space would also imply an environment ready to accept such cultural negotiations. In a contemporary world brimming with various cultural encounters, as well as in the context of the U.S. heterogeneous society, the creation of such a hybrid progressive intercultural space seems almost necessary.

## JHUMPA LAHIRI'S DEPICTION OF SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA

In her short-story collections, *The Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri contemplates the possibility of creating such a progressive intercultural space. She observes various kinds of South Asian migrant experience and juxtaposes it against the predominately white American backdrop in order to observe whether cultural translation and negotiation is possible on both sides. According to Noelle Brada-Williams, what unifies all of the stories from Lahiri's collection is "[a] sense of exile and the potential for – and frequent denial of – human communication" (2004: 454). This potential for human communication that arises out of the contact between the two opposing cultures disguises the hopes of creating a space of intercultural communication and acceptance. The three stories chosen from *The Interpreter of Maladies*, "The Third and Final Continent", "Sexy", and "Mrs. Sen's", focus mostly on the experience of the first generation South Asians and depict different kinds of relationships between them and white Americans, only to observe whether it is possible to create such an environment that would welcome their attempts of assimilating into the American context. The two stories chosen from *Unaccustomed Earth*, "Unaccustomed Earth" and "A Choice of Accommodation", deal with the complex experience of second- and third-generation South Asians and their process of self-identification. The emphasis is placed on the observation of whether these generations are able to make use of the potential of the intercultural space.

## Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies*

### *The Third and Final Continent*

*The Third and Final Continent* follows the unnamed first-generation Indian protagonist who moves from Calcutta to Boston. He has recently entered an arranged marriage and, in consequence, he moves to the States to secure better living conditions for himself and his new wife. His arrival to the States happens to occur simultaneously with the man's landing on the Moon. According to Deepika Bahri, such a coincidence "recalls these various connotations of the word alien, effectively conflating journey of galactic scale, splendid isolation, and [...] [the] achievement of surviving in the 'New World'" (2013: 37). In this sense, Bahri connects the notion of alienation to the state of utter separation (2013: 37). America is, therefore, depicted as the final frontier (Bahri, 2013: 45). He moves in with a 103-year-old Mrs. Croft – a very traditional, patriarchal old lady, whose company serves him as a surrogate family for the following six weeks after his arrival to the States, while he waits for his wife to arrive. As Bahri suggests, Mrs. Croft's old age, her traditionality, as well as the fact that she is completely infatuated with the fact that the Americans have planted their flag on the Moon, present her as the "true American" (2013: 46). However, the fact that Mrs. Croft lives alone, locked within the safe boundaries of her home, points to the idea that the Indian protagonist is not the only character who is alienated. She, herself, remains utterly lonely, isolated and not at all assimilated into what has become of the U.S.

Nevertheless, the protagonist begins his life in the States and starts to slowly assimilate. As he recounts, "[he] bought a larger carton of milk, and learned to leave it on the shaded part of the windowsill, as [he] had seen another resident at the YMCA do" (Lahiri 1999: 192). Therefore, by observing habitual everyday actions of his surroundings, he steadily begins to adapt to the U.S. society. Even through his cohabitation with Mrs. Croft, which is marked by the repetitive routine of the two of them sitting together on a bench, talking about the fact that the Americans planted their flag on the Moon, he grows fond of the old lady and, in a strange way, begins to feel more at home. He claims that repeating this same conversation every evening "reminded [him] of [his] wedding, when [he] had repeated endless Sanskrit verses after the priest, verses [he] barely understood" (Lahiri, 1999: 196). Therefore, if rituals are based on repetition, and tradition is based on rituals, it may be claimed that through his short rituals with Mrs. Croft, the protagonist begins to create a new sort of tradition for himself – the one that would represent his life in the States.

Once Mala, his wife, is about to arrive, he claims that, unlike her, he is already used to living in the States. Nevertheless, her arrival presents yet another challenge – he is required to integrate her – his brand new wife which he barely knows and perceives as an alien in her own right – into his newly-invented American tradition. In the beginning, they both struggle. However, once Mala is introduced to Mrs. Croft, the two of them

immediately get on well. Consequently, it is Mrs. Croft who brings Mala and her husband closer together. Symbolically, she serves as the American backdrop – the context against which Mala and her husband position themselves as the Others and notice their mutual resemblances, all of which strengthens their bond. This very process is reminiscent of the positioning of the South Asian minority against the American backdrop – although there are numerous differences between the members of the community, once they juxtapose themselves against the white, middle-class American population, they suddenly begin to note all of their mutual similarities.

At the end of the story, the protagonist recounts how he and Mala have managed to assimilate to some extent into the American way of living. However, they still struggle to relive part of their tradition through their son. As he claims, “[they] drive to Cambridge to visit him, or bring him home for a weekend, so that he can eat rice with his hands, and speak in Bengali, things [they] sometimes worry he will never do after [they] die” (Lahiri 1999: 215). As Rajan and Sharma claim, “South Asians have prioritized the value of their homeland cultures, [...] [which] means a classical culture: language, attire, dance, music, etc.” (2006: 20). Therefore, by speaking Bengali to their son and by making him eat Indian food in a manner in which it is eaten in India, they make him value and relive his homeland culture. In this sense, they, as the members of the first generation, have managed to reach one the four previously-mentioned acculturation profiles by Berry – that of *separation*. They strongly gravitate around their culture of origin, with a weak orientation towards the U.S. culture. However, it is their son – the member of the second generation – who bears the possibility of combining the two worlds and creating a new cultural space. It is he who is able to at least reach the level of *assimilation*, if not even the level of *integration*, which would enable him to strongly orient himself towards both of the cultures that have shaped him.

### **Sexy**

In *Sexy*, Lahiri goes even further in her exploration of the relationship between the diasporic and the white American subject. The story depicts the illicit relationship between a young, 22-year-old American woman, Miranda, and a married Indian man, Devajit Mitra. The free indirect style of the story presents the reader with Miranda’s perspective. As suggested by Keith Wilhite, “we read the story’s cosmopolitan, global spaces alongside and against her provincial perspective” (2016: 85). Therefore, it may be claimed that, by using Miranda as a focaliser, Lahiri plays with the reader’s prejudices. In other words, it would be expected to suggest that Dev, as a first-generation Indian, is to take the inferior position of a diasporic subject struggling to integrate into the U.S. society. However, as Wilhite asserts, “[while] Miranda’s white privilege alleviates the notions of settlement and citizenship, her gendered and (regionally) dislocated identity limits her mobility” (2016: 78). In other words, being of

provincial origin, as well as being a young seduced woman, Miranda is the one to occupy the inferior position. It is Dev who, according to Friedman, appears as one of the “confident cosmopolites, members of a shifting network of global travellers whose national loyalties are flexible” (qtd. in Wilhite, 2016: 88).

Moreover, it is Miranda’s lack of geographical knowledge that makes her even more inferior. Keith Wilhite stresses the importance of maps in Lahiri’s fiction, claiming that they serve as the site of cultural translation and “a screen for multiple identifications” (2016: 77). That is, by using maps, Lahiri writes “displaced subjects in place” (Wilhite 2016: 77). Maps also “call attention to travel and migration, suggesting the vast distances covered by a pioneering first generation” (Maxey, 2012: 45) and cartography “offers proof of permanent residential settlement through the post-imperial claiming of space” (Maxey, 2012: 46). Mapping is, as Maxey suggests, a polysemic metaphor, providing a rich geographical and historical context for the notions of home and nation (2012: 47). The importance of maps can be observed in the scene in the Mapparium, in which Miranda and Dev stand at the opposite sides of the bridge, which, symbolically, stretches from the States to India. According to Christopher Apap, the “bridge, then, represents their connections to one another at the same time that it is emblematic of their stark cultural differences” (2016: 55). The bridge is, in this sense, the symbol of their affair, which attempts to make up the cultural differences between their countries of origin. However, the fact that their relationship is secret and illicit seems to point to the fact that such an attempt is, in some sense, impossible to achieve.

There is yet another important thing Lahiri explores through their relationship – namely, Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism. He defines Orientalism as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (1977: 14). In this sense, the vision of the Orient is a Western invention, and it immediately places the Orient in the inferior position – that of the Other (Said, 1977: 12). Therefore, what Lahiri suggests in “Sexy” is that the relationship between Dev and Miranda is based on the fetishization of the Other. However, the process of fetishization does not only befall Miranda but Dev as well. At their first encounter, Dev is described as “tanned, with black hair that was visible on his knuckles” (Lahiri, 1999: 95), whereas Miranda is portrayed as having “silver eyes and skin as pale as paper, and the contrast with her hair, as dark and glossy as an espresso bean, caused people to describe her as striking, if not pretty” (Lahiri, 1999: 96). Therefore, they both find each other exotic and mysterious, and, as Wilhite notes, it is exactly this element of exotic fascination that attracts them to one another (2016: 86). Consequently, Miranda’s interest in Dev also awakens her interest in his culture and she starts to formulate her own vision of the Orient. As Apap suggests, her “desire to comprehend Dev’s difference might thus be understood as her desire to understand her relation to Others and otherness” (2016: 58). Miranda starts to inquire about Dev’s childhood and learn about Bengal. She tries to learn his language and alphabet. She starts going to Indian shops and restaurants and consuming Indian food.

However, these poor attempts at mimicking Indian culture do not get her far. She is still confined within the limits of her knowledge and experience. However, what she does succeed in is the fact that she is able “to imagine the Other as human rather than subhuman” (Apap, 2016: 71). In this sense, Miranda, to an extent, overcomes the intercultural barrier between her and Dev. Her attempt at understanding the Other makes room for the possibility of creating the environment that would accommodate Dev’s assimilation, yet this possibility is never fully realised.

### ***Mrs. Sen’s***

Lastly, the story *Mrs. Sen’s* depicts the biggest possibility of creating the intercultural space within the first short-story collection. The story depicts a young American boy, Eliot, who begins to spend time in the house of an Indian family, the Sens. As Martina Caspari suggests, “the text actually opens up a subversive space, a space in which *both* cultures [...] undergo a quiet, barely perceptible change, but still a change that eventually does make a difference” (2014: 246). Mrs. Sen is a first-generation Indian, who has moved from Calcutta to the States with her husband. Mrs. Sen struggles with accommodating into the U.S. context, constantly stressing how much she misses her family, expressing the fear that they might forget her. “The homogeneity of US suburbia induces a profound sense of loneliness” (Maxey, 2012: 36). Mrs. Sen complains that the suburban life is just too quiet and that she cannot sleep in such silence. According to Angelo Monaco, the suburban home operates as a prison for Mrs. Sen – “the lack of transportation available and the inability to drive generate a sense of alienation” (2018: 163). Eliot, however, immediately begins to notice differences between his own and Indian culture, but he does not find them odd. On the contrary, he is slowly being brought up greatly influenced by both cultures and he begins to take in Indian culture as his own. He “[learns] to remove his sneakers first thing in Mrs. Sen’s doorway, and to place them on the bookcase next to a row of Mrs. Sen’s slippers” (Lahiri, 1999: 126). He begins to watch Mrs. Sen as she is chopping food on the floor and preparing meals. His incorporation of Indian culture goes to such an extent that it completely changes the perspective of his own culture – his mother now seems strange and different, distant and cold, and the way back to his house looks entirely different when he is driving with the Sens. In other words, Eliot plays the role of the translator of cultures and ends up creating a space in which the two cultures can not only co-exist, but also intermingle. If the notion of naturalization implies not only the process of the assimilation of the diasporic backdrop, but also the environment which allows for such an assimilation and welcomes difference, Eliot is a character which approaches this idea the most.

Moreover, as Caspari suggests, Eliot “talks very rarely but consumes all these new experiences through his senses” (2014: 250). Both he and Mrs. Sen “refrain from using the English language and actually use very little spoken language” (Caspari, 2014: 250).

In this sense, their use of silences helps them “explore ‘each other’ without the limitations of a language that is created around binaries and borders” (Caspari 2014: 250). By freeing themselves from the constraints of the Western language, they enable themselves to create the empty space of cultural freedom, into which they can inscribe their own process of mutual understanding.

### **Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth***

#### ***“A Choice of Accommodations”***

*Unaccustomed Earth* mostly deals with the complex process of identity formation for the second- and third-generation migrants. “A Choice of Accommodations” follows an Indian-American Amit and his American wife Megan. Although having been born and grown up in the States, Amit is deeply haunted by the sense of alienation and loneliness, still holding a grudge against his parents who moved to India without him when he was in the ninth grade, and constantly aiming to feel more at home in the U.S. He is detached both from his Indian background, because he barely lost all sense of attachment to his family and continues to betray his parents’ expectations, as well as his American background, for he was never entirely accepted in his surroundings. For example, his fellow peers would always “[compliment] him on his accent, always telling him how good his English [is]” (Lahiri, 2009: 97), neglecting the fact that English is, in fact, his first language. Moreover, his two daughters, Maya and Monika, “[look] nothing like him, nothing like his family” (Lahiri, 2009: 94). He begins to forget Bengali and misses the opportunity to teach his children Bengali. All of that serves as “a metaphor for the loss of his origins, a template for his search of cultural and physical accommodation” (Monaco 2018: 173). In this sense, Lahiri problematizes the sense of failure the second generations feel due to their inability to come to terms with the sense of displacement and their doubled identity. These migrants do inhabit the *third* space, but fail to recognize the potential of interculturality and make the best out of it.

#### ***“Unaccustomed Earth”***

In a similar manner, the story bearing the same name as the whole collection, “Unaccustomed Earth”, follows the story of Ruma, a pregnant Bengali-American who has recently moved to Seattle with her white American husband, Adam, and their son Akash, following her mother’s death. She is visited by her father – an unusual first-generation migrant who spends the majority of his time as a widower travelling the world. Her father is emblematic the first-generation migrants deeply affected by “the enchantments of the First World” (Sidhwa qtd. in Maxey, 2012, 34) and thoroughly amazed at the prospects of what the U.S. has to offer. Ruma, however, does not share

his excitement. Her process of self-formation is torn between the two opposing identities clashing within her – the Bengali, influenced by her ancestry and her mother's strong patriarchal and traditional worldviews and the insistence on the preservation of the Bengali culture within her family which only augments after her mother's death, and the American, influenced by her place of origin, her surroundings, and her marriage, as well as her unconventional father. On the one hand, Ruma is a well-educated, successful Western woman, who used to work as a lawyer in New York. On the other hand, following her mother's death, Ruma begins to feel her Bengali side go stronger. She quits her job, decides to prioritize the domestic sphere of her life, becomes a housewife in order to spend more time with Akash, and by doing this, she becomes entirely dependent on her husband. However, as Iwona Filipczak notices, nothing seems to make Ruma happy because she is "able to identify neither with her homeland India, nor with America, thus she suffers from 'double displacement'" (2012: 5).

The title of both the story and the collection stems from Nathaniel Hawthorne's concept of the *unaccustomed earth* as the prosperous ground for growing new things and new, different generations. The motif of the *unaccustomed earth* also signals a very important motif in the story – Ruma's uncultivated garden – her *unaccustomed earth* – which she is incapable of taking care of and completely neglects it. The "unaccustomed garden signifies Ruma's dislocation and lack of belonging, [...] the sense of strangeness, lack of roots and the need to grow them" (Filipczak, 2012: 6). However, it is precisely in this unaccustomed garden that the prospect of the intercultural space happens. Although Ruma struggles to transgress the limitations of her dual identity, it is her son, Akash, the third-generation Bengali American who manages to prosper in this space. He spends most of his time working and playing in the garden with his grandfather. In one scene Ruma even watches them planting the soil with both the seed as well as Akash's toys:

"What are you up to?" she asked him.

"Growing things."

"Oh? What are you planting?"

"All this stuff," he said, his arms full, walking out of the room. She followed him outside, where she saw that her father had created a small plot for Akash, hardly larger than a spread-open newspaper, with shallow holes dug out at intervals. She watched as Akash buried things into the soil, crouching over the ground just as her father was. Into the soil went a pink rubber ball, a few pieces of Lego stuck together, a wooden block etched with a star (Lahiri, 1999: 44).

Therefore, by making use of both the skills and the knowledge of his Bengali grandfather, as well as his Western toys, Adam creates his own kind of seeds and plants them into the unaccustomed earth in order to prepare the ground for the plantation of

a new kind of space – a space of negotiation and acceptance, in which the diversity of his cultural background is thoroughly embraced.

In this sense, it may be claimed that Lahiri places all hopes of creating a hybrid, intercultural space in her naïve and child characters. Through her two short-story collections, she studies all the different potential ways of creating this space. Firstly, she demonstrates how the first generation can never escape their origin and background and assimilate entirely. In such scenarios, the only likelihood of creating the environment welcoming of the intercultural space of mutual understanding and hybridity is placed on a white American boy, Eliot, who, due to his young age, naivety and open-mindedness is able to accept both the South Asian as well as the American influence as his own. Secondly, Lahiri delineates the second-generation experience and problematizes their incapability of transgressing the limitations of their complex hybrid identity. Nevertheless, the hopes are, this time, placed on the third-generation – a Bengali-American boy, Akash, who is the only character able to come to terms with his double identity and create a new kind of intercultural space. Therefore, these young, innocent characters seem to be the only characters that Lahiri presents as uncontaminated by the ethnic, racial and migratory history and politics. In such a way, they are the only characters apt for bearing the weight of the creation of the third space – they are able to make use of their doubled ancestry, as in Akash's case, or are able to accept the culture of the other as their own, as in Eliot's case, and create something entirely new out of that intercultural compound.

## CONCLUSION

Therefore, the purpose of this paper has been to prove that Jhumpa Lahiri's short fiction is not solely focused on the diasporic experience of the South Asian community in the U.S., but that it also attempts to observe the potential of creating an intercultural space in which the opposing cultures, the American and the South Asian, would meet, translate, negotiate, and intertwine. By observing the stories from her two short-story collections, *The Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*, it has been shown that Lahiri observes all the various ways in which the first and the second generation struggle to come to terms with their doubled identities and position themselves within the society of residence. It has been demonstrated that Lahiri also explores whether the predominant population is capable of creating such societal surroundings that would be ready to accommodate and accept the incorporation of these foreign subjects. It has been concluded that Lahiri, in fact, places all hopes of creating a possible intercultural space in her child characters – in Eliot, as the representative of a predominant white U.S. population, ready to create a welcoming environment ready to assimilate foreign elements into his own culture to such an extent that his perspective on both cultures changes, and in Akash, the third-generation Bengali-American, who is the only



character able to come to terms with his doubled identity and create an intercultural space of full potential.

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