

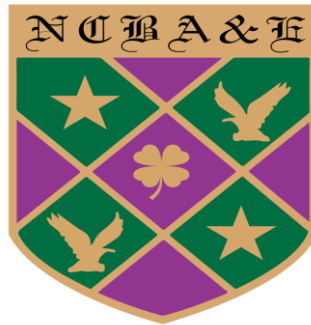
EXPLORING INTERSECTIONALITY AND MARXISM: THE DIALECTIC OF CLASS STRUGGLE AND IDENTITY IN HANIF'S "OUR LADY OF ALICE BHATTI"

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Abstract

Muhammad Hanif's novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) offers a heartbreaking depiction of Karachi, a cosmopolitan city with its necropolitical environment where life and death are governed politically. This article provides a comprehensive and critical approach by merging the materialist perspective of Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) which is a significant progress in modern Marxist Feminism with the complex framework of intersectionality. The protagonist of the novel, 'Alice Bhatti' travels through a tragic trajectory, who is a catholic nurse by profession from 'Churah' origin. She has been employed as a junior nurse. The novel illustrates that capitalist exploitation is inherently influenced and aggravated by patriarchal, religious and caste-based oppressions. The article establishes firstly, the theoretical importance of this synthesis then examines how the protagonist of the novel, Alice's paid and unpaid labor is exploited with intersecting lines and finally delves in the novel's portrayal of systemic violence as the ultimate manifestation of this dialectic. Muhammad Hanif has not simply depicted the class struggle in the novel, rather outlined a 'dialectic of social reproduction and identity' in which the marginalized status of Alice's renders both a saint to the downtrodden and a disposable body for the state machinery. Her existence and sorrowful demise shed light on what Achille Mbembe (2023) denotes as 'the subjugation of life to the power of death'.

Key Words: Intersectionality, Marxism, Subaltern, Patriarchy, Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), necropolitics.

Introduction

The novel, 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti' is one of the complex novels in the history of contemporary Pakistani English fiction and the traditional Marxist critiques with their focus on the economic 'base' determining the social 'superstructure' has provided a powerful but ultimately insufficient lens. The oppressive class structure of Pakistan is the central theme of the novel, in which Alice's oppression is irreducible to her proletarian status. Sirma Bilge, (2013) cautions that a thin and de-radicalized co-optation of intersectionality often sidesteps the materialist analysis of capitalism, whereas a rigid economic Marxism fails to account for 'the differentiated ways in which subjects are constituted and power is lived.

Through this theoretical standoff, the novel finds its most potent critique. Alice is not only a worker, in the strict sense of the term, but a female worker, surviving in a most hostile condition where women class is the victim of extreme hatred. She is a Christian nurse in an

Islamic republic and a member of a specific caste historically consigned to unclean labor. The article turns to the rich synthesis which is offered by Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) to analyze her position in the circle in which she survives. According to this perspective, capitalism depends not merely on the exploitation of wage worker but also on the often-unwaged work of birthing, raising and maintain the labor force (Bhattacharya, 2017). This framework provides a comprehensive lens when it is integrated with the focus of intersectionality on intertwining systems of oppression (Collins, 2019). The novel 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti' is a literary laboratory for this integrated theory. The struggle of Alice to survive in the most hostile condition is not just a series of discrete battles but is a proof of synergistic confrontation with a 'matrix of domination' (Collins, 2019). Her paid labor as a nurse and her expected social reproduction as a wife are both sites of intense conflict and exploitation.

Statement of the Problem

Literary criticism of Mohammed Hanif's "Our Lady of Alice Bhatti" often applies singular theoretical framework, i.e. postcolonial, feminist, or Marxist framework that fails to account for the protagonist's complex subalternity. This reductionist approach neither fully explains how Alice Bhatti's exploitation as a nurse is inseparable from her identity as a Christian woman from the 'Chuhra' caste, nor her murder functions as a political, rather than purely personal act. Consequently, there remains a critical gap in understanding the 'synergistic operation' of economic, social, and necropolitical power in the novel, which this article seeks to address through an integrated theoretical synthesis.

Research Objectives:

The followings are the Research Objectives of the Study.

1. To examine the identity of Alice Bhatti shaped by her experience of class struggle and labor.
2. To illustrate her work place as a theater of socio-economic reality in the light of Social Reproduction Theory and Marxist ideology.
3. To analyze her murder as a gradual building of her character in the light of necropolitical theory.

Research Questions:

The research will function on the following research questions.

1. In what ways the identity of Alice Bhatti has been shaped by her experience of class struggle and labor?
2. How does her workplace function as a microcosm of the broader Pakistani socio-economic system?
3. How is Alice's personality portrayed after her murder and how does her murder reflect the prevailing critique?

Literature Review

The early criticism on the novel primarily places it within a postcolonial framework. Uzma Aslam Khan (2015) analyzes the novel as description of 'subaltern consciousnesses' in a postcolonial state by focusing on Alice's voice as marginalized Christian minority. Her approach essentially highlights the religious and ethnic hierarchies in Pakistan. In this context, class and economic exploitation are the secondary themes. Examining the 'honor' killing of Alice's as a symptom of systemic misogyny, Abbas (2017), a recent feminist critique, focuses on the patriarchal structures governing her body and agency. In the very beginning, these basic approaches often analyzed systems of power in isolation as Bilge (2013) might assert as a 'compartmentalized' understanding of Alice's oppression.

In the most recent era, robust trend in the critique involves the synthesis of Marxist and intersectional theories. The contemporary critics have reframed the analysis of Alice's labor. Building on the initial work of feminist scholars, Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) coins the

formulation of the famous Social Reproduction Theory (SRT). For example, in the recent work created by Raza (2022) contends that Alice duty as a nurse represents a feminized and racilized boundary of social reproduction. Her work as a nurse is of vital importance, yet brutally diminished within a capitalist and castiest political economy. This standpoint leads to seeing her merely as an exploited worker to account for her gender; caste and religious identity are co-constitutive of that abuse.

The Necropolitical theory is an advanced and current scholarship which assimilates this materialist and intersectional analysis as propounded by Achille Mbembe (2003). Fatima, in her scholarly study 'Gendered Necropolitics and the Disposable (2023) maintains that the novel revolves beyond mapping Alice's lived oppression to documenting the political logic of her death. She further argues that the state is indifferent to the brutal murder of Alice which exemplifies 'gendered necropolitics'. This indifference attitude of government highlights the boundaries between private patriarchy and state power dissolve, collectively rendering poor, minority women's bodies have no importance. Puar (2017) further explains this concept of the 'right to maim' by proposing that this system promotes populations like Alice's in a state of perpetual uncertainty.

The critiques around *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* have developed different postcolonial and feminist analyses toward a sophisticated and integrated theoretical model. One of the most persuasive contemporary scholarships have been observed in the recent works of Raza (2022) and Fatima (2023) which determine that a comprehensive understanding of the novel demands abiding SRT, intersectionality and necropolitics in a vibrant and dialectical way. This combine and integrated framework reveals that Alice's tragic ending is not a consequence of a consecutive domination but of a synergistic matrix of power that manages her life, labor and death.

Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative and text-based methodology which is grounded in critical theory to conduct a nuanced literary critique of Muhammad Hanif's novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. The primary object of the study is to develop and demonstrate the efficiency of a cohesive analytical framework that synthesis three theoretical paradigms, i.e. Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), intersectionality and necropolitics. This methodological framework will move beyond solid critical approaches and will reveal the synergistic operation of economic, social and political power structures in the novel.

The study is framed within an interpretive-constructivist paradigm. According to which reality is socially constructed and that the knowledge is generated through the interpretation of texts to analyze within their specific contexts. This pattern generally suits to literary analysis as it accepts the role of the researcher in extracting the meaning through engagement with the text and theoretical lenses.

The central concept of the methodology is the development and application of an integrated critical framework. This framework is not merely a series of just highlighting events but a dialectical synthesis in which each theory suggests and refines the application of the others.

Social Reproduction Theory (SRT)

This theory was initially propounded by Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) which provides the materialist foundation of the study and the concept of traditional Marxist feminism. Its focus shifts from production alone to the processes that reproduce labor power including domestic labor, nursing and social provisioning. In the particular study, SRT is used to highlight Alice Bhatti's paid nursing labor and her expected unpaid reproductive labor not only as a wife but also as interconnected sites of exploitation. It exemplifies the Sacred Heart Hospital not only a

workplace but a key institution of the social reproduction in which the poor class living in Karachi has been neglected.

Intersectionality

The term 'intersectionality' has basically been derived from Black feminist thought and the founder of this term is Crenshaw, 1989. The term provides the analytical tool to understand how power-laden identity enlists mutual constitution. The research employs this concept to examine how Alice's identity as a woman, as a Christian and as a member of Chuhra caste generates a specific and compounded experience of subalternity which cannot be understood in isolation. In the light of this theory the specificities of her gendered and caste-based oppressions are the central points to probe.

Necropolitics

The theory propounded by Achille Mbembe in 2003, offers the ever changing political framework. In the light of the term the study interprets the systemic violence in the novel from the structural neglect in the hospital to Alice's eventual murder by arguing that these are not deviations but the logical outcomes of a sovereign power that decides which ones are to live and which ones are to kill.

This analytical integration explains that 'SRT' exhibits the economic logic of her exploitation, intersectionality reveals the social logic of her identity and oppression and necropolitics exposes the political logic of her ultimate destiny.

Data Collection and Analysis

The basic data for the research is the novel itself. The collection of data involves a process of close reading which is a foundational literary methodology which involves that the thematic analysis will identify the themes related to labor, the body, space, violence and religion. For instance, the description of Alice's works her interactions with medical authority and the spatial dynamics of the hospital and city. Similarly, the narrative analysis will examine the plot structure, character development and the point of view to understand how the story is constructed. The tragic end of Alice's life and ironic narrative voices are the crucial data to analyze. In this way the ironic use of the phrase 'Our Lady', the clinical description of workers and the official language of the state will be analyzed and the discourses that disclose power dynamics. This engagement with the text is not passive but dialogical and regularly moving between the textual evidence and the theoretical framework.

This article will explore the dialectic of class and identity in the novel in three parts. Firstly, it will examine Alice's labor through the lens of Social Reproduction Theory by arguing that this alienation is uniquely compounded by her gender, religious and caste based identity. Secondly, it will analyze the spaces in which she inhabits as sites where intersecting power structure are physically carved by drawing the focus on urban sociology and according to postcolonial theory. Finally, it will analyze her ultimate fate with regard to her murder as a simple crime of passion but as a necropolitical act which is the logical conclusion of our system that reduces certain elements expendable.

The Alienation of Intersectional Labor: Nurse, Women and Chura

Alice Bhatti, being a junior nurse in a dysfunctional Sacred Heart Hospital, is an exemplary proletarian. According to Marxist ideology, she sells her labor for a minimal wage and in return is alienated from the product of her labor. Nevertheless, a completely class-based study overlooks the particular nuances of her exploitation. This analysis is fully shaped by what Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) has pointed out as the despotic but necessary division between the production of goods and services and the social reproduction of the worker.

She compensates her job with love, care, self-sacrificing and emotionally demanding without proper acknowledgement or remuneration which is a pattern thoroughly discussed in the international care employment sector (Hochschild, 2012). This is apparent in her dealings

with the Senior Sister Hina Alvi, working with her who symbolizes what R.W Connell (2014) terms as ‘emphasized femininity’ where in the situation like this the women are bound to obey the patriarchal norms. The attitude of sister Hina towards Alice is not that of about professionalism but about taming a woman who is breaking the gendered expectation. When Alice was busy in performing her duties during an operation, her skill is judged as a threat because it challenges the passive and subordinate character allotted to her (Hanif, 2011).

Moreover, her identity as a Christian from the *Chuhra* origin layers this exploitation with an explicitly South Asian dynamic of oppression and exploitation which is based on descent (Teltumbde, 2018). Usually in Pakistan, the women classes from Christian origin are employed in the profession of nursing just to exhibit their faith and menial work. The father of Alice Bhatti is the mouth piece of the grounded Christian community who is a former stretch-bearer, spittoon-emptier and floor-mopper (Hanif, 2011). Alice wanted to escape from this situation through the profession of nursing and is partially successful in doing so. She merely graduates to a different form of certified servitude. Her meetings with others are marked with religious prejudice which exhibits her as a typical Christian nurse. This notion exemplifies what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as the collection of negative ‘symbolic capital’ in which non-dominant identities reduce her social value which enables her economic exploitation resultantly (Bourdieu, 1986). The administration of the hospital pay her less wages in contrast to her labor and the working hours she spends, it is because her intersectional identity places her at the lowest bottom of the hierarchy, which is the clear example of what the intersectional scholars call ‘discriminatory instrumentalism (Sumi Cho et al., 2013).

Necropolitics in the Hospital and the City

The setting of the novel in Karachi, one of the largest cities of Pakistan is not merely passive background but it provides an active mediator in the narrative of intersectional oppressions in the society. The places where Alice moves and performs her duties are physically separated and distinguished what David Harvey (2012) calls the ‘the contradiction of capital’ as these places are worked out geographically and creating ‘accumulation by dispossession.’

The Sacred Heart Hospital is the perfect example of necropolitics. The private wing of the hospital is well furnished with air-conditioned and mosquito free rooms serve the elite while the general wards are full of noise and having no remarkable facilities for common patients and for the poor (Hanif, 2011). Alice Bhatti dislikes this hostile atmosphere as a subaltern figure. Her movements in the hospital are also monitored by patriarchal norms. The city provides a constant threat for her. Accordingly, Teddy’s untoward behavior also disturbs her which highlights the ‘gendered nature of public space’ (Phadke et al., 2011) in South Asian cities.

Alice’s own existence becomes the final contested figure in the novel, most significantly. A necropolitical concept of common body to allow others to make live and let die a transition into what Achille Mbembe (2003) remarks, the power and the capability to command who may live and who must die. As a woman she is objectified and sexualized by others and according to Christian norms she is religiously others. At the climax of the novel, when she is inhumanly murdered by her husband Teddy in an honor killing style is the intense convergence of these forces. The murder of Alice is not merely a personal tragedy but a necropolitical act. As Patricia Hill Collins (2019), an intersectional theorist denotes by controlling the bodies of subjugated bodies is a key mechanism of power. The act of killing Alice is an extreme struggle of patriarchal possession. It is allowed by a social system that places little importance to the life a poor Christian nurse. Her body is the victim of life and death and becomes a spectacle where the dialectic of social reproduction, gender and religious identity are violently resolved. The state is indifferent towards the murder of Alice which

confirms her status as what Banu Bargu (2014) claims ‘a necro-subject’ whose murder is the outcome of the existing political order.

Sainthood, Nothingness and the Limits of Resistance

In the novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, Hanif ironically titles Alice as Our Lady just to raise a sacred figure to enlist her within the context of suffering and sacrifice. Her attitude, her skill in medical profession, her impudent affair with Teddy and her quiet flexibility are the symbols of resistance against the medium of domination. She knows very well the worth of her body in society that refuses it which is a powerful command of bodily autonomy. (Hanif, 2011)

The novel deals a pessimistic approach about the value of individual resistance in the face of such deep rooted and intersectional systems. By faith she is labeled as virtuous for the poor which is a testament of her sympathy. But this very religious label offers her no institutional protection. The state is represented by the corrupt police officers which exhibits an instrument of the dominant social order. The administration of the hospital offers no sympathy on her murder rather consider her as replaceable subordinate in the machinery of social reproduction whose life and death has no such importance to the system.

Her murder and the further absurd investigation on the part of the state reveal her final destiny within a necropolitical system. Her death is noticed, explained and enquired further and is forgotten. In a sad conclusion of her murder which attaches the events with the ‘SRT’ the focus is on the expendability of certain individuals in the increase of capital reproduction. According to which her individual existence has no importance than the social relations her death reinforces. The dialectic concludes not with a synthesis of liberation in the full sense of the term but with the total destruction of the subaltern subjects. Hanif proposes that although intersectionality and SRT help to understand the nature of Alice’s oppression, yet it is the material and systematic analysis of necropolitics that explains the exemption of certain bodies with which that oppression is performed. Her resistance is heroic what James C. Scott (1990) would recall as an ‘infrapolitical’ act, a form of continuous struggle that is matchless but cannot invert the hegemonic power structure alone.

Conclusion

Our Lady of Alice Bhatti is powerful evidence to the essentiality of assimilating the materialist analysis of Social Reproduction Theory with the nuanced identity politics of intersectionality. The novel interestingly propounds that in a society like Pakistan, capitalist exploitation cannot be implicit in isolation from the potent forces of patriarchy, religion and caste. The tragedy of Alice Bhatti is that she is crushed not by one monolithic oppressor but by the synergistic functioning of multiple and interlocking systems of power that manage both her life and death.

Her sincere and ceaseless labor, both productive and reproductive is separated and exploited at the connection of these identities. Her body develops a necropolitical shape and her resistance is ultimately contained and neutralized by a system allocated for her removal. Hanif has covered these frameworks in a dynamic and dialectical method which compelled him to go beyond abstract theory to deliver an intuitive of human story. He claims that the struggle to liberate the humanity must be as multidimensional as the oppression itself is. He further argues that fighting for class justice without opposing patriarchy, religious bigotry and casteism is to build a struggle on an incomplete foundation. In the end, it is proclaimed that Alice Bhatti is more than a character. She is the embodiment of virtue, self-sacrifice and a symbol of constant struggle. She is simply a necropolitical reminder that until our analysis and our liberties becomes as intersectional and materially grounded as the dominations, the saints among the surroundings will continue to be sacrificed to the logic of capital and identity based disposability.

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