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A Brief Approach to Spivak's Reflections on Subalternity and Agency from the Perspective of Cognitive Science

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Abstract

The dialogue between literary theory and criticism and the sciences of mind promises interesting results in order to achieve a better understanding of social phenomena. This article discusses the main ideas of the scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on subalternity and agency from the perspective of the sciences of mind and it tries to answer to the question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" The discussion eventually concludes that Spivak's ideas on subalternity and agency seem to be corroborated by psychological and laboratory studies which argue that discursive and non-discursive practices can alter the "wiring" of human brains to the extent of hindering or even suppressing the capacity of agency of individuals and social groups.

Keywords: Spivak, Subalternity, Agency, Cognitive science, Cognitive literary theory

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Introduction

The contribution of cultural studies to the understanding of people and society in general is undeniable. However, cultural studies have often been criticized because their insistent lack of interest in empirical confirmation and verification of theses. This may be due to the difficulty of providing empirical evidence to cultural theory and the postmodern skepticism about the traditional discourse of reason and science. The sciences of mind, nevertheless, are now opening new paths to cultural and literary studies in which cognitive science and other related disciplines may help to support or discard previous and new cultural theory. This essay is framed in the subdiscipline of cognitive literary theory and criticism and it briefly reviews some of the most influential contributions of the scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to postcolonial studies under the perspective of the sciences of mind.

Spivak is well-known for her contribution to the (re)definition of the term subalternity and her theories on the agency (or the ability of speaking and acting in one's behalf) of subaltern classes. Her question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" has often been discussed and it has inspired a great deal of debate. This study begins with a discussion on how Spivak's understands subalternity and agency in her famous article entitled "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in which she asks herself to what extent subalterns can be deprived through discursive practices of a voice of their own and, as a result, of agency. Next, this article briefly reviews how Cognitive Science has approached the study of agency and other related subjects. The following section discusses Spivak's contributions under the light of the sciences of mind and it tries to answer her famous question under the light of recent empirical evidence. Finally, a set of conclusion which reflects on the value of Spivak's contributions to the debate between literary theory and cognitive science closes the article.

The ultimate purpose of this article is not only to add a humble contribution to a better understanding of the subjects of subalternity and agency and discern whether some human groups can actually be deprived of voice and agency through discursive practices but also to encourage further research on both the work of Spivak and the review of literary theory and criticism under the perspective of the sciences of mind.

1. What Does Spivak Say on Agency?

Spivak is an Indian University Professor at Columbia University and a prominent scholar in the field of postcolonial studies. Undergraduate students often "fear" Spivak because they find her language difficult. Indeed, the language of Spivak has often been criticized by other scholars. However, it is important to consider that the work of Spivak continuously warns its readers about the "traps" of language and discourse; especially about the "traps" of different academic discourses. Spivak holds that language is always problematic and it is anything but "transparent". Consequently, Spivak's characteristic language might be interpreted as a reflection of her ideas on language: she may *just* be trying not to fall in the "traps" of language and the intellectual discourses she intends to expose.

The work of Spivak cannot be understood without Derrida's theories and outside the framework of the postmodern thought. Spivak's translations and commentaries on Derrida's *On Grammatology* gave her academic prestige and shaped her theories.

Derrida is well-known for his criticism of the Saussurian conception of sign which established a reliable link between signifier and signified. According to Derrida the signified is always *deferred* and the link between signifier and signified is never completed. Words do not have actual "meaning". Meaning is constantly negotiated. As a result, language cannot be fixed and, consequently, it cannot be trusted. One of the main assertions of the postmodern thought is that the Western tradition has wrongly assumed that the relationship between language and world is straight and reliable. That assumption led to confuse language with "reality" and the illusion of the meta-narratives (or universal all-inclusive theories) which dominated before the advent of the *postmodern condition*. Postmodern thinking focuses on language because it assumes that language does not describe reality but it constructs reality. Therefore, for postmodern thinkers, agency cannot be separated from the domain and particularities of language.

"Can the Subaltern Speak?" debates on the subject of who speaks in behalf of whom. The term subaltern (originally a military term which describes officers below the rank of captain) was redefined by the Marxist philosopher Gramsci (1978) to speak of "non hegemonic groups or classes" (p. xiv). The Subaltern Studies historians borrowed the term to denote disempowered post-Independence Indians and Spivak expanded the term to include women in the "Third World" as well. In the first part of the essay, Spivak argues that concepts or categories such as "worker" or "woman" in the Marxist and the Western feminist discourses are the product of particular historical, geographical and class-related circumstances and they cannot be applied universally. The problem of Western models of thought is that they use their own categories to describe *all* realities or models of the world relegating non-Western realities and the realities of the disempowered to sheer marginality. Spivak observes that Western feminists tend to speak of "Third World" women taking for granted that "being a woman" means or implies the same for "First" and "Third World" women. She also remarks that traditional Marxist theories were born in the framework of Western nineteenth century and they can hardly be applied to describe contemporary "Third World" worker women. The perverse consequence of employing these concepts and discourses self-formulated as universal is that those who the intellectuals claim to speak for are in fact silenced. Since language constitutes reality, without a language or their own the disempowered are deprived of actual voice and agency.

Spivak devotes the second part of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to discuss how the ritual of widow self-immolation or *sati* was appropriated by both Hindu patriarchal codes and the British colonial discourse. Spivak observes that ancient Hindu and Vedic religious texts forbid suicide and they only grant the privilege of taking one's own life to religious men as a part of a spiritual pilgrimage and women when their husbands die. Remarkably, ancient Hindu and Vedic religious texts do not enforced self-immolation. Spivak considers that, in fact, ancient religious texts empower women because they give them the choice of "exceeding the general rule" (1988, p. 300). Hindu patriarchy, however, did not interpreted widow self-immolation as a privilege of women but as a renunciation of their free will by making the ritual compulsory. British colonial discourse also interpreted widow self-immolation according to its parameters. The British considered the *sati* ritual just as one more example of the brutality of India society which contributed to justify the British "mission" of civilizing the uncivilized. Both, patriarchal Hinduism and the British Empire, described Indian widowed women ignoring their subjectivity. They claimed

to speak on their behalf but they were just speaking on their own behalf. Depriving Indian widows of their own voice –their subjectivity– both discourses disempowered them and blocked any actual possibility of exercising agency.

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1998), Spivak writes that "the subaltern cannot speak" (p. 308) but her answer to the question is not so clear. Some readers interpret that she actually means that subaltern classes cannot speak because they are described by third parties in an alien *language* or system of representation. This literal reading, however, does not necessarily imply agreement with the author. Moore-Gilbert (1997) states that "if Spivak's account of subaltern silence were true, then there would be nothing but the non-subaltern left to speak or write about" (p. 104). Other critics, such as Morton (2003), argue that Spivak does not "suggest that particular disempowered groups cannot speak, but that their speech acts are not heard or recognized within dominant political systems of representation" (p. 66). Morton also observes that the work of Spivak itself constitutes a struggle to give voice to the marginalized and disempowered and, consequently, it illustrates that Spivak does believe that the subaltern can speak.

2. What Does Cognitive Science Say on Agency?

It is commonly assumed that agency is a matter of *will*: people make decisions rationally and act according to their interests, knowledge and common sense. However, the sciences of mind are challenging this assumption. Libet's experiments question the popular idea which takes for granted that people first *think* and then, according to their will, *act*. In one of his studies (1985), Libet asked informants to move their hand at will while their brain activity was being monitored. "Common sense" assumes that the conscious awareness of choosing to move one or the other hand precedes the preparation of the physical movement. Surprisingly, Libet's research observed that the brain activity associated to the preparation of the physical movement of the hand precedes the conscious awareness of choosing to move the hand. Pascual-Leone performed other interesting experiment with the help of transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). He and his team employed a device which stimulates the movement of a specific hand: left or right. The informants sat in front of a screen. Initially the screen was red and the informants were asked to choose one hand (left or right) without moving it. The screen turned yellow but the informants could not still move the hand they have chosen. During the yellow screen, Pascual-Leone and his collaborators gave TMS impulses to the brains of the informants stimulating the movement of the right or the left hand. Finally, the screen turned green and the participants moved the hand corresponding with the area stimulated by the TMS impulse and not the hand they had chosen during the red screen. However, participants reported to have moved the hand they had chosen when the screen was red. Pascual-Leone's research concludes that free will is an illusion. These experiments (although they have often been criticized and questioned for different reasons) lead us to think that the subject of agency may be much more complex that we used to believe and that humans are not as *rational* as it is thought. The question of who really makes decisions arises.

The sciences of mind are certain that the answer to the question "Who really makes decisions?" resides in knowing how the human brain works. Cognitive scientists often compare the brain with a machine which is "programmed" or "wired" by the electrical

and chemical signals it receives and processes. Neuroscience divides brains into three main parts or divisions: forebrain, midbrain, and hindbrain. The hindbrain or posterior part of the brain is associated with instinctive behavior and automated procedures, the midbrain with emotions and the forebrain or anterior part of the brain with rational thought. The posterior part of the brain is "impulsive" but highly effective as regard the execution of acquired routines. The anterior part is "reflexive" and allows us to "think" but it is slow and remarkably inefficient when it comes to execute routines such as drive a car or play the piano. Cognitive science literature often refers to the "three brains". This does not mean that we have three different brains. There is only *one* brain but it operates at different levels. These levels often clash but they are deeply interconnected and can hardly be separated. The sciences of mind also remark the high plasticity or adaptability of the brain: "Throughout our lives, our brains rewrite themselves to build dedicated circuitry for the missions we practice – whether that's walking, surfing, juggling, swimming or driving" (Eagleman, 2016, p. 89). Neuroscience argues that human brains are born with only a basic set of "preprogrammed" or genetically "prewired" routines (such as the routine for breathing) and that the rest of routines are acquired or learned according to the stimuli that the brain receives and the way it processes them.

Here –and for our purposes– it is interesting to observe that the "programming" or "wiring" of the brain often begins in the anterior parts of the brain and it is mechanized in the posterior parts of it. This is a process "up to down". For instance, when we learn how to drive a car, first, we make lot of conscious decisions which are processed in areas of the forebrain. We feel stressed and we "ask" ourselves a great deal of questions such as "Am I pushing the right pedal?", "Do I have to stop here?", "Do I have to turn left or right?" and a long etcetera. We are learning a new skill and it is the forebrain brain which works the hardest. It is also commonly known that learners tend to be the most inefficient drivers. However, after a while, drivers do not need to "ask" themselves so many questions. Repeated actions are automated in the posterior areas of the brain and the driver can now turn on "autopilot mode". Once the anterior parts of the brain have been "wired" to drive a car, the driver feel more relaxed and he/she becomes a much more efficient driver. Driving a car –especially in a big city– is a highly complex activity. Drivers have to make critical decisions all the time in order to avoid crashing with other vehicles or running over pedestrian. Nevertheless, everyday, millions of experienced drivers commute without being aware of having made so many decisions or even "having been driving". Something similar happens when someone learn to play the piano or speak a new language. These complex activities become something "natural". The "autopilot mode", of course, is not limited to driving or playing the piano: it also plays an important role in other processes such as choosing a brand of cereals in the supermarket or even getting married.

Kandel's famous research on *aplysia californica* proves that the "wiring" of brains is not just a metaphor: stimuli do modify the physical structure of brains. The *aplysia californica* is a giant sea slug which has about 20,000 neurons and some of them are so big that they are visible to the human eye. These characteristics made of *aplysia californica* the best candidate for Kandel's studies on memory. Of course, slugs are very different from humans and the difference in scale is huge (humans brains consist of one hundred billion neurons) but the genetic similarity between humans and slug is approximately 70%. That is to say that we are made of basically the same "building

blocks". It is obvious as well that it is easier to observe and dissect the brain of a giant slug than the brain of a human being. Kandel and his collaborators observed how repeated stimuli modified the physical structure of the brain of the slug and, consequently, its behavior. When something touches the siphon of this sea slug, it hides its gill. The researchers gently touched the siphon of the slug and they observed a rapid withdrawal of the gill. After repeating the operation a number of times and since the slug detected that nothing noticeable happened when its siphon was gently touched, the reflex became weaker and it finally ceased. Later on, they repeated the operation but this time they complemented the stimuli with an unpleasant electric shock to the tail o the slug. The slug neuronal system associated the touch of the siphon with the electric shock and it responded reinforcing the original reflex. Therefore, a series of stimuli changed the behavior of the slug. One interesting conclusion of this experiment is that stimuli can not only change the brain structure of a slug but also its "nature": an original reflex can cease or be reinforced. Thus the traditional distinction between "nature" and "nurture" is now being challenged by neuroscience.

Summing up, the sciences of brain question the traditional principles of *common sense* and *free will*. Scholars such as Libet and Pascual-Leone have observed that actions are the result of complex interactions between different neuronal "circuits" or areas. Rationality, emotion and instincts play a role in the process of decision making. There are conscious and unconscious elements in any decision. People often believe that individuals are able to make pure rational decisions based on "common sense" but Pascual-Leone's experiment suggest that that may be just an illusion. The studies of Kandel also suggest the limitations of "rationality" because they associate behavior and brain structure. Nelson et al. research on Romanian orphans provides a good example of how external stimuli can shape human brains. The study followed 136 people who were raised in Romanian orphanages isolated in cribs with little human contact. The informants showed low IQs and electroencelophalograms (EEG) reflected an unusual reduced neural activity. The researchers observed peculiar behavioral patterns in the informants as well; such an unusual inclination to trust in strangers (described as "indiscriminate friendliness"). The research illustrates how external circumstances can determine behavior and predispose decision making and action. Therefore, agency or the capacity of speaking and acting on one's behalf must be not *just* a matter of will or conscious decisions but also the result and consequence of how the brains of individuals have been "wired" throughout their lives.

3. Discussion on Spivak's Theory from the Perspective of Cognitive Science

Spivak's focus on language seems right from the perspective of the sciences of mind. Eagleman (2016) remarks that

> everything you've experienced has altered the physical structure of your brain … Your family of origin, your culture, your friends, your work, every movie you've watched, every conversation you've had – these have all left their footprints in your nervous system (p. 20)

Remarkably, the examples given by Eagleman are linguistic practices or require language. Family relationships are defined and shaped by culture and culture is based on language; friendship often begins with a conversation and we usually talk with our

friends; movies generally include dialogues; and conversations are linguistic practices. The sciences of mind argue that both linguistic and non-linguistic stimuli shape our brains. Furthermore, people do not have to "live" something to perceive it as "real". Rizzolatti et al. discovery of mirror neurons indicates that actions performed by third parties and between them can have the same effects in the brain that the ones performed by oneself (Rizzolatti and Craighero, 2004). Linguistic practices –such as the narration of astory or the exposition of a theory– can alter the brain as much (and sometimes even more) than physical events lived in person. We are surrounded by language and, therefore, it seems logic to conclude that our brains are continuously "(re)wired" by language. Modern societies and cultures could not exist without language and since Spivak (as other postmodern thinkers) criticizes Western culture, the focus on language seems not only justified but also inevitable.

Cognitive science also seems to support Spivak's distrust of language and her insistence on asserting that all categories or concepts are the product of historical, geographical and class-related circumstances. The sciences of mind point out that concepts are not "prewired" in the brain: they are the product of a complex series of particular stimuli and mental processes. Since people receive different inputs throughout their lives, concepts do not necessarily have to be "wired" the same way in different brains. For instance, the traditional Marxist concept of "worker" does not have to apply to women working in factories in Bangladesh. The Europe of Marx was quite different from twenty-first South Asia. People in both scenes received or receive completely different stimuli. Traditional Marxism understood "worker" as a European male person immersed in a particular political struggle. Women in "Third World" countries live a completely different situation. Spivak argues that one important mistake of traditional Marxism is to assume that "worker" means the same to everybody; always and everywhere. This assumption silences the voice of those who do not fit in the original definition. This idea could be linked to certain cognitive theory on language. Speakers of different languages specialize their brains in order to recognize the limited set of sounds which compose the phonemic system of their languages. For instance, speakers of languages such as Japanese do not distinguish between the phonemes /r/ and /l/. Japanese speakers are "blind" in terms of the distinction between these two sounds because their brains are not been "wired" to distinguish them. Of course, Japanese speakers can "rewired" their brains and be able to distinguish between these sounds but it requires some effort and training. Provided that Functional Neuroimaging Methods (fMRI and PET) reveal that phonetic, morphologic, syntactic and semantic processing are neurologically related, it may be assumed the possibility of the existence of some sort of semantic "conceptual blindness". Like speakers of certain languages do not distinguish between the sounds /r/ and /l/, the particular adoption of specific concepts (such as "worker" in the sense of traditional Marxism) could limit the ability of those who have adopted them to perceive other categories which other individuals clearly perceive and identify. Once more, the sciences of mind seem to support the theories of Spivak which estate that all categorizations are contingent (local and particular) and hide or silence the possibility of other categories and models of the world.

Spivak's distrust in Western discursive practices might also be supported by empirical evidence in the field of cognitive science. She criticizes the Western modes of thought because they claim to be objective and universal: a possibility that she denies. Postmodernism understands discourse as "a historically evolved set of interlocking

and mutually supporting statements, which are used to define and describe a subject matter" (Butler, 2002, p. 44). The sciences of mind agree that discourses "build, revise, and maintain models of the world" (Richardson, 2006, p. 550). Indeed, the sciences of mind observe that human brains are isolated inside craniums. Brains do not have direct access to the "external world" and they only can construct models of the world according to sensorial stimuli and mental processes. Brains interpret the chemical and electrical signals they perceive through senses: "Sensory information flowing into the brain fuels our perceptions, memories, intentions, and actions" (O'Shea, 2005, p.64). Therefore, the Derridian idea which states that it is not possible to establish a reliable link between signifier and signified may be reinforced by cognitive science. Discourses, although originally elicited by a complex chain of electrical and chemical impulses which have their primary origin in "external" sources, are eventually the final product of more electrical and chemical changes inside the brain. There is every indication that discourses are conditioned by the configuration of the brain and *just* models of the world (not the world). Therefore, discourses can be neither universal nor objective and it could be argue that the Western modes of thought might be immersed in the illusion of being objective and universal.

Before we discuss the question "Can the Subaltern Speak?", it could be interesting to propose a previous question "Does the subaltern really exist?" The subject of identity has often been discussed in terms of "essentialism" versus "social constructionism". Essentialists state that identities are objective and even biologically determined. Constructionists affirm that "identity is culturally and historically specific, grounded in contingencies that make … identity relational and non-objective" (Purvis, 2006, p. 436). Constructionism apparently won the debate in the early 1990s but recent research in the field of cognitive science has opened the debate again. For instance, Kanai published in 2011 an article in *Current Biology* which states that political orientation may be correlated with brain structures. Similarly, numerous studies link addition and brain structure. Therefore, the essentialist stance cannot be completely discarded. Spivak's stance on identity is political and she proposes a "strategic use of essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (1987, p.205). Her stance is often labeled as "strategic essentialism" and, although it is critical with essentialism, it considers it useful. Therefore, all seems to indicate that Spivak considers identity a cultural construct with crucial political implications. The discussion in the previous section suggests that, since perceptions model or "wire" brains, nurture can eventually become nature and subalternity may be the "nature" of specific groups of people. The Romanian orphans described above could be described as a subaltern class or group. Their brains were not born "hardwired" to constitute an unnamed subclass without a clear self-conscience of group but they were "wired" or "programmed" by the stimuli they received becoming a distinguishable human group. Consequently, it may be concluded that particular circumstances and the effect of them on brains can give rise to different subaltern classes.

The question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" remains unanswered. However, the cognitive neuroscience evidence commented above shows that specific conditions can difficult and even prevent the actual articulation or specific voices and models of the world. The example of the Romanian orphans illustrates this statement. The negative environment during their first years of life led to low IQs and reduced neural activity which lessen or even disable their actual ability of agency. On the other hand, the

sciences of mind are not deterministic because they assume that "the brain can often recover, to varying degrees" (Eagleman, 2016, p. 13). There are numerous instances in cognitive literature which illustrate how brains can be "rewired". The critical role of discursive practices must also be taken into account in this discussion. Concepts and the models of the world constructed with them can lead to different degrees of "conceptual blindness" hindering and even preventing other models or representation of the world. Therefore, it seems difficult to answer Spivak's question with a categorical "yes" or "no". Probably subalterns can ultimately speak but the difficulties they face can be enormous.

4. Conclusions

The sciences of mind –or at least the evidence discussed in this article– seem to support Spivak's main ideas on subalternity and the agency of subaltern classes. Language must not be confused with the "realities" of people. Language and brain structure necessarily determine the construction of models of the world and, consequently, agency. Furthermore, specific models of the world can be "blind" to other models of the world and even hinder the development of alternative ones. The claims of objectivity and universality of the Western models of thought are also difficult to support from the perspective of cognitive science and neuroscience because human brains are fed by sensory information which is always necessarily local and limited. The fact that all experiences alter the structure of brains implies that brains can be either "wired" or not to articulate new models of the world and to exercise agency. Actual agency can be hindered or even suppressed. On the other hand, human brains are characterized by their plasticity and they can be "rewired" in order to articulate alternative models of the world and give voice to previously silenced individuals and social groups.

Spivak has written several articles with the word "speculations" in the title such as "Speculations on Reading Marx" or "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular". She does not provide empirical evidence to support her "speculations" but, probably, it has never been her intention –as the word "speculation" suggests. However, her "speculations" seem well-founded and they constitute an excellent starting point for further research in the field of cognitive literary theory and criticism. One of the aims of this paper has been to point out the possibilities of the dialogue between literary theory and criticism and the sciences of mind in order to achieve a better understanding of social and cultural subjects such as agency or language. The other aim has just been to reflect on the inspiring work of Spivak.

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The Naked Option, Delta Boys and Big Men: An Analysis of Corruption in the Niger Delta

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Abstract

The oil-rich Niger Delta region in Western Africa is in crisis. Economic disparity and corruption are the main features of the nation that is constantly ranked as one of the most corrupt in the world. Global capital, manifested as powerful and all-encompassing transnational corporations play out a struggle for national power in an increasingly poverty-stricken and disaster-prone country on the brink of a civil war. This results in a widening gap between the rich and the poor. This gap has attracted the international attention of news media and of several art house filmmakers who are eager to shed light on the shady oil business operating in one of the most polluted nations on earth. In this context, resistance takes center stage, thus enabling political and environmental activism to contest the capitalist ideology driving the nation into the abyss of hatred, violence and killing. Besides exploring the complexities of enduring conflict, the documentaries *The Naked Option, Delta Boys* and *Big Men* explore the human face of work in Nigeria revealing the spirit of cooperation, caring and fellowship that supports the Niger Delta people's desire to catch a glimpse of a better future. This paper analyses said documentaries as evidence that in the intolerable political and economic environment in the age of the Anthropocene, the Niger Delta's people experience a social connection that transcends their desperate circumstances.

Keywords: Anthropocene, economic disparity, corruption, transnational corporations, resistance.

Introduction

Our twenty-first century global societies face the era of the Anthropocene, an era characterized by the brutal impact of human-induced climate change and the extinction of wildlife. We do so with uncertainty and much unaware of the terrific impact that maximizing profits will have on our lives in the long run. Greed plays a key role in the field of Energy Humanities. In his defense of capitalism and its core tenets, the influential American economist Milton Friedman recognizes so when he questions "(t)ell me, is there some society that you know that doesn't run on greed?...What is greed? Of course, none of us are greedy, it's only the other fellow that's greedy. The world runs on individuals pursuing their separate interests" (M. Friedman, personal communication, 1979). This sweeping statement endorses a justification of the global capital to act irresponsibly in contrast to the recent neoliberal policies held by the so popular currents Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR). 'Storying' the Niger Delta ecocide opens a window into the complex realities of the oil-rich region within the frame of unequal power relations. In connection therewith, corruption takes center stage in this geographical area where entanglements of ethic and economic interest dictate the mandate of the regional politics.

The exercise of sovereignty plays a pivotal role in this enduring conflict. Mbembe (2003) states that "to exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as its deployment and manifestation of power" (p.12). This illustrates oil international companies' understanding of power as its deployment is the major source of deep moral, social and economic distress in the oil-producing region. Pro-indigenous filmmaking addresses the resultant grievances in local ethnic communities that stem from state and corporate corruption over the environment. This alternative representation of the Niger Delta defies the predatory working dynamics of capitalism and reaches an international audience. Additionally, it also deals with the constraints that continue to limit the potential for development in the area.

In so doing, filmmakers put customary indigenous claims such as the need for resource control and ownership, good governance, the reversal of environmental degradation and/or the lack of compensation for loss of livelihood at the forefront of the debate. These accounts show evidence of the fact that the Niger Delta people experience a social connection that goes beyond their desperate circumstances. Their daily struggles to "thrive" in life, despite the government's and multinationals' policy-making, locate the audience in a sensitive environment. This, in turn, is the breeding ground for the development of social movements centered on the role of the environment. According to Ojo-Ade (1999), many of these cultural agents draw inspiration from the former Ogoni leader and intellectual Ken Saro-Wiwa. Their claims are of critical importance in order to frame the struggle for sovereignty and power in a poverty-stricken and disaster-prone region, where the widening gap between the rich and the poor is an immediate consequence of widespread oil despoilment and mismanagement of oil revenues.

Ken Saro-Wiwa

The crisis of Ogoni people mirrors the crisis of post-independent Nigeria, particularly when it comes to managing ethnic diversity. Nixon (2011) found "unelected officials from the three largest ethnic groups –the Yoruba, the Igbo, and the Hausa-Fulani–

have totally dominated national politics" (p.106). This institutional and ethnic crisis provides a clear evidence of the failure of nation-building policies in a country deeply influenced by ethnic bias and designed to cater to the interests of the largest and dominant ethnic groups. Such a scenario in which the welfare of the privileged elites, regardless of whether they are ethnic or politic, is built upon the enslavement of minority groups and the destruction of the Niger Delta ecosystem. This context constitutes a watershed for the further exploration of the role of oil multinationals in the oil-rich region. The increasing influence of oil multinationals in the domestic economy and policy-making of the African country led the deceased intellectual, Ken Saro-Wiwa, to mobilize his people and speak up against (Ejeke, 2000) "the economic, social, political, and environmental degradation encouraged and perpetuated by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the oil prospecting and exploring companies" (p.19). This remark shows the growing concern about the neocolonial and neoliberal policies that would give continuity to the former colonial pillage in the shape of economic suffocation and the evils of ecocide, affecting to traditional culture and ethnic identities, too. In line with this view, Saro-Wiwa (as cited in Ejeke, 2000, p.18) stated that as

> keepers of the conscience of the nation and custodians of its culture, we owe ourselves and the nation the responsibility not only to protect the rot and shame but also to immerse ourselves actively in stopping it and restoring sanity to the land

These insightful remarks push in the direction of good governance and the restoration of land and of indigenous rights over resources as the axis of regional development and equality. To some extent, political institutions and oil multinationals have constantly denied over the last decades the rot in the exploitative productive system of the African powerhouse. Therefore, critical responses to stop the rot of crime and corruption endorsed by state and corporate violence against minority ethnic groups and the environment seek to promote awareness on the need to tackle the perpetuation of abuses, on one hand, and on the importance of the constitution of a political movement echoed by grassroots support, on the other. This effort is aimed at ensuring the active involvement of indigenous communities in shaping decision-making processes. The latter remains a central question in order to guarantee an atmosphere conducive to mutual confidence in the midst of chaos.

For this purpose, it is necessary to understand –and navigate through– the complexities surrounding the current Niger Delta's sociopolitical arena by approaching Saro-Wiwa's political struggle for minority and ethnic rights. His untimely death has certainly come to signify the sheer nonsense of making politics in a country that, according to International Transparency's Corruption Perception Index 2017, constantly ranks among the most corrupt nations on earth. Much to the chagrin of Nigerians, the military regime of the West African nation under General Abacha's iron fist rule achieved an international dimension when Saro-Wiwa's questionable judicial murder showed the entire world the far-reaching consequences of political dissent in Nigeria. Saro-Wiwa's failed attempt to negotiate a peaceful and decent solution to decades of gradual impoverishment and ongoing exploitation of the Ogoni people at the hands of the Anglo-Dutch oil multinational Shell paved the way for subsequent human rights activists and environmentalists to work together in search of (political) visibility and recognition. Then, Saro-Wiwa's death, though tragic, was not

in vain, as his humbleness and kind-hearted nature stand, still today, as a model for minority ethnic groups and young people to fight for indigenous rights over resource control and land ownership.

The figure of Ken Saro-Wiwa is significant to the analysis of corruption in the Niger Delta and a guiding thread to the work of filmmakers Andrew Berends, Rachel Boynton and Candace Schermerhorn in support of the claims of ethnic groups, militants and organized women in Rivers State. The Ogoni revolution under Saro-Wiwa's leadership advocated for resource control and the protection of the Niger Delta environment from oil multinationals (Orage, 1998, p.46). The documentary films under analysis, namely *Big Men, Delta Boys* and *The Naked Option,* give prominence, to a greater or lesser extent, to the relentless work carried out by the Ogoni leader, intellectual and writer in unmasking the existing connections between the body politic and organized crime, and the resultant poverty in the area. Saro-Wiwa's efforts towards closing the widening gap between Nigerian and corporate elites and local communities have thus attracted the international attention of art-house filmmakers. With cameras in hand, these socially committed filmmakers shed light on the shady side of oil industries and on the goings-on of greedy and corrupt politicians in what is often known these days as petro-cultures.

Corruption and Strategies for Resistance

Sustained corruption over the last decades has originated complex webs of petro-violence, compelling Niger Deltans to flee from hunger, poverty and war, join the armed struggle or actively engage in political activism. The latter compels the audience to explore the sometimes blurred boundaries between terrorism and militancy. A distinction between crime and activism is very much needed in order to facilitate the understanding of the complex nature of an enduring conflict where the control over land and resources fuels insurgencies of all sorts ranging from hostage-taking for ransom to oil theft, mugging, armed confrontations with Nigerian security forces or mass peaceful protests at the gates of oil production stations. Moreover, the broad consensus of institutions, oil multinationals and mainstream pro-global capital media tends to criminalize the feeling of resentment, regardless of whether it is legitimate or not, in their bid to justify the increasing militarization of the oil-producing region and the violent actions attached to the ever-threatening presence of armed soldiers patrolling the creeks. The ongoing denial of the debate on the politics of dispossession and displacement that are driving the region into the abyss of hatred, violence and killing manifests itself in outbreaks of violence and global tensions, endangering the stability necessary for progress and development.

The Niger Delta is a region of global strategic importance in the energy market and violent threats in the creeks affect oil price and economic growth. Despite this fact, oil multinationals and institutions have systematically failed in securing basic amenities to improve the livelihoods of the local communities. This is a central claim of the groups concerned and the core reason to organize responses against the economic plundering of the region. The documentaries produced about the area discuss the dispossession of lands through the enactment of different laws. According to Obi and Aas Rustad (2011), the 1969 Petroleum Act, and its subsequent regular updates, or the Land Use Act 1978, have eroded relations between institutions and citizens. In this context, possibilities for pacification and peaceful cohabitation, as the case study

documentaries attest, will only come through the restoration of indigenous rights, the enforcement of good governance and development.

The conflict largely stems from the considerable mismatch between the level of wealth accumulated by the global capital in/from the oil-rich region and the stark contrast in terms of the level of welfare enjoyed by Niger Deltans, which is non-existent at large. This issue furthers moral and socioeconomic distress because, as Onuoha (2005) and Obi (2009) found, with the advent of oil industries Niger Deltans dreamt of world-class infrastructures, high wages and escaping from the poverty trap often associated with, for example, some of the traditional low-productivity occupations such as cocoa or yam growing in Nigerian soil. Nothing could be further from the truth, considering that declining opportunities for gainful employment, especially among the youth, turn out to be the dismal reality of the struggle for survival in the once fruitful creeks and productive farmlands of the Niger Delta. Furthermore, federal institutions that are not accountable to the communities they seek to serve along with corporate neoliberal attacks in the shape of environmental disasters have laid the ground for present-day petro-violence in a region where most of the population incomprehensibly lives below the poverty threshold.

These formulations are the backbone of the stories displayed in *Big Men, Delta Boys* and *The Naked Option.* All taken together form a set of narratives about the successful coming-together of alienated and marginalized members of society that subvert the notions of catastrophe and collective helplessness in varying degrees. The documentary films thus offer a restorative image of the Niger Delta's social fabric through the articulation of indigenous responses to counter the threat of predatory oil-fuelled corporate development –and the passivity of its joint institutional partners in the local plunder. In their bid to combat the all-encompassing role of oil in the sociopolitical realm of the Niger Delta the coming-together of diverse ethnic groups, often confronted in the past for land disputes, is most welcome as it lays the foundation stone of peaceful cohabitation and mutual understanding to develop joint actions against corporate and state abuse.

As an example, consider the tremendous success of an organized group of women in *The Naked Option.* Only apparently, these "vulnerable" women, unarmed and naked, stopped the production of oil in Chevron's oil station for nearly two weeks. A landmark achievement and a clear demonstration of indigenous power disrupting Chevron's procedures and, more importantly, forcing the multinational to sit at a negotiating table and to engage in discussions with the up to then very much neglected indigenous female representatives. Niger Delta women, wary and wily, and weary of greed, exploitation and economic repression take action against Chevron's failure to build an oven that ensures their economic survival. Other protests of similar nature against the wielding influence of multinationals on the lives of Niger Deltans followed suit and have centered on environmental restoration and the need to develop key partnerships with global capital, willing to transform the current unbalanced relation between oil multinationals and local communities into one of mutual benefits. As Richard Peet and Michael Watts (1996) put it, "environmental problems in the Third World (…) are less a problem of poor management, overpopulation, or ignorance, as of social action and political-economic constraints" (p.4). These words provide serious insights into the Achilles heel of Niger Delta people as their fate largely depended on their confidence in the skills of politicians of dubious reputation,

who had barely shown any interest in population's concerns, to exert pressure on oil corporations to provide solutions to their practical everyday problems.

According to these courageous women, oil multinationals have not been fair to the community they represent. It is precisely because of the lack of commitment on the part of oil corporations with the nearby communities that women decided to organize themselves as a pressure group actively reporting the daily polluting activities of oil industries. These actions set in their agenda also demonstrate the ineffectiveness of political leaders to enforce regulations, thus showing the mutually supportive relationship between oil multinationals and authorities. This aspect arouses the distrust of these women, who enter the political struggle not only as subjects staking a claim on their rights as citizens but also from the standpoint of gender as battered and often neglected subjects relegated to the outer spheres of decision-making in their communities, too. The long-term relationship between economic and politic power breaches local sensibilities and reinforces the well-founded idea of local communities to take a leap towards political participation as a means for progress and real development in the region. Watching over Nigeria's flawed democracy is then an essential task of these women edging towards a corruption-free society through both the politics of representation and the representation of women in politics.

Art-house filmmakers come to terms with indigenous sensibilities, most notably Andrew Berends in *Delta Boys*, who engages the audience in the daily routines of a group of militants and tells the story not only of political disappointment but also of decades of ongoing exploitation, alienation and dispossession from the standpoint of young –and educated– militants. Their real motivations to fight back against economic and political elites see light, but more importantly, the human face of militants reveals a profound desire to catch a glimpse of a better future for generations to come. In *Delta Boys,* the audience gets to know in greater depth Tom Ateke, the chief of a group of militants operating in the creeks, who argues convincingly to justify both their presence in the creeks and their demands for protection of their lands rights to prevent further squalor and abandonment of Niger Deltans.

Fighting the abuses of the global capital and political authorities through what some voices consider illegal means is, according to these freedom fighters, as they label themselves, the only way to bring back part of what they consider legitimately to be theirs. Within the frame of institutional abandonment and bearing in mind the failure of the so-called corporate social responsibility policy, militants regard themselves as social agents carrying out welfare work that enhances somehow social assistance in favor of the dispossessed, nurturing stories of hope and promoting the enactment of Niger Deltans' agency. The non-fulfillment of the promises made by oil corporations in terms of reinvestment in the area, again with the endorsement of local authorities, provides grounds for the suspicion of the militants that the stifling situation in the Niger Delta might not come to an end unless they see signals coming from corporations and political institutions. These signals of change ought to come in the form of basic infrastructures and access to work by encouraging skills acquisition and the participation of local communities in the oil business.

In much the same fashion, *Big Men, Delta Boys* and *The Naked Option* explore the reasons why popular unrest, escalating violence and criminal activities in the lawlessness Niger Delta grow relentlessly. In the first place, it is important to consider

the large-scale implications the shift from agriculture to oil industry entailed in the decades to come after the commercial find was discovered in the year 1956 in Oloibiri. This change in the production model put thousands of locals out of work, impoverishing the area gradually. In connection to the implementation of oil industries, Ukiwo (2017) observes that "the hallmark of the entire process of exploration, concession and exploitation is the non-involvement of [local] people" and that these "are made to understand that they lack the skills to be employed in the highly technical industry" (p.20). Therefore, loss of jobs in traditional occupations along with the terrific environmental consequences of oil spillages have resulted in the loss of livelihood for farmers and fishermen. Their claims, nonetheless, play second fiddle to other priorities set in the political agenda.

The ecocide in the Niger Delta, besides causing serious environmental damage and maximizing oil companies' profits, affects the indigenous perception of identity. In the midst of a dystopic context, indigenous ties to land, places and practices have loosened too. The influence of neocolonial practices over land has threatened the poorest members of society, who in many cases have lost their roots through either displacement or the abandonment of their traditional homelands in search of opportunities in the overcrowded Nigerian urban settings. On this last point, sound management of oil revenues could have prevented local peoples from massive internal migration. However, corruption, mismanagement of resources and environmental disasters run rampant, compelling civilians to rely on luck alone.

The estrangement of civilians from the body politic and growing feelings of alienation lead grassroots to raise their voices against the forcible imposition of poverty on them. So far, there is no economic compensation, provided that foreigners take up a high percentage of the jobs in the oil industry, a common demand in all films. Instead, the greed of some of the agents and the deviance from the law of some others gain ground at a time of mutual distrust. In the wake of this desperate situation, foreign oil workers and business tycoons have become the target of criminal gangs and militias operating in the area, kidnapping oil workers for ransom so as to earn a living, on one hand, and to fund a whole range of activities, on the other. To top it all, considering that Niger Deltans' labor force remains largely excluded from oil benefits, federal and local government inactivity and deficiencies add extra fuel to an already stifling atmosphere. This situation is further aggravated by the illegal theft of oil and activities associated with oil bunkering, in which politicians are suspicious of being involved. On this last point, Paul Williams (2016) contends that "extractable oil makes control of the government more attractive because of the large revenues at stake" (p.100).

This political-economic control mainly boosted by neocolonial practices and neoliberal policies is conducive to building webs of corruption. In these well-orchestrated webs oil multinationals and politicians appear to be in cahoots with one another, and, eventually, sovereignty over oil determines power, ensures access to commodities and denies the possibility of a democratic and more egalitarian society. Instead, devastation and impoverishment gain ground substantially in the Niger Delta, partly because in this way corrupt politicians can take part in oil-related activities such as, for example, oil bunkering and go thus unnoticed for the vast majority of civilians. This exercise of greed on the part of politicians lays at the core of most of the indigenous claims, seeing that the perpetuation of power structures inherited from

the colonial state consolidate the status-quo of political and economic elites, and jeopardize the future of the Niger Delta in all regards.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, allow me to compliment the strong determination of certain social groups confronting in political terms the dreadful and untimely tragedies of corporate and state abuse. Likewise, national elites enjoy from the endorsement of supranational institutions and international leaders, whose opportunities to reap a profit out of a shameful context call into question the role of democracy in such a developing country, as it is Nigeria. The capacity of emerging activist groups such as MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) or MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People) to strike at the weaknesses of the global capital and political institutions determines whether or not all the parties involved in the scramble for natural resources decide to open up a new front of reflection. A new time in which greed gives way to all-inclusive policies for the betterment of the country instead of becoming embroiled in internal tensions that condemn the Niger Delta as a whole to a blood-stained future. In line with the previous statement, Carlson, Szeman and Wilson (2017) invite modern societies to start out exploring new sources of energy that require new modes of making politics:

> Oil transformed life over the century in which we came to depend on it; the looming threat of its absence from our lives means that it will transform us again, from people who are at home and comfortable in the petrocultures we have devised for ourselves to people who will have to shape ourselves to fit contexts and landscapes we can barely imagine, even if we need to do so – and quickly. (p.4)

What is clear from the above statement is that our twenty-first century increasingly globalized societies can no longer turn a blind eye to environmental degradation, especially in developing countries, as it is the case of Nigeria, that act as one of the global energy suppliers. The so-called developed world will have to reconsider its behavior as consumers and take on a radical shift towards energy transformation. This transition from the use of fuels to the use of environmentally friendly and renewable energies must also bring to a halt the abuses of the global capital in the energy market through a rights-based system of distribution. As discussed in this essay, the Anthropocene is causing profound and significant changes of economic, cultural, social and political nature, urging society to reassess its relationship with the environment for its own survival in the long run. Who knows if, perhaps, 'storying' the Niger Delta ecocide equals to the narration of the beginning of the end of mankind.

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Trends and Factors Affecting Aesthetic Experience of Visitors of Contemporary Art and Cultural Galleries

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Abstract
This research aimed to study 1) a perception of aesthetic experience, 2) factors influencing aesthetic experience, 3) trends of aesthetic experience, and 4) a guideline for managing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries. A mixed methodology was adopted for conducting the research, which involved in-depth interviews with five to six curators and eight to ten visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries and quantitative survey questionnaires collected from 400 cluster ransom samples of visitors of 12 art and cultural galleries. The qualitative data were analyzed by summarizing and interpreting methods and the quantitative data were analyzed by percentage, mean, T-test, one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA), multiple regression analysis, and factor analysis methods. The results showed that the factors influencing aesthetic experience were (1) belief and faith in art, (2) senses of human, (3) past aesthetic experience, and (4) developed belief and faith in art and the trends of aesthetic experience management consisted of four components, which were (1) activities and aesthetic creation, (2) social roles and responsibilities, (3) administrative management, and (4) services and facilitation.

Keywords: contemporary art and culture, aesthetic, art museum

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Introduction

From past until present, there have been attempts to encourage the establishment of art galleries. Some were successful, some faced obstacles after obstacles, and many others had to be closed down. In Thailand, promotion of art perception has been so long neglected that education and learning about art is usually deemed too strange and too new for the Thai society even though in fact the society is surrounded by art. At a seminar "Art Gallery: The Opportunity to Become a Contemporary Cultural Center in Asia", which in conclusion reflected that Thailand should have "a contemporary art and cultural gallery" of unlimited size with open concepts and purposes to create a network with existing art galleries nationwide, covering central and regional galleries and government, private, and community galleries, which will reinforce and benefit one another's art and cultural work and public work. Likewise, according to a seminar "Living Art Gallery" in 2006, art galleries served as a foundation in the development of contemporary art because they were places where knowledge about contemporary art was exchanged, integration of learning about contemporary art and cultural work happened, and the old and young generations were mutually connected to create art and cultural experience for the youth and other members of the society (Natawon Chuenchom, 2006). Up until now, however, the way of life of Thai people is completely isolated from art; in other words, art cannot yet become part of living in the Thai society. Since art galleries or art and cultural galleries are a channel or space to connect art with the people's living, artists and relevant parties have been trying to create a public space or public sphere as a medium for making aesthetic experience part of the people's lives, as the saying goes "art is life". An art gallery is an institution or organization that is vital to the art circles in the preservation, dissemination, and promotion of art and artists also use it as a place to exchange knowledge and opinions about art.

For this reason, it can be said that an art gallery is an important channel or space to create aesthetic experience for people, to connect the visitors or art appreciators with aesthetic feeling, and to make art part of everyday living. John Dewey suggested that art was an experience of indefinite form and perception or learning of experience by humans happened every day and all the time, both intentionally and unintentionally. Similarly, Alexander Baumgarten, a German philosopher, defined aesthetics as sensual cognition from the art of thinking beautifully and thinking analogous to reason and the immediate cognition called intuition which was a higher level of cognition used for judging beauty without the need of any other reasons (Hammermeister, 2002). Stone (2001) pointed that learning activities in art museums played an important role in leading to the goal of developing aesthetic experience; experience in art museums could enlarge aesthetic cognition and artistic understanding of the visitors and to get in touch with works of art would enhance their aesthetic experience. According to the theory of aesthetic development of Parsons (1987), there were five levels of aesthetic development: 1) favoritism, 2) beauty and realism, 3) expressiveness, 4) style and form, and 5) autonomy. In the holding of art activities, Koster (2009) stated that art activities should be based on basic related principles and integrated and art activities should offer the participants experience of success and reflect their daily experience. A study of Tharin Klinkesorn (2012) showed that the three most frequent aesthetic experience behaviors were feeling interested in the content, considering what appeared before their eyes, and connecting what they saw with their personal thought and the three least frequent aesthetic

experience behaviors were not feeling confident about giving comment, paying attention to the identity of the artists, and paying attention to the intention of the artists.

Accordingly, to study aesthetic experience is to explain about the characteristics of aesthetic experience, how to differentiate it from general experience, how to obtain aesthetic experience, and the relationship between the experiencers and the achievement of aesthetic experience. The study of trends and factors affecting aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries aims to seek a guideline to manage and offer the visitors aesthetic experience that is appropriate to the social, economic, and political situations and their ways of life, focusing on the factors that lead to aesthetic experience from participation or direct and indirect experience of beauty and realism, expression, and identities of artists and art appreciators as portrayed in the works of art.

Objectives

1) To study a perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries.
2) To study factors influencing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries.
3) To study trends of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries.
4) To study a guideline for managing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries.

Methodology

This research adopted a mixed methodology approach in the study, which involved quantitative survey questionnaires collected from 400 cluster ransom samples of visitors of art and cultural galleries and in-depth interviews with five to six curators and eight to ten visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries. All the data were collected from 12 art and cultural galleries in Bangkok and other provinces in northern, central, northeastern, and southern Thailand which represented all four types of art and cultural galleries: national art gallery, provincial art gallery, university art gallery, and private art gallery.

The quantitative data were analyzed by descriptive statistics, i.e., percentage, mean, and standard deviation (SD) and reference statistics, i.e., T-test and one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) to compare the mean, multiple regression analysis to analyze the factors influencing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries, and factor analysis to study an aesthetic development model. The qualitative data were analyzed by summarizing and interpreting methods.

Results

General information of the respondents

In terms of demographic characteristics, the majority of the respondents or 219 people (54.80 percent) were female, 145 people (36.30 percent) were male, and 36 people

(9.00 percent) were homosexual. 172 people (43.00 percent) were aged between 30 and 44 and 57 people (14.30 percent) were aged between 25 and 29. Most of the respondents or 258 people (64.50 percent) were single and 126 people (31.50 percent) were married. 151 people (37.80 percent) were university students and 117 people (29.30 percent) were private company employees. The majority of the respondents or 127 people (37.80 percent) had an average salary of less than 9,000 baht a month and 101 people (25.30 percent) had an average salary of more than 20,000 baht a month.

Perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries

Regarding the perception of aesthetic experience of the visitors, the item "You usually perceive aesthetics from seeing when you visit an art gallery." had the highest mean score (4.23, S.D. = 0.76) in a great deal rate, followed by the item "You usually appreciate a work of art that creates meaning to the society" (4.20, S.D. = 0.73) in a much rate.

Factors influencing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries

Regarding the factors influencing aesthetic experience of the visitors, the item "The five senses, which are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, are important in the development of aesthetic experience." had the highest mean score (4.07, S.D. = 0.80) in a much rate. The item "When you view a work of art, you have belief and faith in the art." had the second highest mean score (3.98, S.D. = 0.74) in a much rate and the item "When you view a work of art, you can feel the quality of the work and the connection between art and a way of life." had the third highest mean score (3.97, S.D. = 0.67) in a much rate.

Management of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries

Regarding the management of aesthetic experience of the visitors, the item "Art galleries should have a security system such as surveillance cameras, fire extinguishers, baggage deposit counters, and prohibition of food and drink." had the highest mean score (4.58, S.D. = 0.70) in a great deal rate. The item "Art galleries should have an exhibition that encourages self-learning and provides edutainment for the visitors." had the second highest mean score (4.46, S.D. = 0.68) in a great deal rate and the item "Art galleries should have a relaxing corner, a reading corner, computers for searching exhibition content, internet services, restaurants, and coffee shops." had the third highest mean score (4.45, S.D. = 1.23) in a great deal rate.

Tests of hypotheses and multiple regression analysis of factors influencing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries

1) The samples of different sex did not show differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall, so it rejected the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

2) The samples of different sex did not show differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in each aspect, so it rejected the hypothesis. When comparing each pair of the analysis results with the Scheffe method, the mean score of each pair was not different, so it rejected the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

3) The samples of different age group did not show differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall, so it rejected the hypothesis. When comparing each pair of the analysis results with the Scheffe method, the mean score of each pair was not different, so it rejected the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

4) The samples of different age group showed differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in the aspect of aesthetic judgment (P-value = 0.01), so it accepted the hypothesis. However, the samples of different age group did not show differences in other aspects at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

5) The samples of different marital status did not show differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall, so it rejected the hypothesis. When comparing each pair of the analysis results with the Scheffe method, the mean score of each pair was not different, so it rejected the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

6) The samples of different marital status showed differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in the aspect of aesthetic meaning (P-value = 0.01) and aesthetic judgment (P-value = 0.03), so it accepted the hypotheses. However, the samples of different marital status did not show differences in other aspects. When comparing each pair of the analysis results with the Scheffe method, the mean score of the perception of aesthetic experience in the aspect of aesthetic meaning was different between the samples with married status and the samples with single status (P-value = 0.02) and the mean score of the perception of aesthetic experience in the aspect of aesthetic judgment was different between the samples with married status and the samples with divorced status (P-value = 0.03), so it accepted the hypothesis. However, the mean score of other pairs was not different at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

7) The samples of different occupation did not show differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall, so it rejected the hypothesis. When comparing each pair of the analysis results with the Scheffe method, the mean score of each pair was not different, so it rejected the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

8) The samples of different occupation showed differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in the aspect of aesthetic meaning (P-value = 0.01) and aesthetic judgment (P-value = 0.00), so it accepted the hypotheses. However, the samples of different occupation did not show differences in other aspects. When comparing each pair of the analysis results with the Scheffe method, the mean score of the perception of aesthetic experience in the aspect of aesthetic meaning was different between the samples that were state officers and

the samples that were university students (P-value = 0.02), between the samples that were private company employees and the samples that were university students (P-value = 0.02) and the mean score of the perception of aesthetic experience in the aspect of aesthetic judgment was different between the samples that were private company employees and the samples of other occupations (P-value = 0.04). However, the mean score of other pairs was not different at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

9) The samples of different average monthly salary group did not show differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall, so it rejected the hypothesis. When comparing each pair of the analysis results with the Scheffe method, the mean score of each pair was not different at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

10) The samples of different average monthly salary group showed differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in the aspect of aesthetic meaning (P-value = 0.01) and aesthetic judgment (P-value = 0.00), so it accepted the hypotheses. However, the samples of different average monthly salary group did not show differences in other aspects. When comparing each pair of the analysis results with the Scheffe method, the mean score of the perception of aesthetic experience in the aspect of aesthetic meaning was different between the samples with average monthly salary of less than 9,000 baht and the samples with average monthly salary of 15,001-20,000 baht (P-value = 0.00) and between the samples with average monthly salary of less than 9,000 baht and the samples with average monthly salary of more than 20,000 baht (P-value = 0.04) and the mean score of the perception of aesthetic experience in the aspect of aesthetic judgment was different between the samples with average monthly salary of less than 9,000 baht and the samples with average monthly salary of 15,001-20,000 baht (P-value = 0.01). However, the mean score of other pairs was not different at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

11) The samples with different frequency of visit to contemporary art and cultural galleries showed differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall, so it accepted the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

12) The samples with different frequency of visit to contemporary art and cultural galleries showed differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in the aspect of aesthetic meaning (P-value = 0.03) and aesthetic judgment (P-value = 0.00), so it accepted the hypotheses at a statistically significant level of 0.05. However, the samples with different frequency of visit did not show differences in other aspects.

13) The samples which gave different importance to the criteria for selecting art exhibitions for contemporary art and cultural galleries showed differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall (P-value = 0.00), so it accepted the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

14) The samples which gave different importance to the criteria for selecting art exhibitions for contemporary art and cultural galleries did not show differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries, so it rejected the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

15) The samples with different interests in each type of contemporary art and cultural work did not show differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall, so it rejected the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

16) The samples with different interests in each type of contemporary art and cultural work did not show differences in the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in each aspect, so it rejected the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

17) The mean score of the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries was correlated with the factor influencing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall, so it accepted the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

18) The mean score of the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries was correlated with the factor influencing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in every aspect (P-value = 0.00), so it accepted the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

19) The perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall was correlated with the management of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall (P-value = 0.00), so it accepted the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

20) The perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in each aspect was correlated with the management of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall in every aspect (P-value = 0.00), so it accepted the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

21) The perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall was correlated with the management of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries in overall (P-value = 0.00), so it accepted the hypothesis at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

Multiple regression analysis of factors influencing aesthetic experience

The factors influencing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries that could best forecast the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries were (1) "When viewing a work of art, you have belief and faith in the art.", (2) "The five senses, which are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, are important in the development of aesthetic experience.", (3) "You think past aesthetic experience is necessary for the development of aesthetic feeling towards a work of art.", and (4) "When viewing a

work of art, you develop belief and faith in the art.", which indicated the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries by 43 percent (R Square = 0.43).

Trends of aesthetic experience management for visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries

Component 1 – Activities and aesthetic creation

(1) Art galleries should systemically collect and store information about works of art or artists such as biographies, interview articles, and analysis articles.

(2) Art galleries should provide activities that encourage participation of visitors and facilitate easier understanding,

(3) Art galleries should adopt new technologies to provide knowledge and stage exhibitions with multimedia technology.

(4) Art galleries should regularly provide new interesting activities.

(5) Art galleries should have staff to provide tour guide services for visitors.

(6) Art galleries should systematically organize works of art by categories and historical periods.

(7) There should be activities to encourage interaction between the art galleries and the visitors.

(8) Art galleries should be living art galleries which stage interesting exhibitions from works of art in the galleries for people of all ages.

(9) There should be a forum for exchanging opinions about aesthetic experience management.

(10) Art galleries should develop a website for those who are interested to search for information such as the location and getting there, current exhibitions, opening hours, and admission fee.

(11) Art galleries should have a security system such as surveillance cameras, fire extinguishers, baggage deposit counters, and prohibition of food and drink.

(12) Art galleries should have an exhibition that encourages self-learning and provides edutainment for the visitors.

Component 2 - Social roles and responsibilities

(1) Art galleries should be an example of the good taste of the community.

(2) Art galleries should be open and provide integrated art information to people of all levels.

(3) Art galleries should give an opportunity for newcomer artists to exhibit their works.

(4) Art galleries should spread knowledge and promote activities about art to the community.

(5) Art gallery staff should have genuine knowledge and understanding about an artist's works and there should be competent curators and staff.

(6) Art galleries should have standard criteria to screen for artists by considering from the quality of works.

Component 3 – Administrative management

(1) The government should give full support to the management of art galleries, with participation from the private sector.

(2) Art galleries should conduct survey with target groups and visitors about what they would like to learn.

(3) Art galleries should create a selling point to attract visitors.

(4) Art galleries should have a relaxing corner, a reading corner, computers for searching exhibition content, internet services, restaurants, and coffee shops.

Component 4 - Services and facilitation

(1) Art galleries should impress visitors with good services such as facilities and service-minded staff.

(2) Art galleries should be a variety source of knowledge.

Guideline for managing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries

1) Activities and aesthetic creation - (1) Art galleries should create a connection between art and people or art appreciators, (2) art galleries should encourage participation and appreciation for works of art, (3) art galleries should create an interesting or leading point, (4) art galleries should exhibit various types of art, and (5) art galleries should be a place to connect aesthetics and beauty of art with thinking, creation, and the world of business.

2) Social roles and responsibilities - (1) Art galleries should create value and upgrade professionalism, (2) art galleries should be creative public sphere, and (3) art galleries should be a source of life-long learning.

3) Administrative management - (1) The government sector should have a part in the allocation of space inside contemporary art and cultural galleries, (2) A network should be created among contemporary art and cultural galleries, and (3) art galleries should support copyrights of works of art.

4) Services and facilitation – Art galleries should provide various services, especially regarding security, facilities for people with disabilities, relaxing or souvenir corners, curators or narrators, both narration in person or by electronic or digital systems.

Conclusions and Discussion

The factors influencing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries that could best forecast the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries were (1) "When viewing a work of art, you have belief and faith in the art.", (2) "The five senses, which are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, are important in the development of aesthetic experience.", (3) "You think past aesthetic experience is necessary for the development of aesthetic feeling towards a work of art.", and (4) "When viewing a work of art, you develop belief and faith in the art.", which indicated the perception of aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries by 43 percent (R Square = 0.43). This corresponds to Stone (2001), which pointed that learning activities in art museums played an important role in leading to the goal of developing aesthetic experience; experience in art museums could enlarge aesthetic cognition and artistic understanding of the visitors and to get in touch with works of art would enhance their aesthetic experience. Likewise, the theory of aesthetic development of Michael J. Parsons (1987) suggested five levels of aesthetic development: 1) favoritism, 2) beauty and realism, 3) expressiveness, 4) style and form, and 5) autonomy.

Regarding the trends and guidelines for managing aesthetic experience of visitors of contemporary art and cultural galleries, the research found four important components, which are (1) activities and aesthetic creation, (2) social roles and responsibilities, (3) administrative management, and (4) services and facilitation. The details are as follows.

In terms of activities and aesthetic creation, the research findings correspond to the idea of Koster (2009), which stated that art activities should be based on basic related principles and integrated and art activities should offer the participants experience of success and reflect their daily experience. A study of Tharin Klinkesorn and Ampai Tiranasar (2012) suggested that in the provision of teaching and learning activities to enhance aesthetic experience in art museums, important principles that should be taken into account included application and integration of various existing resources in the art museums and the environment of the museums that is favorable for the activities.

In terms of social roles and responsibilities, the research findings are in line with a study of Amnaj Yensabai (2006), which found that art galleries or art museums are innovations that could advance the education reform to develop the Thai society, starting from the structure of the Thai society, cultures of the Thai society, to education management in Thailand because art galleries or art museums are life-long learning sources of the Thai society and art galleries should create an equilibrium between human development and the business survival.

In terms of administrative management, the research findings matched the results from a study of Siriwat Sanserm (2000) which showed that the education roles of art museums in Thailand have a high level of correspondence in the aspects of (1) principles of art museums, (2) educational policies of art museums, (3) operational plans of art museums, and (4) expected education roles of art museums, which include provision of aesthetic knowledge and art appreciation, provision of knowledge about history of art, provision of Interdisciplinary knowledge, and provision of social knowledge.

In terms of services and facilitation, the research findings correspond to a study of Siripan Tirasrichote et al (2005) which suggested that museums should use a visitor centric approach in the creation of activities and services and should expand the scope of services such as staging touring exhibitions and roadshow activities, developing online services, and lending of materials for exhibitions.

Acknowledgements

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Culturalizing Transformation: Reimagining Futures

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Abstract

This paper introduces "action research" work that began in 2013 with the identification of the experience of singleness among *adivasi* (indigenous) women farmers in rural parts of Odisha, India. The continuous articulation and analysis of singleness has connected women in 5 different villages in a kind of *collective form*, named *Eka Nari Sanghathan* (Single Women's Collective). The *Sanghathan* has emerged as a space to host *friendship, belongingness and togetherness* for women who have been either abandoned by their families or are treated as burdens and liabilities. However, it functions not only as a support group but also as a *transformative space* that (re)thinks questions related to development, agency, well-being, solidarity, rights, and politics. This work situated deep in developmental contexts challenges discourses and practices that represent *adivasi* women simply as poor third world victim beneficiaries in need of "development" and treat indigenous cultures as backward and lacking in knowledge, logic, and capacity to transform. This paper explores the role *adivasi* culture and collaborative gender work, such as that of the *Sanghathan* play in rethinking practices of transformation and creating common futures? In other words, the paper wonders whether culturalizing the process of transformation and rethinking through lived experiences and social practices offer us a new way of reimagining futures? Can the *adivasi* spaces be seen as our future rather than a past to be destroyed? Can newer imaginations of the future be built through rethinking of the past? Can we begin to learn from those wrongly represented in the developmental imagination as 'backward' and 'lacking'? These are some of the explorations this paper shall work towards.

Keywords: Singleness, Development, Transformation, Culture

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Introduction

This paper introduces an 'action research' work that began as part of an MPhil programme in Development Practice at Ambedkar University Delhi in India. In 2013, the identification of the lived experience and the condition of singleness among indigenous women farmers in rural parts of the Rayagada district of Odisha, India, marked the beginning of this action research. Singleness in this work is largely understood: (a) as a condition depicting loneliness, aloneness, material deprivation, including emotional, political and socio-cultural othering and exclusion, and (b) as also a condition that has enabled women to lead at least a negotiated gendered existence that at times challenges strict structures of hetero-patriarchy. In the *adivasi* context of Rayagada the various forms of discriminations, oppressions, exploitation and violence perpetuated by the larger hetero-patriarchal world upon single women seem to range from 'social ostracization' to subjecting them to numerous kinds of taboos, restrictions, and controls; making them economically vulnerable and depriving them of their rights over food, wages, family property and land. Moreover, the life of the *adivasi* single woman is, as if, lived between humiliation and helplessness, sadness and silence, loneliness and pain, in short between an unlivable life and a death deferred. There are stories of single women dying as a result of acute hunger, illness, homelessness, lack of care. At times their dead-bodies were found, after a few days, in the midst of the forest; dead-bodies left unclaimed, after the gold worn by women had been ripped off their bodies. This imagery represents extreme forms of cruelty subjected to not only single women but even to their dead-bodies. It marks the never-ending nature of brutality, ruthlessness and violence which is a part of an *adivasi* single woman's everyday living and continues to haunt her till her death and even after death.

In a culture where a woman or her family cannot propose an alliance for marriage and the woman has to wait for a proposal to arrive from a man's family, there are many women who remain unmarried and live with their families looking after and supporting their parents and siblings. Moreover, most women who are abandoned by their husbands or by the in-laws after the death of the husband return to the natal family. However, acceptance in the natal family is very rare for women who return after being married. Especially when women grow old and are unable to labor (including married women) they are considered a mere burden. They are often abused and held responsible for family disputes. Eventually they are either thrown out of the house or they decide to leave. Many a times, married women also face similar exclusions and disowning by the family. Thus, most *adivasi* women live under constant fear of getting abandoned one day; in addition to loneliness and unwantedness, the fear of abandonment haunts the lives of these women.

The relationship they share with their families and the larger community is far more complex than what seems to be at surface. There are many women who live alone having been abandoned by their families (especially older never married women and separated women) and there are also women who share the household with their parents/brothers/husbands/in-laws (mostly those who can still perform labouring activities at home and outside), however, in either situation, these women continue to negotiate their everyday existence in/with the family.

In spite of the oppressive, exploitative, and at times violent space that family is, there is a lot of value attached to being-with and belonging in relationships. Unfortunately, given the privileging in hetero-patriarchal structures, 'family' seems to be one of the primary sites, hosting (false) promises of care and belongingness. Or is it due to dearth of other forms of socio-political relationalities and spaces that we resort back to oppressive structures of family? One remains uncertain. Thus, the important question in this context is whether there can be alternatives to the hetero-patriarchal institution of family that oppresses, exploits and abandons women at its whims and fancies? Can belongingness be found/forged in non-familial but familiar spaces that emerge with a possibility of a shared/common future; spaces of care and companionship, working through the complexities of power, affect, intimacy and desire.

Our work in Rayagada is an effort in this direction. *Eka Nari Sanghathan,* a single women's collective that got forged as a result of familial/social exclusion and othering of women in the *adivasi* society, works towards reimagining and re-constituting an emergent-contingent, being-in-common. The *Sanghathan* as a response to the condition of loneliness and socio-cultural exclusion and building upon women's everyday negotiations and resistance, urges us to work through existing forms and (im)possible formations of relationality. It hosts companionship and a sense of *care and security* for women who experience 'singleness' as a result of social/familial othering. The coming together of women in the *Sanghathan* is not seen as a means to attain some common/shared goals (such as increasing numbers in order to attain rights and entitlements) but as *an end in itself* (where women come together to share their life with each other). However, it functions not only as a support group but also as a *transformative space* that can move beyond the standard models of addressing (single) women as victims to making sense of singleness as a living process – as also a response and challenge to hetero-patriarchy. In addition to forging friendships among women, the *Sanghathan* also entails a form of collective struggle, wherein along-with generating an understanding of peoples' oppressions, constructive collective action is undertaken towards challenging power structures and working together towards enhancing well-being (see Chitranshi, 2016).

Women in this collective journey engage and (re)think questions related to development, solidarity, rights, feminist consciousness, and politics and these processes have been significant in building and strengthening more and more voices of dissent. This work thus, is a work of affirmative/affective praxis of transformation – mainly transformation of the self, the larger social and the political. The *Sanghathan* in this way has engendered a process of transformation in the way these women perceive themselves, in their relation to the larger socio-political world, and the ways in which women want to live their lives and work towards a just and common future.

Embedded deeply within the larger discourse and practice of development, transformative work in the *Sanghathan* has led to critical reflections that argue for a postdevelopmental imagination and practice. Our work with the *adivasi* single women in Rayagada points to how the developmental processes and foreign agendas leave unattended and unaddressed significant concerns of *adivasi* women's lives. Rendered as lacking, backward, and pre-capitalist in the developmental discourse, the third world tribal communities are branded as the *victim others* – victims of structural poverty, victims of their own backwardness, non-scientificity, superstition, even anti-

modernenss by the contemporary cultures. As Ashis Nandy (2013) states, "the role tribal communities have played in defining India's cultural identity, creativity and dignity has [paradoxically] been rewritten as a history of underdevelopment" (Nandy, 2013: xi). A majority of India's roughly 250 tribes "face a new [and resurgent] India that wants them to retire into history [and into museumized artifacts], vacating space for more spectacular [forms of capital-centric] development. … Pushed into destitution, marginalized, and denied even a vestige of dignity by modern India, [the tribe – as the Other or the necessary double of an 'eternal/Vedic/Hindu India' has] now become targets of a new form of double displacement" (Nandy, 2013: x-xi): (a) "the territorial displacement" and 'everyday dislocation' (see Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2009) of traditional forms of habitat and (b) psychoanalytic displacement marked by the "new brown man's burden" and an neo-Orientalist equation: "tribal India today is what we were yesterday and their tomorrow is nothing other than what we are today" (Nandy, 2013: xi). In other words, new emergent India has nothing but contempt for the tribal; strangely, it is contempt for one's own past; a past one wishes to disavow; at most, new India has some pity for the tribal – pity for a petty third world figure of 'lack' – a figure already in its final journey into oblivion – a figure whose epitaph is always already written. Nandy calls this new emergent India "regimes of narcissism"; "regimes of narcissism that are built not only on individual psychopathology, as Christopher Lasch recognized in the late 1970s, but also on political cultural realities" (Nandy, 2013: ix). Regimes of narcissism, according to Nandy (2013: xii), are marked on the one hand, by extreme self-centeredness and hyper-eroticized egoism, *but* on the other, by also "incapacitating self-doubt and feelings of inferiority" – a self-doubt and inferiority new emergent India has managed to project onto the tribal. Marked by such interiorized doubt and inferiority the 'terminally ill' tribal emerges as the figure of what we have called, "the living dead" (see Chitranshi and Dhar 2016). What is it to be woman, an *adivasi* single woman in the midst of such cultural crisis and devastation looming large, and from which there appears to be no apparent escape, is a question this paper explores.

Beyond Development

The process of development since the 1970s has claimed inclusion of women into existing capitalocentric and Orientalist developmental interventions (Dhar and Dasgupta, 2014). The approach to Women In Development (WID), apart from its familiar feminist critiques, assumed universality of oppression and homogeneity of experience among women and failed to acknowledge the specific social and cultural contexts of women's lives. The *illusory gender work* in developmental discourse is centered around the universal myth that once women gain access to economic and material resources, their gendered existence and the exclusionary social condition will transform. In this process, poor tribal women "become a sound economic and political investment… (as) they are hardworking, easier to mobilize, more honest and agents of better credit risks. They selflessly work for the betterment of their entire families and communities and are thus great poverty alleviation agents" (Batliwala and Dhanraj, 2008: 22).

While on the one hand, there is a developmental journey of taking along issues, in ways that can nevertheless be challenged, mainly pertaining to poverty, income, livelihoods and now even gender to an extent, on the other, this also has been a journey of silencing and foreclosing singleness and perhaps many other aspects of

women's lives. It is interesting how singleness remains foreclosed in the *apparently woman-centric developmental work* in Rayagada with about 35-40% women being single (accounting for widows, separated and unmarried single women alone). These women are collected into groups to promote micro-finance, livelihoods and other so called "developmental agendas" that claim to "empower" women, but the 'reality' of their lived life and their socio-cultural experiences (singleness being one among many) is largely kept outside of these interventions. The inclusion of women in development paradoxically works towards reducing questions of women's issues (related to questions of gender and power in relational contexts) to issues of women (issues related to claiming material/tangible resources). Rekha Pappu (2011) observes, "within the developmental discourse, single women are positioned as subjects in need of governmental support; issues of land, wages and health assume primary importance. Significantly, absent from the discussions about single women's rights are issues of their self-fulfilment or desire. *The objective conditions of their existence seem to overwhelm their subjective being"* (379).

The *adivasi* single woman thus has two faces; one of which is illicit; illicit in the mainstream discourse of development. On the one hand, is the appropriate(t) image, the third worldish image of the tribal single woman; which is the image of the *widow* – an image tattooed in the language of victimhood. On the other, is the inappropriate(d) image, the illicit, the prohibited, the tabooed image of the tribal single woman; which is the image of the *single* or of *singleness.* It is, as if, one particular image of the composite 'tribal single woman' –the image of the widow – is not taboo to development; the widow is a victim. What is taboo is the image of the single – the *unmarried* woman; the *abandoned* woman.

Third worldism around the individual victimhood of the single tribal woman is, as if, "a certain organization of places designed to *lead astray*" (xxxvi); Derrida calls such a displacing organisation of space *crypt*; for Derrida "the crypt hides as it holds"; third worldism – i.e. the presencing of parts of the South as *lacking* – hides as it holds the narrative and pain of the tribal single woman; the grounds are so disposed as to "disguise and to hide … but also to disguise the act of hiding and to hide the disguise … what is at stake here is what takes place secretly, or takes a secret place, in order to keep itself *safe* somewhere" (Derrida in Abraham and Torok, 1986: xiv).

The inhabitant(s) of a crypt are always a living dead, a dead entity, semantically dead; as if neither can be inserted in the syntactic chain; or even the chain of signifiers; as if both are "words buried alive" [1986: xxxv]; both are "defunct words" [1986: xxxv], words "relieved of their communicative function". Is the tribal single woman the *living dead* of the Indian nation-state, of a regime of narcissism, of a developmental imagination premised on capital accumulation and primitive accumulation? Is (inclusive) development the crypt – the delusional topograph – to keep (conserve-hidden) the living dead? Or has the living been rendered dead by the third worldisation of the lived experience of tribal single woman? Has she been rendered semantically dead, even if she is biologically alive? She can't be inserted in the syntactic chain of the Empire-nation-state exchange; Spivak calls her the gendered subaltern.

In the context of Derrida's invocation of the crypt and of cryptonymy, a lingering kind of self-doubt begins to take shape: is 'development' itself a cryptonym (a word

that hides)? Does it hide some *key word*, no doubt unutterable… and unknown for the moment? Does it shroud the language of the tribal single woman? Do certain *words* – in the tribal single woman's world – suffer an extraordinary exclusion? Is it because a given word, a key word, or some words in the tribal single woman's world are unutterable – unutterable not as such, but unutterable in the Capitalocentric [1] - Orientalist as also androcentric imagination of development (see Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2009)? Does development as a substitute signifier, as a *cryptonym* render *prohibited* [or *taboo*] the wor(l)d of the tribal single women?

Culturalizing Transformation

With regards to our work in Rayagada, the *adivasi* culture, language, logic, ethos and space emerge as a context for women's oppression. It appears women's oppression in Rayagada cannot be thought without an antecedent tribalness. We thus have to understand tribalness to understand women's oppression and singleness within it. This work thus places the woman question firmly within the history of the tribal question in India. The problem that one encounters here is that the history of the tribal question is always already marked by the stamp of colonial anthropological assumptions and the assumptions of the developmental state. The general idioms and assumptions related to tribal cultures that come to mind instantly are, a) tribal cultures are primarily backward, they lack in development, modernity and civilisation at times b) tribal cultures are gender just/equal/sensitive. The valence of these two somewhat opposed generalities needs to be revisited and verified. We need to move beyond simple celebratory notations and equally simple derogatory denouncements of tribal contexts. Moreover, as against the perpetuating theories of the World Bank or United Nations that are invading the tribal worlds through various strategies such as micro-financing, capacity building and trainings, perhaps what is needed is to generate newer theories of oppression and practices of resistance and transformation that are more experience sensitive, culture sensitive and history sensitive. The question then is how can we move towards models more sensitive to tribal life worlds and forms of life?

It is to ask how we can learn from them theories and praxis of feminism, of transformation rather than trying to always train them in foreign theories and practices. How can we learn to be political and what is it to learn to transform from a subaltern life worldview? These questions require us to think further as to what it is to listen to a subaltern voice. Can we begin to see, for instance, what patriarchy, gender, power, violence, oppression, resistance, or the political entails in the subaltern world.

Since the single women's collective in Rayagada belongs to the tribal women, the questions concerning women, gender, and hetero-patriarchy as well as the other collective endeavours that the *Sanghathan* undertakes, are all placed well within the particularity of the tribal *context*. Belonging to the same ethnic community, most of

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[1] "In a capitalocentric field, capitalism is the norm and non-capitalist economic relations or entities are understood with respect to capitalism, as either the same as, complements to, opposites of or contained within capitalism" (Gibson-Graham, 2016: 291). Thus, capitalism becomes a centre, an essence or a nodal reference point in terms of which noncapitalism is conceived, discussed and policed (by a set of policies). What gets erased in the process are the multi- faceted, noncapitalist modes- of- being and the diverse possibilities they may reveal (Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2009).

these women share kinship ties and there is a sense of cultural ethos that drives the nature of these relationalities. Building upon these already existing kinship ties, common cultural ethos and value systems, single women in the *Sanghathan* have been recreating new relationalities and redrawing old ones.

However, the women in the *Sanghathan* do not constitute a homogeneous whole. There are varying degrees of differences and power differentials at play. As a result, continuous efforts are undertaken towards mitigating power relations within the *Sanghathan* and to cultivate a *common* and a *non-hierarchised* space. *'Care for the other'* is held in the highest regard and perpetual attempts are undertaken to maintain *trust* among each other. Keeping differences among women alive, the collective repeatedly undergoes several processes in order to analyse and reflect upon group behaviour, group functioning, communication patterns, power dynamics, external/internal influences and so on. Thus, through cultivation of bonds of friendship, love and care among women in the *Sanghathan* and through working towards non-violent engagement with the larger social, we strive to negotiate conditions of economic poverty, emotional poverty and poverty of social care.

The collective has also been involved in creating models of self-sustenance, in creating processes of working together and generating surplus in order to take care of the financial needs of single women. For instance, for the last 2 years, the women in the *Sanghathan* have been collectively preparing a traditional mango pickle from mangoes 'gathered' from the forest. Part of the pickle produced is kept for self-consumption by the women themselves and the rest is sold to generate *surplus which is appropriated collectively*. The idea of making pickle is not to make a business venture but to *come together as labouring-creating subjects*. It is also to generate support for the members of the *Sanghathan* who are now old and are not in a condition to self-sustain.

Similarly, last year 35 women from the *Sanghathan* have come together to *collectively cultivate paddy* by leasing 3 acres of land for the next 3 years. With the help of my colleague Ashutosh Kumar and in collaboration with Dr. Debal Deb and Dulalda (from Basudha- cintdis.org/basudha/), *we cultivated indigenous seed varieties using ecologically-sensitive methods and techniques*. In today's time when the farmers are being encouraged to produce and appropriate on an individual basis keeping self-interest in mind and are being lured into relying heavily on capitalist market-based inorganic and chemical farming which emphasizes the use of fertilizers, pesticides and hybrid/high yielding seeds, this experiment of alternative farming with indigenous seeds made an attempt at: *(a) exploring ways and processes of collective farming, and (b) moving beyond chemical farming to alternative ways of farming*. Given that agriculture has become an economic activity with the sole objective of individual subsistence and income generation, this process of alternative farming also helped us re-examine and revive agriculture as a life form marked by overdetermined natural, cultural, social, ecological and economic processes.

Not only the performance of labour, even the appropriation and distribution of the produce was a collective endeavour and everyone including Daima Pedenti (who is a member of ENS but could not participate in this year's labouring process due to health issues) was given equal share of the produce. This collective journey of producing, appropriating and distributing paddy equally has left us all with lot of new

learnings, reflections, and most importantly strengthened relationships. These collective processes are not just business ventures designed for individual income generation or gain but are instead geared towards collective laboring-production-appropriation-distribution of surplus that in turn move away from capitalist processes to post-capitalist[2] processes (Gibson-Graham, 2006) and bring about a gradual shift in subjectivities, from individualistic/self-interested ones to collective/shared ones. As women collectivize to perform labor, produce together and share the surplus, there is a transforming of gendered subjectivities, realities and relationalities.

Thus, the action research work with tribal single women in Rayagada has been traversing the difficult and largely deferred path of exploring both the overt and the secret language/logic/ethos of tribal life worlds and life forms. It has been attempting to build upon gendered subaltern histories, cultural practices, ethical value systems and tribal worldviews in order to explore possible collaborative praxis of transformation, which remains distinct from mainstream practices of development, that are geared towards rethinking the ethical and the political through the non-violent reconstitution and rehabilitation of desire and through re-subjectivation. It is an attempt to recover the past through which a transformed future can be imagined and cultivated.

Acknowledgments

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[2] Postcapitalist politics leads us on towards an engagement with the economic field from a perspective of ethical decision making, bringing together the realms of community and economy by articulating a shared concern about economic and ecological interdependence. Key concerns of a community economy include how to produce and share a social surplus in order to meet our needs, how to generate and sustain commons, as well as how to invest in an ecologically and socially sustainable future" (Gibson-Graham et al, 2013).

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Imagining 'Empowered' Futures: Thinking of Possibilities in Contemporary Times

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Abstract

The paper is a presentation of the work based on an intensive 'field work' conducted in Hoshangabad district, block Kesla, Madhya Pradesh, India. The work examines the practices of women empowerment and its strategies at the ground level, in villages and at the block level. It is a work which critically pursues the functions of empowerment strategies and goals, with its gains and limitations, with its successes and failures and argues for an uncovering of the deeper layers embedded in the hegemony of a certain 'kind' of training of the rural woman. The paper is a reflection on the power attached to the 'parameter' of agency in models of women empowerment and rethink agency at a conceptual, philosophical level. It is to think of the instrumentality of agency in the discourse of development and how it can be rethought. The object of enquiry thus holds to understand the 'experience' of empowerment and its nature of 'transformation', of the category of the 'third world woman' which gets *foregrounded* in the global projects of 'empowering' them, as 'unified', homogenous, subjects of 'transformation'. The argument of the paper then asks us to *re*-visit the notions of empowerment as a structural category which is fulfilled through the mainstream development rhetoric and what it means to '*live*' empowerment, perhaps through a renewed understanding of 'agency' in the contemporary. It is thus to unfold these practices in order to understand 'what of' empowerment effects (and affects) women in their everyday lives.

Keywords: empowerment, agency, third world woman

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Introduction

As the conference dwelled upon thinking about 'fearful futures', one wonders what happens to the question of 'empowerment' in the face of fear and continuous political, global threat of future. Whether there will be any future which will not be fearful anymore, and what forms will questions of agency take shape, remain questions to be contemplated. Whether agency will be suppressed, repressed, or taken for granted as everyone's key to freedom. And whether 'empowerment', no matter how much it is needed in present times, becomes an ironical replacement of everything that one stood against. Perhaps this deliberation on agency and empowerment is the attempt of this paper.

The paper is a reflective writing of the work done over a period of 5 months in a small block of Central India. It is also a reflection on a methodology of complex processes among groups of women doing savings-credit and formed around inculcating a sense of their empowerment by the developmental-interventionist organization in the area. The work with these groups of women then evolved through (ethnographically) following their lives, building a relationship and then reflecting and complicating the understanding of processes that come to be defined as 'empowerment' of women.

The paper then asks, what gets 'prescribed' and 'described' as empowerment. The current work is trying to sit patiently with the women who have been 'prescribed' as the 'empowered' women, and listen to their narratives which might not always be the linear, structured narratives of 'empowerment'. We then need to hear this voice, deeply, to what she is saying, when she talks loudly, aggressively, when she sounds meek, when she slowly disapproves of her life as a 'woman', as a 'struggling' woman, thinks of life as 'labor' but also that of possibility. A possibility within gaps and disruptions

A Foreword

As I sit by the window, hearing the twirling and whispering of nature, I think about the nights I spent with women in the villages, close by. The women who are 'empowered' in the discourse of micro-credit Self-help groups and state-cum-development sector empowerment missions. I walk with them almost every day, on journeys that we take together into entering and creating intimate space(s). We talk about life as we are walking through the fields and villages. Of course we talk about their lives as 'empowered' women, about their lives becoming 'better' in terms of mobility, voice and agency. But perhaps the empowerment narrative slightly fades away in the background and it is more about life and living in the everyday that becomes part of our conversations. It is about their labor and struggles that we talk. The labor that goes in the struggle to become 'empowered' while everything remains unchanged, their laboring lives or their unmet desires. We also stop by and rest for a while. Sometimes we talk about love and what life would mean if we could make our choices of love, in love.

Perhaps we may not meet together in the struggles that we share and we live but we are in a process of building a relationship, the possibility of a transformative relationship. Perhaps then this work is both about the critical thoughts about what empowerment gets defined by discourse and also around a 'methodological process' that open up the matrix of empowerment, as hitherto understood only as an enumerable category to be achieved.

The paper and the work then doesn't attempt to define 'what is empowerment' or 'what would it mean to be empowered' but rather it attempts to understand how do women navigate and negotiate their way around their lives, in struggle, labor, fears or even happiness. Perhaps the attempt is to understand this process of negotiation which gets lost in the reflection of state policy and development interventions, where the task is only to present a 'happy' smiling woman, who works towards the peace for her family and for the world. A specific third-worldization[1] is also attached to this representation, which assumes that the only way the third world woman could be uplifted is to invest in her, *bank* upon her, towards 'saving' money, mobilize her to gain 'voice' and mobility, as that presents a good image of 'gender equality'. Thus far women had been excluded from the development discourse, so inclusion happens in this kind of tokenist approach. The problem that however remains, the status quo and hegemony doesn't get altered. Women continue to live and survive in patriarchal families and relationships. Even though empowerment missions often invoke an internal questioning, but it also always puts them at a life-risk of subverting the deep-seated traditions that they end up confronting. One woman had said to me during my stay in the field that, "a sword is always hanging by our heads, for the kind of work that we do". But the missions do not really provide support that women would need, in this kind. For instance they would just end up fire-fighting with traditions, culture and communities at their own risks. What ends up becoming of them is more of an empowered figure that is very masculine, like the dominant male figure and sadly a patriarchy of another kind, where there is little space for the women who can-*not* speak loud, aggressive and fiercely.

Sense of agency- the 'process' of empowerment

Naila Kabeer (1999), a scholar on questions of development, gender and empowerment, builds on the conception of empowerment through opening up the perspective of 'choice'. She lays down that the central concept to understand 'empowerment' is 'power' and the "ability" to make choices, which makes one 'empowered' or 'disempowered' (disempowered in the moment when one is denied 'choice'). Further, she clarifies that to be 'empowered', disempowerment is a necessary condition, because one can be very powerful but not necessarily 'empowered' because they were never disempowered in the first place. These choices

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[1] I refer here to the specific development and aid interventions in the Third world countries, which push for a certain kind of representation of women. Women often are represented only as poor, victims of abuse and violence and dependent on their families for everything. And development and aid interventionist discourse harps only on this and not the complexity of different contexts. This the Third world feminist scholars have referred to as the 'Third Worldization' of women in third world countries (Mohanty, 1984).

she says are further determined by resources (pre-determined), agency (process) and achievements (outcomes). The next dimension which Kabeer defines as fundamental for empowerment, is 'agency', the ability to make decisions, to be able to define one's goals and actions, with meaning, motivation and purpose, she refers to it as '*power within*'. She also differentiates between a positive and a negative sense of agency; '*power to*' and '*power over*' respectively. The former refers to one's ability to make one's decisions, life term choices, and goals and to be able to act those even in the face of opposition; the latter refers to the capacity of an actor to impose goals against one's wishes. However, she also says that in contexts like South Asia, power doesn't necessarily require agency to function, it can work in the absence of agency because of societal norms and rules just like a young girl can be married off without her consent etc.

Further, she expands 'agency' with the help of Sen,

> Resources and agency together constitute what Sen refers to as capabilities, the potential that people have for living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of 'being and doing'. Sen uses the idea of 'functionings' to refer to all the possible ways of being and doing that are valued by people in a given context, and of 'functioning achievements' to refer to the particular ways of being and doing that are realized by different individuals (Sen, 1985). It is only when the failure to achieve one's goals reflects some deep-seated constraint on the ability to choose that it can be taken as a manifestation of disempowerment. (Kabeer 1999: 3-4).

Amartya Sen (1999) a noted scholar and economist, also builds a connection between women's well-being and agency, where the pursuit to achieve women's well-being is intrinsically linked to women's sense of agency relating it further to the role of 'responsibility', to be able to achieve an agentic well- being. "Understanding the agency role is thus central to recognizing people as responsible persons: not only are we well or ill, but also we act or refuse to act, and can choose to act one way rather than another. And thus we-women *and* men-must take responsibility for doing things or not doing them" (Sen, 1999: 190).

Further, he pursues agency, by laying emphasis on women's agentic role for the welfare of the family (men and children) and community. "Freedom in one area (that of being able to work outside the household) seems to help to foster freedom in others (in enhancing freedom from hunger, illness and relative deprivation)" (Sen 1999, p.194). Both Kabeer and Sen then perhaps seem to be saying is that 'agency' is the *will*/ability to act, as 'active agents', developing on their 'power within'. However, for Sen, the responsibility of the 'woman' lies on how 'well' she can 'act' for her empowered status and acquire a productive well-being and for Kabeer, agency is a "meditative" process to reach an achieved outcome.

Deveaux (1994, 1999) poses a feminist critique of Foucault's theories of power in order to generate an articulation of 'agency' of women to reach empowerment. She stresses the need to pay attention to the "*inner* processes" (p.245, Italics original) of

women, with which they make sense of the 'freedom' or choice in relation to the external processes of power and domination.

The above formulations see woman as a category, an 'identity' working towards agency, underlining the 'liberal' notions of choice, emphasizing the 'internal' power within. It interiorizes the 'problem' of women's marginality providing her with the 'alternative' of 'choice' and as if the oppression of women could be addressed through exercising one's choice with 'responsibility', missing the larger structural point that choice is 'not available' to all.

The 'experience' of the woman gets naturalized assuming that escape from her oppression lies 'within' her, losing out on both the complexity of experience, structures as well as the formation of a subjecthood - which is a complex, fragmented, embodiment of 'desire' and non-linear. The problem with the current modules of 'gender trainings' that aim to sensitize women on 'gender' and create awareness about their patriarchal lives are illustrative of this problematic understanding and entry into women's lives. To view women within 'conscious', identitarian frameworks and to enhance their 'power within', is to bring in an unsophisticated feminist critique. She is not one woman, she is multiple, she is the oppressed but also the oppressor. And women sitting together in savings/credit groups can have little possibility of change, unless we attend to our fragmented histories and our contradictory, complex lives. It is not all black and all white, it is not that all men are oppressors and all women are oppressed. And at the same time when one or the same development policy created in 'World Bank', which enters the rural households of women in the 'third world', it cannot fit all sizes.

This work in that sense attempts to question the one size fit all model, or that 'economic' empowerment of women will lead to their empowerment in other spheres, which is followed by most development and aid agencies especially in women empowerment missions. It also seeks to question the literature that promotes choice and agency as conscious, liberal-individual oriented markers, that seemingly takes us back to the assumption that feminists want to give up- that it is the woman's responsibility to work towards her agency and choice. I would like to propose a more complicated understanding of agency embedded within structures of fear, threat, violence as also individual people.

Re-thinking Agency-Empowerment

In the context of India, a genealogical analysis of the movement of agency and empowerment shows us the shift which happened from 'welfare' (however problematic but held the feminist promise of equality) approach towards women to the 'efficiency' model (in the 1980's and 1990's), where (reproductive) 'productivity' of women became the central point and women 'acquired' the status of "active agents". With the buzz around 'population control', reproductive productivity of women gathered valence and women's education, employment and economic (later social and political) decision making became important empirical markers for women to perform the roles of 'agents' (agential 'lacking' third world others) specifically

through "increase in child survival and reducing fertility rates". John (1996) shows this through the World Bank report on Gender and Poverty (1991), which uses the findings of Shramshakti report (1988) (on the conditions of women in informal labor), to say that "there is general consensus" among researchers, activists and government departments in India, that women must be seen "efficient" economic actors, to reduce poverty. The World Bank, she says, takes the recommendation of Shramshakti report to provide economic access to women and shifts the argument made for the immense '*exploitation*' of women in the informal labor sector, to that of '*efficiency*' (p.3074). Achuthan (2009) points to the problematic nature of agency as a 'pure' form of empowerment of women, which perpetrates patriarchal forces rather than contending it.

> What is economic empowerment? If paid work outside the home fosters freedom from hunger and illness, this would be the language not only of pure empowerment/emancipation/independence but also of productivity and power, the clout hitherto wielded by the sole male breadwinner being undercut by the female contributor to household income. And it remains a fact that this working woman, while challenging patriarchal structures, yet remains deeply embedded within, and supportive of, them. Through the normative responsibility that this typical motherhood brings, she empowers patriarchal family structures in the very moments that she asks for a voice within them. Her agency is never unmediated through contexts…. This could be taken to mean that agency has here been imperfectly achieved, that a further consolidation of capability or improvement of context will help this goal. One would, however, in critiques of the liberal position, work with the notion of the impossibility of pure agency or a secure subject from which it may flow.
>
> (Achuthan, 2009:31)

She further situates the critique in the problematic nature of 'inclusion' of women in every development policy, to seemingly make women visible everywhere, to fill in their otherwise excluded 'absence'. **"**Women, then, have not been left behind. They have been re-produced in development – as the repository of the patriarchal feminine…Needless to say, 'women' here stands in for poor women in what we could still unfashionably call the third world" (Achuthan, 2009: 21-22). She further asks the question whether the hegemony of development is in an over determined relationship with the gender regimes in the third world. "Or that development is the overarching apparatus through which gender is organized? Or that gender regimes are the nodal signifier around which development as hegemonic formation is organized?" (ibid.42). The trope of development then seems to 'universalize' and create a particular identity of the woman as the empowered woman. This also points to the universal language through which the nation state adopts the roles of modernizing its population. What is the gender 'of' development? What is called empowerment as maybe a feminizing of development but perhaps is necessarily the standard of hegemonic masculine framework of development?

Chakrabarti and Dhar (2012) conceptualise 'inclusion' as a careful strategy of 'exclusion' of the poor, pre-modern, pre-capitalist third world 'other' (or and also the

non-modern Other), made 'included' by presence-ing her poverty, her victimhood and her 'third-world-ism'. In this 'presence-ing' there is a palpable devaluing of the 'language-logic-ethos' of the third world, of what they call is the 'traditional', by the 'modern', capitalist, first world. Development is, they say, the secret politics of 'modernisation', and it works on operating through two 'privileged' centres of capitalism and modernity; "the logic of transition is driven by these centres, such that the *other* is attempted to be worked upon and transformed in their images" (ibid.1090). The authors depict the hegemonising relationship of modernism-capitalism which 'produces' the third world subject through the development policies of 'inclusive development'. It sproduces this 'third world' other as that space which is 'devalued', 'denigrated' and as the 'lacking' other from the perspective of the centre. In the light of this, how does one understand the agency of the third-world woman? How does one understand agency in the face of the fear of the modernist, capitalist state that wants to include woman but only as the devalued, lacking, victimized other. Perhaps this conceptualization problematizes the simple understanding of empowerment of women, as mere (token) inclusion of women into discourse to-- what operationalizes such inclusion and what holds the cost of this kind of liberal understanding of inclusion (the representation of the victimized third world woman). Agency of women then needs to be understood through a larger understanding of the processes of negotiations and struggles, fears and achievements and perhaps a continuous and reflective process of accessing and understanding one's empowerment.

Conclusion

Spivak (2003) asks us to be wary of the "euphoria" of the political activist, to bring 'empowerment' in women's lives and the cost of what is 'lost' in this "euphoria" of empowerment. The 'euphoria' that is more about the 'event' and the 'universal' declarations that are made, rather than the people who are spoken about. And that's why she finds this 'enthusiasm' quite wasteful and unenforceable, because it doesn't mean anything to the subaltern population. Spivak's basic critique of the sphere of gender trainings and declarations is that, there's no attempt to make sense of the "structure of feeling" of the groups who are supposedly being helped (p.614).

In that sense, she argues for a work, that works 'with' the rural subaltern rather than 'for' (on) them. "There is a difference between the two things: between woman-centered *philanthropy* and democratic *pedagogic* involvement. That's what I'm talking about" (italics mine, ibid.,615). Spivak's suggestion to us is to move towards thinking of 'education' as a "sustained, uncoercive rearrangement of desires with no guarantees" (ibid.). In envisioning (political) imagination as a "material practice", she asks us that our engagement with the world's "disenfranchised women has to be as thick as our students" (ibid.). Can we then imagine models of gender training as a 'practice' of education that works through the desires of the 'disenfranchised' women and creates a political imagination which is a continuous process of learning and undoing?

In that sense the attempt of this work has been to think through and work on building a feminist praxis which is differs from the desperate measures of empowerment as described above, but works slowly in understanding processes and lives of women. Can we begin to think about a feminist praxis that as Jacqueline Rose (2014), suggests doesn't just call out for the 'personal is political' or shout 'equality for women'. But works towards creating/cultivating a feminist praxis that does not try to 'sanitize' the 'dark' experiences of the personal and private, rather attempts to understand what it means to enter the 'personal'. What does it mean to then 'practice' feminism that is 'scandalous' as Rose suggests, or perhaps how Bell Hooks (2000) calls it plain and simple, to build on the practice to oppose 'sexism' at all and deepest levels. In creating the possibility of 'empowered futures', perhaps the imagination then is not to look for definitional answers of women empowerment but rather cultivate a process, a praxis where the future looks livable, equal and empowered.

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Ethnic Stereotype as the Case of Hatred: The Study of Thais' Biases Towards the Rohingya Refugees

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Abstract

In 2017, the United Nations addressed the situation of the Rohingya refugee crisis as "the world's fastest growing refugee crisis and a major humanitarian emergency". Up to March 2018, the report by the United Nations Children's Funds showed that there were approximately 1.3 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, alone. Thailand is not directly affected from the Rohingya refugee crisis; however, the prejudices of Thais towards Rohingyas are negatively strong. This paper aimed to study the schema of ethnic stereotype among Thais towards Rohingyas by adopting the framework of Tajfel and Turner's Social identity theory. The author stated two research questions: one was ignorance to historical background (IH) was a foundation for an act of ethnic stereotype, and another was that prejudice related to religious difference (R) was a fundamental cause for ethnic stereotype. Data were gathered from Facebook comments of all Rohingya news in Thailand, those were posted on BBC Thai Facebook Page, during 2014 – 2015, which was the first time that the Page reported this type of news in Thailand. Using content analysis, the results suggested that IH and R existed during this period, but not highly significant compared to other opinions, which were political viewpoint, humanitarian purpose, and a will to pass responsibility. In addition, it was found that opinions were various depending on types of news. Opinions reflected political viewpoint were prevalent among Rohingya human trafficking news, and that opinions regarding ignorance to the current situation were frequently found in humanitarian aid news for the Rohingya people.

Keywords: Thai, Rohingya, Ethnic Stereotype, Social Identity Theory

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Introduction

The 21st century is marked as the era of globalization. With the arrival of advanced technology, people who live in different parts of the world can easily connect within seconds. Watching what happens on the other side of the world in real time does not no longer stay merely in fictions. Television is not the only resource for receiving news, but today, human derive them from several other options that come in a form of social media, such as, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. All these channels allow audiences to express their opinions on their platforms, which are often made public. Hence, we do not only view the news, but we are able to learn about what others think about the topics in the same time. Public opinions those reflected on the news can come in all forms ranking from positive and cheerful comments to hurtful or abhorrent ones. One of the great resources to learn about hated comments is the news about refugees, which unfortunately happens to be the crisis of this modern era.

People had witnessed the massive movement of human since the World War II, when the Jewish people migrated out of Europe due the holocaust. More than seven decades after the end of World War II, it seems like human have not gone that far. Today, we still witness the movement of Syrian refugees that migrate to Western Europe due to the war in their country, and then it comes to the situation of the Rohingya refugees that fled genocide in Myanmar to Bangladesh and other countries in Southeast Asia. Although the migration of Syrian and Rohingya refugees may seem similar in some extent at a first glance, the circumstances are different in many aspects. Unlike the situation of Syrian refugees in Europe, the Rohingya refugees are not warmly welcomed and have been facing with harsh treatments in Southeast Asia countries, especially Thailand, because of its being a non-signatory member state to the UN Refugee Convention (European Commission, 2017). As a result, the Rohingya refugees are viewed as illegal migrants once set foot in Thai territory, which even fueled Thais' negative public opinions towards the Rohingyas. Additionally, an ambiguous identity of the Rohingya people create dubious and distrust among Thais towards them. Many Thais decide to shut their doors, physically and mentally; and many have taken benefit from their vague identity.

Rohingya is a name refers to a Muslim ethnic minority living in Arakan State, the Northwestern part of Myanmar (Nemoto, 1991). Nonetheless, the term, "Rohingya," has created lots of debate and tension in Myanmar. Many people around the globe perceive the name as a representative of one among many ethnic minorities living in Myanmar, however; the Myanmese government argues otherwise. Leider (2014) pointed out that there is difficulty tracing any historical written context that prove the history of the Rohingya, and this becomes the reason why the Myanmese government has long denied the existence of this ethnicity. Instead of calling them the Rohingya, like they wish to be mentioned to; the Myanmese government often refers to them as the Bangali due to their historical migration from Bangladesh (Nemoto, 1991; Leider, 2014). Following the rising power of General Ne Win in 1962, which brought the Burmese[1] Way to Socialism to the country (Green, MacManus & Cour Venning, 2015), several ethnic minorities, including Rohingya, faced with many threats (Chan, 2005). The enactment of the 1982 Citizenship Law, as part of the Burmese Way to Socialism, which had tried to deny the rights of citizenship for Rohingya people in

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[1] The former name of Myanmar

Myanmar became effective (Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, 2014). Since then, the conflicts between the Rohingyas and Myanmese governments have been continuously occurred. Many of them decided to flee Myanmar, and by 2012, the eruption of conflicts between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims have sparked a massive exodus of Rohingyas out of Myanmar (International Crisis Group, 2012; Kipgen, 2013). By 2017, The United Nations Refugee Agency declared that the Rohingya refugees' situation is "the world's fastest growing refugee crisis and a major humanitarian emergency".

There is not a clear evidence when the Rohingyas first migrate to Thailand. However, the report by the United Nations Refugee Agency, in 2014, suggested that there were approximately 62,000 Rohingya people travelling to Thailand and Malaysia in 2014. According to the fact that many of the Rohingya people are stateless people, most of them travelled without documents to declare themselves, which made them being vulnerable subjects for human trafficking (Amnesty International, 2014). In 2015, many Thai authorities were charged with human trafficking allegation, and this has turned public interest among Thais towards the Rohingya situation in Thailand. Today, the official number of the Rohingya people reside in Thailand is still unknown. However, the Center for Migration Studies (n.d.) pointed out that there is a small Rohingya population living in Thailand in which many of them have been long living here since before the exodus in 2012. Most of Thais do not have direct experiences with the Rohingyas, but the prejudices and biases among Thais towards the Rohingya people are prevalent. Therefore, the author planned to study about this phenomenon by using the framework of Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory.

Social identity theory is a psychological theory in a branch of social psychology. It is the theory that is mostly applied to the study area of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination. In 1972, Tajfel (as cited in Hogg, Abrams, Otten & Hinkle, 2004) proposed that not only self-identity that is important to human, but we all desire the need to belong to certain groups because group identity or as it is called, "social identity," fulfill our collective emotion and value, which make us feel being part of group membership. Social identity drives human to automatically compete their groups to others, because the more we realize that our groups are better than others, the higher self-esteem, which is a result of strong social identity, we could process (Tejfel & Turner, 1985).

By applying Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory, the author aimed to study the possible causes of hatred between Thais towards Rohingya refugees, which the concept of ethnic stereotype was the key term of this study because stereotype is the first process that would eventually leads to prejudices and discriminate behaviors, respectively (Guimond, 2018). The research questions were as follows:

1. Ignorance to the historical background of Rohingya is a foundation for stereotyping between the ingroup (Thais) and outgroup (Rohingya).
2. Prejudice related to religious difference is a fundamental cause for stereotyping between the ingroup (Thais) and outgroup (Rohingya).

Methodology

To prevent any news biases that may have been reported in Thai local news, the author decided to select the news from one international resource, the BBC Thai Facebook Page, which was the only international news resource in Thailand as the moment that had its own Facebook Page in Thai version. All the Rohingya news that either happened or related to Thailand during the year 2014 – 2015, which was the first time this type of news was reported in the Page, were gathered. The selected news were categorized into five groups: Humanitarian aid (H) referred to news that mentioned about providing humanitarian aid to the Rohingya refugees in Thailand, Human trafficking (Hf) was a group of news involving Rohingya trafficking in Thailand, Death and human trafficking (DHf) was a type of news that addressed the death of Rohingya people in Thailand as a result of human trafficking, Deportation (D) referred to news about Rohingya deportation by Thai authorities, and lastly, Boat crisis (B), which was a group of news mentioning the finding of Rohingya boats travelling into Thai territory.
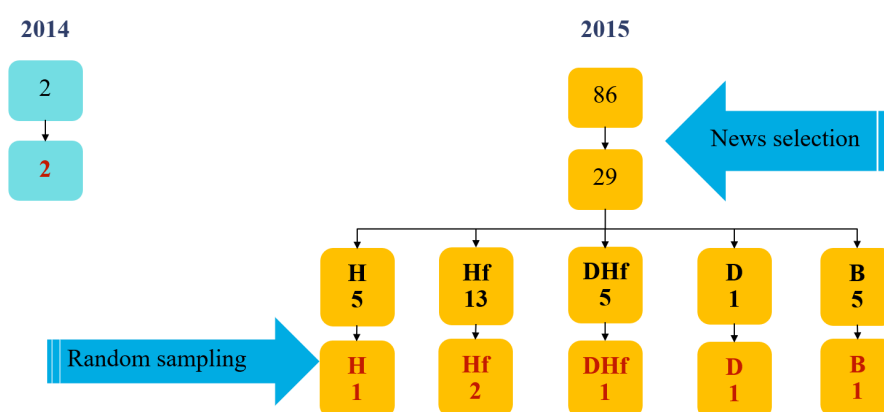
Figure 1: This image depicts numbers of selected news and its categorization.

From all the Rohingya news in Thailand during 2014 - 2015 gathered from the BBC Thai Facebook Page, it was found that there were 2 news in 2014, and 86 news in 2015. Due to the small number of news in 2014, both were selected. For the 86 news in 2015, merely 29 news were selected due to its contents that related to Thailand. Among the 29 news, there were 5, 13, 5, 1 and 5 news were categorized into the sections of H, Hf, DHf, D, and B, respectively. Then, the author randomly selected the sample news in each category by calculating the proportion, which resulted to one news as a representative in each group, except Hf that had been selected 2 news due to its outnumber. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the news' comments were those comments that opened as public comments and written in Thai. Only the main comments, not the replied comments, were selected; and that the comments needed to be relevant to the news. Comments such as advertisements or images were entirely excluded from this study. Then, the author gathered comments of all news in each group and analyze the contents of all comments using three-expert raters content analysis.
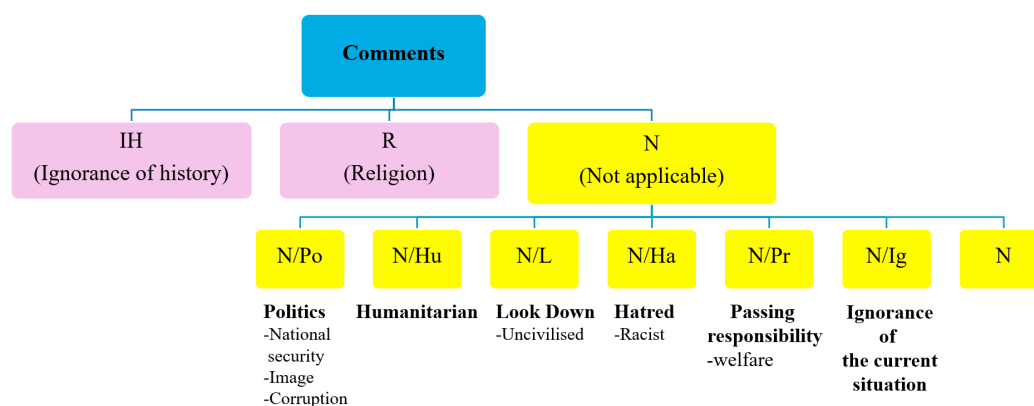
Figure 2: This image demonstrates data coding for all selected news.

All comments from randomly selected news were coded as illustrated in figure2. The three main codes were Ignorance of historical background to the Rohingyas (IH), Prejudice related to religious difference (R), and Not applicable (N). However, it was later found that many comments fell into N coding. Therefore, besides the main coding of N, the author separated sub-coding under the N coding group into Political viewpoint (N/Po) referred to comments that related to national security, country's image and corruption, Humanitarian aid (N/Hu) referred to comments that talked about a need to provide aid to the Rohingya refugees, Look down (N/L) for comments that disdain the Rohingyas and perceived them as uncivilized people, Hatred (N/Ha) referred to racist comments, Passing responsibility (N/Pr) for comments that concerned about Thais' welfare if the country needed to provide supports to the Rohingyas, and lastly, Ignorance of the current situation (N/Ig) referred to comments that were apathetic to the situation.

Conclusion

The results from content analysis suggested that there were IH and R among the comments of Rohingya news in the year 2014 and 2015, however; there were not significantly high compared to other opinions. The study of the news' comments in both year, 2014 – 2015, suggested that public opinions of N/Po, N, N/hu, and N/Pr were the four highest opinions that had been mentioned in the comment sections. Interestingly, the analysis of each year suggested slightly different results. In 2014 alone, N/Hu, N, IH, and N/Po and N/Ig were the highest reported comments, consecutively. However, in 2015, N/Po, N, N/Hu, and N/Pr were found to be the highest opinions, respectively. Although the number of IH and R comments were not high, they were found to be increasing from 2014 to 2015. In addition, there was one comment in 2015 that contained both IH and R, which was not the case for comments in 2014. Moreover, another point needed to be noted was that the number of N/Hu and N/Pr comments in 2015 were almost equal (24 and 23, respectively).

Therefore, it can be concluded that Ethnic stereotype among Thais towards the Rohingya refugees existed during the year 2014 – 2015, which was the first period that the news about the Rohingya refugees in Thailand had been reported on the BBC Thai Facebook Page. Although the negative comments that resulted from the ignorance to the historical background of the Rohingyas and prejudice related to religious difference were not highly reported, Thais perceived that helps and supports

needed to be provided to the Rohingya refugees only if they were not the one to provide them. Moreover, it was found that comments related to political viewpoints were highly reported, which could result from a high number of Rohingya human trafficking news in Thailand during this period.

The limitation of this study was that it used only one news source, which might not be a good representative of Thai population's opinions towards this topic. In addition, a small number of comments in 2014 may not be a good representative of Thai's public viewpoint in 2014. Lastly, even though the author had divided sub-coding under the category N, the results fell into this category, N alone, were still found to be quite high. Therefore, the study would need further analysis. Future study on this issue should address this limitation.

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Cultural Identities of International Students in the Twentieth First Century

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Abstract

In the twentieth first century, the world has shrunk into a small village where all cultures have come together and national boundaries are gradually blurred. Study abroad has become popular. The number of international students has increased exponentially. However, as individuals can easily experience different cultural products and values and even immerse in different cultural environments, the question of cultural identities seems to be more puzzling. This research, therefore, aims to explore perceptions of individuals, specifically international students, of cultural identities. Twenty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted at Newcastle University, a higher education institution in North East of England. The findings show that international students usually struggle to find their cultural identities. National identities are rigid and explicit whereas cultural identities usually are fluid, implicit and subject to change. Thus, a new approach, in which cultural identities are studied as a process of identification, should be applied. It is suggested that longitudinal design should be employed to better study cultural identities.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, National Identity, Intercultural Communication, Cross-cultural Transition, International Students, Internationalisation in Higher Education

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I. Introduction

Globalisation has led to many significant changes, such as the significant decrease in transportation costs and the exponential increase in global mobility. The world has been internationalised in every aspect and education has gone far beyond the boundary of one nation. Study abroad has increasingly become popular. According to Forest and Altbach (2006), from 1997-2002, there was a significant rise in the number of international students around the world, from under 750,000 to nearly 1,000,000. The figure was doubled the following year and has continued to grow rapidly, which is predicted to reach almost 8 million by the beginning of 2020 (Forest and Altbach, 2006).

In 2011, the United Kingdom (UK) is the second largest market for international students, after the USA (Gil, 2014). In fact, the total number of international students in the UK in 2016-17 is 442,375 which accounts for 19% of the students pursuing higher education (HE) (UKCISA, 2018). 13% of them come from non-EU countries (HESA, 2018). It is estimated that nearly 90,600 students enrolling for full-time postgraduate programmes in 2016-17, which is 22% increase from last year (HEFCE, 2017). Among these, 42% of the students undertaking postgraduate degrees in the UK are from outside EU (HESA, 2018).

International students have contributed significantly to the British economy. In particular, in 2015-16, a non-EU and EU international student was estimated to contribute around £102,000 and £87,000 respectively to the UK economy (Economics, 2018). The large difference is mainly driven by the higher tuition fee of non-EU students. In terms of benefits-to-costs ratio, it is reported that hosting non-EU and EU international students bring 14.8 and 4.6 times greater to the UK economy than the total cost (Economics, 2018). International students have supported financially to the research base of HE institutions in the UK and created thousands of academic-related jobs as well as non-academic ones. They has also brought large amount of income to the city and the nearby area where they live (UKCISA, 2016).

However, after the results of BREXIT[1] votes in 2016, the situation has been exacerbated. 2016 marked a turning point in the development of the British HE industry. It is the first year since 2012 which experienced the decline of 4% in the number of non-EU applicants, while the slump of the EU student applicants was around 5% (Passport, 2018). A recent research shows that 30% of the surveyed international students feel unwelcomed to stay and study in the UK after the event of BREXIT, thus, refuse to choose the UK as their ideal destination for overseas study (Aftab, 2016).

This is, in fact, not the first time that the UK has been listed as one of the "unwelcoming destinations" for international students. A previous survey of National Union of Students (NUS) in 2014 also reveals that more than 50% of non-EU students rank the UK from moderate to low on being welcoming and friendly to international students and 19% of them would not recommend the UK to their friends and relatives

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[1] BREXIT is a referendum held on 23 June 2016. The result of the referendum shows that 51.9% of the electorates voted for the UK to leave the European Union (EU).

(NUS, 2014). The hostile visa and immigration policies of the British government, together with the gradually increasingly expensive tuition fee, are one of the main reasons for these worrying figures (NUS, 2014).

Moreover, during the overseas stay, international students are confronted with many challenges in the adjustment process to the host cultures. This process is often associated with the stress and pressure driven by the "*triple transition*", a theoretical term coined by Jindal-Snape and Ingram (2013), which refers to the cultural transition, the educational environment transition and the transition to the new education level. This "*acculturative stress*" (Berry, 2005) has been the focal point of research in cross-cultural transitions for decades, but recently, it is suggested that international students also experience re-entry stress when returning to their home countries.

Re-entry stress is usually caused by the dissonance of cultural identity. In particular, after the sojourn, individuals may experience some changes in cultural identity, which are sometimes so profound that these sojourners can be regarded as "*cultural strangers*" to people from their home cultures (Gudykunst and Kim, 1984). A recent research among American students after their study in France shows that most of the students encounter re-entry stress when returning home (Pitts, 2016). They often express it as a feeling of "inbetweeners" of "the two worlds": outsiders of their home cultures and insiders of their host cultures (Pitts, 2016). This stress is sometimes perceived as more stressful and arduous than the acculturative stress, especially when most of the students do not anticipate this, thus, are unprepared for it (Walling *et al.*, 2006). However, some studies have reported insignificant changes in cultural identity (Brabant *et al.*, 1990). It is, therefore, recommended that further research should be conducted to study the change and dissonance in cultural identity.

However, before researching about the change in cultural identity, it is sensible to take a step back to look at "the root" of all of this stress and dissonance, which is "cultural identity". What is it? How do individuals perceive of it? These questions have become even more relevant in the twentieth first century when all cultures are coming closer, national boundaries are being obsolete and the individual's identity is being constantly questioned.

Therefore, this research aims to answer the question of cultural identity of individuals, specifically international students, in the twentieth first century. The findings of this research can be applied as the foundation for further research of cultural identity changes and cross-cultural transition. They can also be used as resources for understanding of the thoughts and feelings of international students in the UK, which can facilitate the process of creating a welcoming, friendly and safe cultural environment for the students in British HE institutions.

II. Methodology

From late September to early November 2017, 23 interviews were conducted (N=23) at Newcastle University, a HE institution in the North East of England, which is famous for its agenda to develop and maintain the internationalised academic environment for students. Research participants were students undertaking one-year taught master's programmes in Business School and School of Education,

Communication and Language Sciences (ECLS). These two schools have the largest number of international students in the university.

Nevertheless, some limitations of the research are that most of the participants aged around 20-30 and that female participants (N=20) dominated males (N=3). This, however, reflects the characteristics of the cohourt of full-time postgraduate international students in Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in the UK. In general, there are more females than males and the age group of full-time students in HE falls around early 20 to early 30 (HESA, 2018).

Interviews were conducted on campus and lasted around 30-45 minutes on average. Most of the interviews were conducted in English. There was one interview which was conducted in Vietnamese, as requested by the participant. Pseudonyms were applied so as to protect the confidentiality of the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Thematic analysis was applied. Nvivo, a software for qualitative coding, was used as the tool to analyse the transcripts and record the key themes.

During the process of transcribing and analysing, cultural backgrounds of the students were hidden (for instance, "I'm from X. I love X country.") because:

- When discussing about cultures, it is inevitable to not discuss about stereotypes and generalisations. Although these were done unintentionally, some stereotypes may be offensive, therefore, it is better to hide cultural backgrounds of the participants.
- When analysing the data, hiding the cultural background is useful so as to avoid the researcher's bias. Students could then be regarded as individuals with different thoughts and feelings, rather than representatives from their cultures.

III. Findings and Discussion

1. Cultural Identity – Is it an easy question?

Since culture and identity are two of the most contested concepts in social sciences, the concept of cultural identity is also very "slippery" and covers many different ideas (Dervin, 2012). However, instead of delving too deep into these ongoing disputes and arguments about the concept of cultural identity, which is not the main purpose of this paper, the main mission will be to explore the perception of the individual in the twentieth first century of his or her cultural identity.

Although there are many definitions of cultural identity, in general, it is often defined under two aspects: affection and awareness. In particular, many scholars such as Lustig and Koester (2003) and Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) define cultural identity as *individual's sense of belonging or emotional attachment and affiliation to a cultural group*; therefore, paying more attention to the affectionate aspect of the concept. Some scholars, meanwhile, concentrate more on the awareness of identity and often regard cultural identity as *the identity obtained from the membership of a cultural group* (Sussman, 2000).

Since this research focuses on exploring the individual's perception of cultural identity, both of the aspects of cultural identity were mentioned to the students[2] and they were the ones deciding to discuss which aspect they found most relevant to their cases.

When their cultural identity was questioned, 9 out of 23 students replied with absolute certainty.

> *"Yeah, actually, I love being X... I like to represent our country… to other people. I love my country,"* said Tristin.
> *"I fit into my country more than, of course, here…"*, shared Fiona.

One noticeable similarity between these students is that they often regarded *cultures* as *nations or countries*. Whenever being confronted with the answer of their cultural identity, they instantly thought of nationality. For them, the answer to this question could never be more obvious. It's what is written on the passport that matters. For them, if an individual was born and raised in a country and is a citizen of that country, he or she certainly belongs to that country or that "national culture", and therefore should love that country. There is no doubt about it.

Is it really the case for everyone?
Is *culture* the same as *nation*?
Is the answer to this question of cultural identity that simple?
If yes, why were there still 14 students who were utterly confused?
> *"It's a tough question. Well uhm I don't know... I think some points yes and some points no ... it really depends"*, responded Tina, with a big laugh.

Similarly, when her cultural identity was in question, Taylor, a student from ECLS, contemplated for a while and then she turned back and asked, with a hesitant smile on her face,

> *"Uhm what's the question again?"*

If there is anything that can be sure of, it is certainly that these students did struggle to solve this puzzle of cultural identity.

In fact, this struggle or confusion is very common and has been mentioned in many theories in the study of culture, identity and cross-cultural transition. Sussman (2000), in her paper on cross-cultural communication and identity, explains that cultural identity is usually latent, lying hidden to the conscious mind of the individual. The individual can only be certain about his or her cultural identity when he or she is exposed to different cultures. In contrast, national identity is more prominent and explicit and is, for most of the time, what is written on the passport. Thus, national identity is sometimes coined as "passport identity". In general, cultural identity is

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[2] In most interviews, the students were approached with two main questions "What is your cultural identity?" and "Do you feel belonging to your cultures?" Sometimes when the students were confused, the questions were paraphrased into different questions such as "Do you love your cultures?", "Do you feel proud to be a person of your culture?", "Do you see yourself as a typical person from your culture?" etc.

flexible and subject to change depending on the environment while national identity is more rigid and "solid".

2. Can culture say anything about one's identity?

Interestingly, 8 out of 23 students felt that they did not belong to their home cultures.

> *"No I'm not always a typical X person…like uhm if there's a picture in a dictionary of how a X person is like, it would not be me. Like there's just… like I don't fit the mould,"* Tracy, from ECLS, shared.

She went on to illustrate her points by sharing an incident when she met other local people from Newcastle. This incident unexpectedly made her wonder about her cultural identity.

> *"…It was so strange coz they [local people] started to ask me like "why don't you have a X accent?" and then I was like "should I have a X accent?" … I don't know. I don't meet their expectations about what it's like being a X. That's kinda weird. I thought it's strange, I don't know. What should I be now...?"*

Although culture is collective, there is no guarantee that all individuals in a cultural group behave the same way. Many scholars of cultural studies emphasize the importance of culture and explain that culture bonds people within a cultural group, by providing them with collective symbols, rules and behavioural norms based on which people can "read into" behaviours of other people in the group (Kidd, 2012). Therefore, it is believed that culture influences the behaviour of an individual. However, culture should not be used to limit how people in a group should behave. The term "culture" that essentialist scholars often use can only indicate the "common pattern" of the dominant group of people in a cultural group but should neither be used to represent all the individuals in that group nor to categorise one cultural group from another (Samovar, 2007).

This is especially true in this era of globalisation when the world has shrunk into a small village where all cultural products and values are being exchanged and individuals can easily encounter different cultures. When being exposed to a new way of living or a new belief and value, individuals can be aware of stereotypes and generalisations that they are making, at the same time, are confronted with those which are being imposed on them.

In the case of Tracy, a student from ECLS, only when studying in Newcastle and being in contact with local people, was she aware of how the local people expect her to behave. With this knowledge and experience, she then reflected on herself to see whether she fit "this cultural mould" or not. If not, she was then faced with a new question, which was whether she should go with the flow or swim against the tide! This process of self-reflection may result in the process of re-defining her identity, but that is an entirely different story.

3. The need for a new approach to the study of cultural identity

Although it is not very common, but it is worth mentioning that one student participating in the research shared that it was impossible for him to identify his cultural identity. It was not because he did not feel belonging to his cultural group but because he felt attached to more than one group. It was so difficult for him to tell which one he felt more attached to.

> *"Nope… My parents are originally from Y country… but I was born and raised in the island so my home life wouldn't be the same with the one who has lived for generations there,"* said Tyler.

In cultural studies, this is theoretically coined as "*hybrid identity*" (Bhabha, 2012), which refers to "the mixture" of cultural characteristics, languages and identities and is also a critique of the concept of culture, nation and identity of essentialist scholars (Camilla Erichsen, 2017). In particular, globalisation leads to the increase in the number of refugees and immigrants settling in different countries. Their second generations, Tyler for instance, were born, raised and have grown up in more than one culture. Therefore, it is even more difficult for them to identify their cultural identity. Now it is neither this cultural group nor that group but a combination of both.

In general, individuals in the twentieth first century seem to have no permanent, consistent and one singular cultural identity. It is even possible for them to have many different cultural identities responding to different social contexts and cultural environments that they are living in. The singular form of cultural identity may no longer fully indicate the fluidity and flexibility of identity; thus, it is highly recommended that the plural form of cultural identities is employed.

Since cultural identities are multiplex and always changing rather than static and rigid, another question appears. How can we study something that is always changing? How can we "capture" them? The answer is simple. We may never be able to do so. There comes the need for a new approach to the studies of cultural identities. The old research question should be replaced by the new ones. Instead of asking the question "What are cultural identities?", the more appropriate questions could be "How are cultural identities constructed?" and "What factors evoke changes in cultural identities?"

IV. Conclusion

The findings from this research suggest that individuals in the twentieth first century are often struggling to find their cultural identities. Although some participants are certain of their identities, this is only the case where they confuse cultural identities with national identities. For the majority of the participants, cultural identities are often implicit and latent. Only when being confronted or challenged by alterity such as people from different cultures with different behaviours and opinions, can individuals become conscious of their cultural identities. Interestingly, it is also possible for individuals, who are the second generation of immigrants, to nurture a sense of hybrid identity, which regards to the mixing of cultural characteristics and identities.

However, since the setting of the research is in a HE institution in North East of England and the participants are mainly master's students; this may limit the generalisability of the research findings. It is suggested that further research should be done with participants from various backgrounds and in various settings. Research in gender differences or gender comparisons could also be conducted as genders may influence the way individuals perceive, reflect or even (re)define their cultural identities.

Theoretically, it can be concluded that in the twentieth first century, scholars of cultural studies are challenged with a very daunting task which is to study cultural identities when all of the rules of culture, nation and identity start to crumble. Distinctions between cultural groups are gradually blurred under the influence of globalisation and internationalisation. It is getting more difficult to distinguish one culture from another (although in the beginning, this task has not always been feasible and optimistic). Similarly, it is even more challenging to "capture" and study cultural identities, which are constantly changing and evolving.

Thus, a new approach to cultural studies is recommended. The old ontological question of cultural identities should be replaced with a new set of epistemological questions. Cultural identities should be studied as a process of identification rather than a static object. As a consequent, it is suggested that scholars in cross-cultural studies should diversify their research designs to not only apply cross-sectional research design, but also to use longitudinal design. By doing this, hopefully we can shed light on this puzzling yet intriguing question of cultural identities.

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