

Societies in Implosion and Emergence of Alternate Social Models: A Psychological Overview of Select Works of Anna Burns, Ayi Kwei Armah and Burhan Sonmez.

S. Ambadi Narayanan^{1*}, Dr. Beena S Nair²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India.

², Assistant Professor (Sr. Grade), Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India.

*sambadinarayanan@am.amrita.edu

ABSTRACT

The world capitalist economy is in midst of its most serious crisis in its five-hundred-year history. Over the last five decades, world capitalist societies have witnessed remarkable restructuring as a result of globalisation. We must consider both the dynamics of the current global capitalism and the nature of its crisis if we are to analyse its effect on societies. The proposed research intends to explore conventional societies in implosion through a literary study. Putting focus on conventional societies, the study intends to explore those societies which had organically attained an order through the course of history. These societies adhere to its own social, ethical, political and moral values, which restrict them from expanding itself alongside with capitalist and modern developments. This conformity further leads social structures to remain within the historic framework but also to step into an immature developmental process leading to an instability. Study would focus on societies that are crumbling from within due to its own contradictions, interstitial gaps, and incongruencies.

Keywords: capitalist economy; conformity; societies; conformity; contradictions; interstitial gaps; incongruencies.

Introduction

In 21st century. capitalist globalisation analysis can be used to investigate numerous socio-economic, political, cultural and ideological structures in a social context. Dumenil and Levy recollect the history of this economic and political transition from the era of Keynesian Compromise (refers to study of John Maynard Keynes: the marginalization between traditional business elites and workers due to the intervention of financial intermediaries) , World War II to the late 1970s: massive employment, complete protection of social welfare and access to health care and education were considered as the characteristic features of a developed society. There was a great assault on conditions of work, social organisation and working class pay.

can be summed up in the three words, poverty, efficiency and opulence: perpetual or aggravated poverty, reaching into the capitalist centres; the efficiency of the big groups led by capital. In accordance with an unambiguous criterion, that of maximising the profit rate and payments to owners; and the opulence of the superior fractions of the dominating classes.” (Dumenil,10).

The postcolonial world witnessed the crisis in the form of debts. A world elite grabbed this opportunity to increase the profit resulting in structural adjustment programmes (policies promoted by World Bank and International Monetary Fund [IMF] from 1980s for developing countries) and further leading to a social disintegration. There was a massive movement into the urban spaces with limited public services and reduced government subsidies.

Representations of societies depicting its own inequalities and antagonisms can be traced back to Friedrich Engel’s *The Condition of Working Class in England* (1845), Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* and depiction of a globalised south, Meja Mwangi’s *Going Down River Road* (1976), Chris Abani’s *Graceland* (2004). All these social justice writings depict societies trembling into “unprecedented levels of poverty, inequality and atomisation” (Manneh 5) from within. This new genre of social novels is distinctive in its own narrative techniques.

Objective

The principal aim of this proposed research is to understand the forces behind the imbalance within the conventional social organisations which lead to an implosion and to conduct a literary study to comprehend the emergence of multiplicity of new orders. The study is also an attempt to analyse how realism plays an important role in deploying a social imaginary to portray global inequality and urban deprivation in the wake of global capitalist policies. Societies tend to lose the ability to hold its own incongruencies and suffer an implosion. Individuals are studied as social symbols as part of symbolic interactionism. Key contours of global capitalism and its devastating effects on global societies are studied historically, and the choice of sources are from three different key time spans of global capitalistic economy, so as to conduct a comprehensive study and its effects.

Methodology

The proposed research methodology is based on various post-modern and social theories focusing on concepts such as, 'Cultural Modernity and Social Modernisation', 'Revival of Public Sphere', 'Rationalisation of System and Life Worlds' by Jurgen Habermas. A rational society would be one in which both system and life world are permitted to rationalise rather than being subordinated or colonized, in their own ways following their own logics. Various social logical theories including 'Symbolic Interactionism' by George Herbart Mead are employed to study people as social symbols and symbol makers. A close reading of the selected knowledge and excerpts of the text that will help in analysing the text will be carried out.

A general exploration of social justice fiction will be undertaken in this research and this proposed research is an attempt to discover patterns of a capitalist economic system "supplanting the primacy of the nation-state by transnational corporations and organisations, and eroding local cultures and traditions through a global culture" (Kellner 1).

Burns, Anna. *No Bones*. 4th Estate, 2018. -. *Milkman*. Faber & Faber, 2019.

No Bones (2001), *Milkman* (2018) and Anna Burns has gained a sudden critical attention in the literary spheres.

Ireland in the 1990s experienced an economic boom popularly known as the "Celtic Tiger" (Irish: *An Tíogar Ceilteach*, a period from mid 1990s-late 2000s during which the Republic of Ireland saw an economic boom; first used by Kevin Gardiner in a report by Morgan Stanley in 1994) and came to an end by 2008. Through these years Ireland witnessed recession, destabilisation of banking and financial sectors and this economic shift had a discursive shift in the political landscape. "the predicament of humanity undergoing intense ordeals with reference to perceptible events like war, rebellion and building alternate neo-world models...how people try to manipulate memories and justify their past actions as they repress information in order to create multiple identities with technical nuances." (Ambadi Narayanan, S., Nair, B.S. 1)

The extensive economic fluctuations among the individuals cultivated gendered constructions of heteronormativity. The term "heteronormative" was coined by the social theorist Michael Warner in 1991, giving expression to beliefs based on birth-based gender expression. Warner further criticizes the non-confirmative ideology this concept in his book *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993). Women started to get disempowered due to the ethos of materialistic

consumerism and social conformity on conventional social conformity based on gender. Claire Bracken and Tara Harney-Mahajan finds out that “The subsequent economic crash of the Tiger ushered in an altered, yet still heteronormative, gendered economy of representation, enfolding a masculinity in crisis with more traditional and domestic representation of the feminine (Negra)” (Bracken 1)

Burns emphasises gendered violence as a common place in the society in the north of Ireland and openly criticises some of the dominant ideologies. Her women return to disintegrated societies burnt down by war and neoliberal institutions, these women try to rearrange the bits and pieces shattered by war in order to start a new life. Both the narratives try to rekindle the reconfiguring self through war experience. In Northern Ireland, among the conflict and post-conflict zones women suffer all the more due to disruption of traditional gender roles which results in the breakdown of cultures, traditions of security, protection and destabilises communities in terrifying ways. Burns through her works suggest that communicating a collective shared experience can help in bringing people together and rebuilding the broken nation at large. Women emerge as leaders, retaining their new identities while men preserve their pre-war, pre-conflict masculine prerogative of dominance. The writers stand implies that the war cannot be won through violence or military campaigns but through termination of hostilities and preservation of life. Women seem to be in the best position to bring about the realisation of these ideas. Theorists Avar Brah, Iona Szeman and Ireme Gedalof had noted: “in recovery or crisis, neoliberal economics and politics have proved deeply destructive to most women, and have exacerbated the intersecting divides of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class” (Brah 7) in Northern Ireland.

Women’s literary voices question the late capitalist and neoliberal ideology in the language of Faux feminism (Faux Feminism literally means fake feminism. It is a movement led by people claiming to be feminist to bash non-feminist (usually men)). Anna Burns strongly reinstates about gendered nature of institutional politics.

The usual ones said things like ‘KEEP OUT OF THIS PROPERTY ON PAIN OF DEATH-THIS ,THE ONLY INTIMATION ‘then signed ‘DISTRICT RENOUNCERS’ as a warning to any of us wayward inhabitants, including children, who might have a notion to break into some vulnerable person’s residence-to have a play there, to have a teenage person’s dossing-down drinking session there, to explore and poke about there, even the squat there – without giving any thought of the usually

far-gone and wretched alcoholic who already lived there and whose house is was. They were making it clear, our renouncers that if we persisted into our unjust, inconsiderate and merciless behaviour towards the more fragile of our district, then ramifications would follow that certainly we would all regret. In contrast, this housewife's notice said 'ATTENTION ALL WOMEN OF THE DISTRICT: GREAT GOOD NEWS!!!' (Burns 151)

Here institutions include Parliament, executive, judiciary and other economic institutions of a society. Burns brings about experiences of female adolescence through rapid juxtapositions in her narrative as she comments:

The criticism was bad, very bad, much along the lines of 'depravity, decadence, demoralisation, dissemination of pessimism, outrages of propriety 'as had been levelled at that red-light street when first it became inaugurated.'" (Burns 152-53)

The collective feeling of nationhood dissipates through an imposition of masculinity which even went to phallic pretensions like "we have balls and we deserve this" (Kilroy 23). These gendered constructions were not only in the economic spheres but also in the social and political spheres. For example, "Milkman" (Burns 2) is a gender identity that Burns provide to a paramilitary figure in the novel who follows the narrator as part of physical surveillance rather than a professional one. The instances of 60s and 70s Belfast Troubles made Anna Burns a part of a rejuvenated literary continuum. Her hectic and stream of consciousness writing takes place in a hair trigger society of bomb scares, hijacking and sees a birth of dynamic women activism. Irish Literary History saw a formation of a collective women identity in all spheres of literary expression. Fiction laureate (currently Anne Enright), feminist movements in theatres, women as independent publishers and journals (Liberties Press; performance poetry by Sarah Clancy and Elaine Feeney.

Armah, Ayi K. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Heinemann, 1964. presents an anonymous rail road clerk from Independent Ghana and he is torn between his family and community "The Man" (Armah 3) is a witness of deterioration of his society throughout the book exemplified by a corrupted economy.

There is an impending socio-economic, moral and political decay in the expressions of Armah and it highlights the developmental crises emerging in nations like Kenya and Ghana.

According to Virginia Ola, this kind of depictions of Ghanaian illness is “A step toward the awakening of this readers to the reality of depth of self-abuse and self-betrayal... through greed and apathy” (Ola 129-136)

The inability of this new nations to meet the congruencies within the society is portrayed through images of filth and putrescence by Armah. For Joshua Desty, “Shit emerges as an index of moral and political outrage in new Ghana bedevilled by greed and bureaucratic corruption” (Desty 22). Moreover, these images “draws attention to the failures of development to the unkept promises not only of colonial modernising regimes of post-independence economic policy” (Desty 32).

Jürgen Habermas proposes an idea of ‘public sphere’ in his essay “Modernity -An Incomplete Project.” According to him public sphere is the framework of democracy and further he considers democracy is the rationalisation of system and life world. Life world according to Habermas includes various forms of human existence in everyday life. System world includes various social institutions for example State, Parliament, executive, judiciary and other institutions of public sphere. In this Ghanaian context the established social institutions constitute “system rationality” (Habermas 6) which colonises and subordinates the life world rationality and does nothing to improve the living condition of the downtrodden. The author’s aim is to arouse a disgust against this system rationality through his narrative technique of grotesque realism. Here the Ghanaian society fails to attain a rationality in the system to form a democracy.

In Armah’s Ghanaian society state is corrupted in the clutches of global capitalism and has gained hegemony over life world rationality. Habermas states

Under the pressures of the dynamics of economic growth and the organizational accomplishments of the state, this social modernization penetrates deeper and deeper into previous forms of human existence. I would describe this subordination of the life – worlds under the system’s imperatives as a matter of disturbing the communicative infrastructure of everyday life. (Habermas 8)

Further it had interfered in the life world and has made rail clerk a fractured entity. The recurring images of putrescence, filth, faeces and vomit envisage the themes of corruption and squalor and “show the author’s revulsion for the stifling and suffocating conditions in

post-independent Africa... they also indicate the author's readiness to protest and called for a remedy of a situation through the crucible of social criticism". (Agho 197)

The disintegration of society in Ghana and Kenya is the outcome of corruption and of an obsession with material comforts. In place of the 'beautiful ones' (Armah 1) the leaders appear to be the 'dark ghost' (Armah 95) of European Masters.

For Armah, fight for independence "was not that the whole thing might be overturned and ended, but that a few black men might be pushed closer to their masters, to eat some of the fat into their bellies too. That had been the entire end of it all" (Armah 126).

A great social change was the aspiration immediately after independence in Africa. But unfortunately, the new nation bourgeoisie didn't transform the existing colonial social structures. Frantz Fanon comments

the national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the former European settlement ... its mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism (Fanon 152).

The former colonial powers seem to be much closer to this new bourgeoisie regime rather than being closer to the people.

Sönmez Burhan, and Hussein Ümit. *Sins and Innocents*. Garnet Publishing, 2014.

Sönmez Burhan, and Hussein Ümit. *Istanbul Istanbul*. OR Books, 2016.

Since 1980s, Turkey had undergone a rational social transformation which has resulted in significant implications on prevailing notions of secularism, democracy and citizenship. Political, secular and religious characteristic of a social organisation has been redefined by the Kemalist encapsulation. Kemalism is a modern philosophy which lead to the transformation of a multi ethnic, multireligious Ottoman Empire to Republic of Turkey. Turkey went into a "statist" (Duzgun 120) modernity as Islamist business groups took the advantage of "opportunity spaces" (Duzgun 119) created by global economic process and broke supreme powers of military bureaucracy and hegemonically linked civil society with political society. In this conception, the "strong state" (Duzgun 120), a legacy of the "patrimonial imperial past" (Duzgun 120), centralised and monopolised the alternative interpretations of economy and civil society, leaving only little room for the development of

liberal conceptions of modernity” (Heper 1985, Mardin 2006 a; 2006 b; 2006 c). The characters of Sönmez carry their imperial past along with them as in *Sins and Innocents*, “My mother was my childhood; as I grew up, I became distanced from it; the more distant I became the bigger it grew inside me.” (Sönmez,1)

An interstitial gap has been developed between this imperial past and monopolised civil society in Turkish modernity. *Istanbul Istanbul* by Burhan Sönmez represents two different social conditions in the form of two cities with the same name one Istanbul above and one Istanbul underground. He recollects stories about Istanbul-fables, distant past, jokes, riddles and tales from their own lives which led to their incarceration and torture. The narrative techniques of Sönmez employs a kind of confusing social and individual memory. He further states that a mere physical recognition doesn’t provide a sense of identity and he recognises knowing the past is more liberating and is the first step into “dream of freedom or absence of pain”. To quote Sönmez, the present condition of Turkey is

nothing official works here. It is like a display window: you see very nice clothing in the window, but if you go into the black room, people are in rags. There is exploitation, violence, dark places but the lights are all on the display. (Reynolds)

The characters in the novel experience political imprisonment. Capitalism is merely constructing new building for the Turkish government. In a study on post-civil war Kurdish society, Michiel Leezenberg states

In the Kurdish north decades of totalitarian rule, corruption and violent repression may have durably undermined the very idea of state legitimacy as founded on a social contract of sorts. There seems to be a widespread perception that institutionalised clientelism, and having to bribe officials for various kinds of civil services, is, if not the norm for legitimate government, then at least the normal factual state of affairs. People may be dissatisfied with the authorities in power, but they often not only lack the means and the media for voicing their protests; they are also too financially dependent on the parties to engage in any genuine public oppositional activities.

In Chapter One of *Istanbul Istanbul*, first day told by the student Demirtay DAY THE IRON GATE, narrator compares himself with the characters of Dostoyevsky. The narrator suffers self-condemnation and miserable fate like Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. The timeline narration brings for the inconsistency in time and space. The first-person narrative

draws in the elements of the modern Turkish society but at the same time the whole plot encapsulates entire dark Turkish history as in

They were hopelessly in love with bygone eras, but they had scorned the city where they opened their eyes every morning. They heaped concrete upon concrete and built domes that mimicked one another. They demolished, they smashed, then, when they returned home exhausted, they went to sleep with a pretty painting of Istanbul above their heads.” (*Istanbul Istanbul*, 112)

Sönmez initiates the reader a broader picture of the city of Istanbul where the inmates of the city encounter contradictions, outrageous and frustrations with a melancholic smile of hope for peace and rehabilitation from violence. The images of ‘Raki and Balik’ is so evocative of peaceful times in history where the city is in its more organised structure before implosion. Sönmez can be considered as an ardent follower of Orhan Pamuk’s generation who had been the first-hand witness of the disintegration initiated by Turkish secularists in their “frenzy to turn Istanbul into a pale, poor second-class imitation of the western city”. It was a generation that had grown, oscillating between polarities of dignified pride and inferiority complex with the internationalised emptiness and post empire melancholy. Sönmez develops his contemporary novels as a response to massive societal degeneration by deploying a realist social imaginary.

For John Thomson, the social imaginary is “the creative and symbolic dimension of the social world, the dimension through which human beings create their ways of living together and their ways of representing their collective self.” (Thompson). The four political prisoners, the Doctor Demirtay The Student, Uncle Kuheyilan and Kamo The Barber in *Istanbul Istanbul* represent their collective self-amidst the daily torture in prison. One of the characters from the novel comments on their plight as:

Their wretchedness was their inescapable destiny, a constantly suppurating wound. They strove not to accept life, but to dispute it, and, when they suffered, to spill their blood and smear it over the face of life. That life has opened up a new page for me too now. Damn you! Take that look off your face, stop staring at me like those people burning in hell. (Sonmez 12).

The real beauty of the city is showcased in crumbling mansions, ruined walls, broken fountains, old mosque and semi dark lanes. Sönmez himself comments on the modern

mentality as “let’s destroy the past to build the future” (Reynolds). The memory of “patrimonial imperial past” (Duzgun 120) has not faded from citizens of Turkey but at the same time his past has been brought under extreme scrutiny by “wiping out ancient forests, polluting old rivers, covering the land with cement in the name of extreme industrialism.” (Reynolds).

Literature Review

Dasgupta, Samir, and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein. *Postmodernism in a Global Perspective*. SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2014. Wallerstein takes into consideration the contemporary condition and presents both post-modernism and globalisation in a theoretical framework. Reality has been criticised in various spatial definitions in the era of global capitalism. They have tried to comprehend post-modernism from a totally different perspective other than temporal that was from pre-modern to postmodernism.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2011. Huntington is one of the most eminent political scientists, throws light on how global capitalism has changed global politics. Furthermore, he states that clashes within civilisations is the greatest threat to world peace. He proposes an international world order to ensure peace against the crisis. He points out issues related to nuclear proliferation, immigration, human rights and democracy.

Roy, Arundhati. *Azadi*. Penguin Canada, 2020. This book is a collection of essays in which Arundhati Roy highlights her meditations on current politics and pandemic. She expresses her view on the pandemic situation and says that world is passing through a portal. The essays reflect hope in the post-truth world and opens up an opportunity to imagine another world from all illness and devastation.

Habermas, Jürgen. “*Modernity versus Postmodernity 1.*” *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, 2017, pp. 295–306., doi:10.4324/9781351226387-19. Jürgen Habermas criticises on restricting the concept of modernity to Renaissance and he proposes ways in which he could analyse modernity through post-Enlightenment, post modernity even post history. He portrays his wishes on the discipline of aesthetic modernity, cultural modernity, social modernisation, project of enlightenment and false programmes of the negation of culture.

“Abu-Manneh, Bashir. “Global Capitalism and the Novel.” *Modernism/Modernity Print Plus*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2018, doi:10.26597/mod.0034. Through his essay Bashir postulates that neo-liberalism has been a major part of destruction of a social order at both domestic and international levels. He draws in a comprehensive history of global capitalism through the years and attempts to trace the birth of social justice novels. He also adds to his conclusion that realism has been brought into critical attention and seems effective as a social narrative.

Colman, Warren. “Imagination and the Imaginary.” *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2006, pp. 21–41., doi:10.1111/j.0021-8774.2006.00570. x. Coleman brings about a sociological theory postulated by Jean Paul Sartre. Imaginary is a set of values, institutions, laws and symbols through which people imagine their social whole.

Diamond, Jared. Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive. Penguin, 2013. Jared Mason Diamond is an American geographer known for his popular science books and exceptional views on ecology, anthropology and evolutionary biology. In his book he brings about various examples of social collapse from history where ecological degradation has been the sole reason. He brings about examples from Australia, massive erosion in the Loess Plateau in China, densely populated, largely deforested Wahgi valley in new Guinea Highlands and many more to represent ecological disintegration within a society.

Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method by Herbert Blumer. Blumer was a student of George Herbert Mead, coined the term ‘symbolic interactionism’. It is a theory that focuses on the relationship among individuals within a society. People are considered as both symbol and symbol makers and Blumer states that humans interact with things based on meanings bestowed on those things. This work helped to analyse Anna Burns for the study of significance of the self, role taking and role making in a society and significance of social reality.

Conclusion

Most of the primary sources under reference employ a experimental narrative technique and beyond a literary focus the writer aims at speculation on himself as an individual, his moment and milieu. As Roland Barthes writes

“a historical study of narratology of various book or literary production of a particular historical era can open up various vision on different social logical themes

(transformation in gender identities, technological advancements... Individual and Society, socio-historic developments)". (Barthes)

This global world highlights the victory of capitalism and market economy for critics such as Fukuyama, Friedman while critics like Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith, 1996; Zillah Eisenstein, 1998; Kevin Robins and Frank Webster, 1999. Some theorists like Leslie Sklair sees a transnational emergence of ruling elite while critics like Samuel Huntington foresees societal fragmentation or "Clash of Civilisation". For Ino Rosy, global capitalism creates a rupture in history and play down differences and novelties. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their work *Empire* present "Evolving forms of sovereignty, economy and culture that clash with a multitude of disparate groups unleashing political struggle and an unpredictable flow of novelties, surprises and upheavals." (Negri) From this perspectives, politics of global capitalism can be seen as highly complex, contradictory and as an ambiguous set of institutions and the social relations which takes force of sameness, uniformity and heterogeneity, difference, and hybridity, as well as a contradictory mixture democratising and anti-democratising tendencies.

Results

In Northern Irish Women's Literature, they exercise scope of collecting fractured people together and rebuilding a broken nation at large. For that war ridden society, women are seen as a vital hope of regeneration. They encounter forces of destruction, hunger and starvation and they once again remind us that war would not be won through violence and military campaigns but through termination of hostilities and preservation of life.

Kurdish Literature makes the readers aware that values of the traditional system could be challenged but cannot be completely taken out from the collective psyche of the people. Most importantly these traditional values at the time of a crisis or implosion become potent sources of energy to which people can return for a panacea or rehabilitation.

Armah reminds us of exercising the necessity of rationalisation of system and life worlds proposed as by Habermas to meet material attendance and control over a society's environment.

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