An Infinite Play of Shattered Mirrors:
Storytelling Toward a Holistic Resistance

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Abstract of Thesis

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Throughout time, the story has been used to both weaponize objectivity and express humanity. While narratives of domination have substantiated in a self-affirming totality of exploitation, narratives of resistance can promote a much more affirming understanding of human existence. This paper will highlight the importance and potential of the story as a revolutionary form of resistance. It will expand on Trinh T. Minh-Ha's mirror metaphor in *Woman, Native, Other* to show how a more holistic narrative form can break apart reductive structuralist perceptions of reality. The theory of "the shattered story" provides a framework for reorganizing our own understandings to foster a much more fluid understanding of humanity. Contemporary resistance authors like Arundhati Roy, Yaa Gyasi, and Svetlana Alexievich are on the forefront of this movement, allowing their novels to encompass multiple perspectives at once. By representing marginalized people as unique entities who live through their identities, these authors fight against the liberal fetishization of suffering. This sort of resistance story works to reconceive history and open pathways to new, more empowering futures.

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Chapter 1: From Brutus to Columbus to Cook

I will tell you something about stories,
[he said]
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death.

You don't have anything
if you don't have stories. (Silko 2)

Stories are the creators, destroyers, and preservers of us, of our lives, our identities, our history, and our humanity.

The story is so deeply intertwined with society and culture, it is inseparable from our understanding of human nature. Not only is it an integral part of creative expression, but it is also the ultimate preserver of the past. It is the base building block of education, as knowledge and morality are passed down primarily through storytelling. As the gatekeeper of the past, the story is multifaceted, and in this ambiguity one can find the meaning to guide them through the present and imagine a future. This paper will explore the importance of the story and the depth of impact it has on culture and society. However, to examine the dialectic power of the story we must understand the ways in which this power has been consolidated and controlled throughout history.

Today, the importance of the 'story' lies in its connection to 'history'. Contemporary scholars often struggle to define the word 'story' without juxtaposing it

with ‘history’. For example, Herman Harrell Horne’s 1916 guide *Storytelling, Questioning and Studying*, he begins his definition of ‘story’ by writing,

> The story is not history, though there may be historical stories, but it is an imaginative invention. The terms "story" and "history" are indeed derived from the same root… but for us history tells us what happened at a definite place and time, while the story tells us only what might have happened at some indefinite place and time.” (25)

Horne argues that history must be anchored by reality, but stories are bound only by the teller’s (or writer’s) imagination. To Horne, the story possesses the power to pass along societal values, but it is not hindered by space and time. Namely, the story does not possess the responsibility to objectivity that history does, and therefore it can package information in a more entertaining and digestible way. However, it is not nearly as important as history, as Horne claims that a story is only valuable when the audience is reassured that the story is, in fact, fiction, and one must replace the ‘story’ with ‘history’ when they want to discuss reality. Horne argues that while history shapes identity through recounting one’s cultural and hereditary past, the story is only useful as “a thing of beauty primarily” (28).

Horne’s argument may seem plausible, but it is nothing more than an imperial apparatus of control and domination. To understand this, we need to look no further than the adage “history is written by the winners”. To ‘win’, to have power, is to control the narrative and therefore have agency over one’s past. In this way, the stories of those in power become the objective stories of history. The bearers of agency center their own point of view and mold the dominant remembrance of the past. Those who are

unrepresented in this shaping of history are only understood as players in other's events and denied the acknowledgement of a past of their own. This paper will expose the systems through which subjugated people and cultures are rendered historyless and the avenues through which storytellers have undermined these systems. However, to the marginalized and oppressed, the story is an integral form of resistance in redefining history. Namely, the story is the ultimate weapon of both control and empowerment.

To show the effect the story can have in redefining history, one must first examine the complex relationship between the 'story' and 'history' and how it contributes to our understanding of ourselves. Horne's argument fails to acknowledge that the predominant stories of a society control the way history is understood. In this way, history's claim to objectivity is based on, even controlled by, presumed fictions. This is the paradox in which history exists today, the paradox that makes storytelling such a dangerously impactful force.

In his book *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons from the Grundrisse,* Marxist scholar Antonio Negri explains how such a paradox is possible by depicting the tangible effects of abstract reasoning. He writes,

> The naive methodology begins with the concrete as a presupposition; Marx's methodology takes *the concrete as a result*… In this way, rather than make the concrete representation evaporate into an abstract determination, one succeeds, on the contrary, in abstract determinations which lead towards the reproduction of the concrete by way of thought. (47)

Negri implores his readers to move away from methodology that begins with the concrete. In the context of the story and history, it is misguided to come to conclusions about society based on objective history because the concept of history itself is flawed. Perspectives that analyze how abstract ideals lead to concrete outcomes, on the other hand, allow us to understand the basis of history and subvert marginalization efforts of the past. By analyzing the abstract's effects on the concrete, we can not only analyze the totality of imperial domination, but also theorize the ways in which resistance ideals can reshape the future of humanity. Through this process, the concrete potential of stories and the abstract potential of history will both be revealed, and the difference between the two will gradually disappear.

In his 1988 essay "The History that Makes Literature", Richard Waswo argues that quintessential fables become the cultural bedrock of a society, the knowledge through which each individual bases their understanding of life and identity. He writes "We see what we look for; our stories tell us what to look for; we find it (whether it's there or not) and then we can act out the stories" (Waswo 560). This leads to, as Sylvia Wynter argues, these stories becoming the metaphysical backbone of societal philosophy (144). Our stories become the lens through which we understand our surroundings and existence, and, in turn, create the repeating tropes through which we look to act out our lives. Though evidence of such narrative power presents itself in every society that has ever existed, Waswo chooses to focus on the origins of European imperial attitude because of its especially consequential outcomes in defining and suppressing humanity. He argues that European colonization and manifest destiny can be traced back to Virgil's *Aeneid* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. From the ninth to seventeenth centuries, Britain

and France accepted the *Aeneid* as their personal history. The story recounts the life of Aeneas and his progeny, Brutus, who conquered modern day Britain and France as a continuation of the Trojan empire. The Western Europeans considered themselves to be the descendants of Aeneas's Trojans, even going as far to outlaw any study that suggested otherwise. Waswo argues that this Trojan ancestry became fundamental to British and French identity, as important as laws of physics are to existence:

> Myths continue to be enacted, but only by coalescing with or assuming the form of science. This is precisely what happened to the story of civilization in our [Western Civilization's] founding legend: created as myth, it was elaborated as history, and finally became, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, science. The story, from Virgil to the present day, has not ceased to be enacted. (543)

Waswo outlines a progression here from fiction to history to science to emphasize the objectivity with which these people believed in this story. British and French explorers believed they had the blood of colonizers pumping through their veins and understood filial glory only through the languages of conquest. Naturally, they set out to enact these legends in their own life, looking to emulate the characteristics of heroes like Aeneas and Brutus. This undoubtedly influenced the 'white-man's burden' attitude through which Europe looked to colonize the world.

The specificities of Virgil's epic poem not only perpetuated the ties between conquest and civilization, but also equated heroism with a settler colonist mentality. Waswo continues,

> I must observe that the Occident, that is, Rome before Virgil if not after him, had a choice of cultural ancestors. Aeneas of Troy was indeed a less obvious choice than either Hercules or Odysseus, both of whose wanderings in the Italian peninsula were commemorated in stories and cults of pre-Roman times. To fix on Troy, however, was to impose an origin that was always already destroyed, and hence required a narrative of displacement, exile, and reconstruction. The story is therefore structured as a journey, the search for a predestined and permanent home. The story thus presents civilization as that which comes from somewhere else… There, it is imposed by force on the indigenous population, who may or may not be given the opportunity to assimilate themselves to it. In any case, should they resist, they are wiped out. (Waswo 545)

Virgil's *Aeneid* allowed the British and French to understand themselves as migrants and harbingers of civilization to new and rich worlds. Through a story of "displacement, exile, and reconstruction", Western civilization situated itself as directly opposed to indigeneity, enforcing moral authority for conquerors over natives. Characterizing the civilized home as "predestined" allows the colonists to understand their conquest as a hereditary right. It is inevitable that a European colonizer would understand his own conquests as an extension of his ancestors because of the tropes of the *Aeneid*. This reflects the true power of origin stories. They can perpetuate mindsets and cement cultural values in a way that predetermines human action.

In her essay "Columbus, the Ocean Blue, and Fables that Stir the Mind", Sylvia Wynter posits Christopher Columbus's exploits as the eminent example of such an origin

story. In his letter on his first voyage, he writes to Franz Ferdinand that the natives "firmly believed that I, with my ships and men, came from heaven"(Columbus 3). Here, Columbus invokes an Aeneas-like image of himself and his crew, claiming the tropes of destiny and divine intervention in his description of the natives. This is also reflected in his legacy because, just as the British and French understood themselves as the children of Brutus, American colonists understood themselves as children of Columbus, worshipping him as the first prophet of civilization to the Western Hemisphere. Wynter identifies this connection in her essay, arguing that "both the legend of descent from Troy and the narrative of Christian Providential destiny central to Columbus' reconception of the earth were the matrix forms of which the legend of descent from Columbus was a transumed form" (152) The story of Aeneas and Brutus is embodied in Columbus, confirming Waswo's claim that this story "continues to be enacted" throughout history. Wynter calls this perpetuation of tropes a "transumed form", highlighting the way the metaphorical associations of the conqueror-hero imprint itself into the Western mindset. This wording comes from the work of Harold Bloom, who coined the phrase "transumptive chains"[1] (Wynter 152) to refer to these repeating and highly influential tropes that repeat themselves in fiction and reality. These transumptive chains simultaneously guide and interpret history and identity by connecting it to the tropes of

[1] While the word "transumption" is used today to describe a metaphorical transference, the word was originally used in anthropology to describe the ritual of eating the bodies of dead kin amongst the Fore people of modern-day New Guinea. Anthropologist Michael Alpers describes this process as "the mortuary practice of consumption of the dead and incorporation of the body of the dead person into the bodies of living relatives" (Alpers *A History of Kuru* 2007, p. 14). This, on a metaphorical level, may even be a more apt way to understand Bloom's transumptive chains. The narrative tropes of the past are not so much transferred into the present as they are incorporated into the present, consumed by it. Past tropes are understood through the present and utilized to understand present reality. However, transumptive chains are not a mortuary practice. I do not wish to misrepresent the ritual of the Fore people, but rather explain the etymology of 'transume' because it is important to understanding the central sentiments of this paper.

the past. In this way, an individual's understanding of the world becomes an amalgamation of the cultural tropes that mark their lived experiences. Transumptive chains overlap in a sort of web that acts as the blueprint for understanding reality. The choice of "chain" has two important connotations: first, that the narrative tropes are connectors, each link can be thought of as a transference that uses the past to imagine a present, second that the chain is a constraint that binds an individual to a certain understanding. Columbus most likely saw himself as Brutus or Odysseus as he embarked on his voyage, describing his actions in a way that would equate him to these celebrated heroes. Therefore, these transumptive chains define the past, construct the present and outline the future.

These recurring tropes are the engine behind another famous adage: 'history repeats itself', and in the context of valorizing conquest, they have brought immense suffering and sustained destruction to humanity. Wynter proposes that the dominant transumptive chains throughout history are ones of reduction and oppression that look to uphold the hierarchy of society by ascribing to a strict definition of humanity. The rise of neoliberal capitalism and exploitation that accompanied European colonialism can be traced back to transumptive chains such as this one. For Wynter, these stories have caused the prevailing understanding of humanity to reflect a static order of knowledge. She takes Waswo's argument of stories as science a step further to argue that stories are, in and of themselves, what constitutes humanity. She borrows from ethnologist Kurt Ranke and theorist Walter Fisher in describing the human as "*homo narrans"* (McKittrick 25). While the species classification of *sapiens* in *Homo sapiens* is translated as 'wise', the *Homo narrans* classification centers storytelling as the most definite and

distinguishing trait of humanity. Unlike insects like ants or bees, our social structure is not only a result of our genetic coding, but the specific empirical reality that our society promotes and reinforces through storytelling. The characteristics that define the "human" then become completely reliant on the stories that characterize history. Waswo's argument provides a clear example of this, as the transumptive chain of Aeneas to Columbus and beyond has influenced the loaded nature of the word 'culture':

> In sum, then, the Aeneas inherited by the early historians and by Virgil appears to have been… the founding father of a wall-building agricultural society. In the later forms this society took… civilization: cult/cultivate/culture… All derived from Latin colo (p.p. cultum, which means to dwell as well as to till the soil), these words make all forms of refinement-intellectual, aesthetic, moral-as well as religious worship dependent on tillage, on the controlled nurture and growth of vegetation and human taste. Opposed to cultivation, which is civilized, is savagery, which isn't. And what is savage (silvestris, silva) is literally "of the forest." It is land and people that remain uncultivated. (Waswo 550)

The Trojan story, understood as *the* European founding story, paints Aeneas as the embodied representation of the sedentary and militaristic agricultural society. The presumed superiority of this way of life embeds itself into the very language through which one navigates the world. The reductive etymology of the word 'culture' forces the English speaker to be complicit in the denigration of pastoral or foraging civilizations and livelihoods. The transumptive chain of Trojan descent plays an integral part in the subjugation of the non-agri*cultural* as it celebrates the destruction of such civilizations

and worldviews. When Waswo argues that "human taste" itself becomes integrally tied with tillage in the origins of Latin language, he is hinting at the ideas that Wynter elaborates through her application of *Homo narrans.* European stories of conquest like *Aeneid* work to define the Platonic ideal of 'human' as those who prescribe to a European understanding of civilization. The "savages" are rendered lesser-than-human in the European lexicon.

To Wynter, the story is the gatekeeper of humanity, dooming those that it considers lesser to generations of oppression and marginalization. She argues that "the hybrid laws that engender the empirical reality of our own always genre-specific fictively eusocializing are storytellingly chartered, symbolically coded, thereby self-organizing living autopoietic systems" (McKittrick 28). These predominant stories create a self-sustaining and actualizing totality of reality, one that must be accepted as real in order to participate in societal order and reap its benefits. In turn, these stories create self-affirming knowledge systems, favoring those who confirm and perpetuate the tropes and understanding of predominant systems.

Before this paper explores the ways in which contemporary postcolonial authors look to undermine these systems, it must outline the specific effect this "living autopoietic[2] system" has on marginalized people. This system is a product of the transumptive chains of conquest and civilization that has affirmed itself throughout

[2] The word "autopoiesis" was first coined by biologists Maturana and Varela in their study *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*. Where they used the term to describe the self-organizing processes of living cells. They point out that "An autopoietic machine is a machine organized (defined as a unity) as a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components which through their interactions and transformations continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produced them." This description has deep similarities to the transumptive chains, as they are both self-contained processes, continuously regenerating themselves through consumption and reproduction.

Western conceptions of history. Though it presents itself in different ways today than it did in the seventeenth century, the presumed patriarchal superiority of white culture continues to thrive. Humans who are not assigned into this dominant grouping are marginalized because this system has been created to uphold the power dynamics of society. The only people who are allowed agency over their own past are the ones in power because this system has worked to ingrain this notion into our understanding of reality. Stories from other societies are not rejected as much as they are unrecognized as history, unrecognized as the very ideas that give other cultures their own humanities. As Franz Fanon writes in his essay "On national culture",

> Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's head of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. (210)

The "past" that Fanon refers to is that of a people's own transumptive chains, ones that lead back to their own culture, identity, and worldview. The colonial mindset is a self-affirming circular one: it justifies its own superiority by deeming that progress is the erasure of all other ways of life. In destroying cultural pasts and personal histories, imperialism strengthens itself, tightening the shackles of its own transumptive chains.

The insistence of Western objectivity has embedded itself even deeper into the British with the rise of seventeenth century liberalism. In a stroke of tragic irony, this movement, which values 'freedom' above all else, advocated for the detention of non-Europeans. In her book *The Intimacies of Four Continents,* Lisa Lowe heavily critiques liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill by pointing out the chauvinistic underpinnings of his philosophy. She writes,

> While liberty would appear to eradicate or vanquish despotism, Mill discussed despotism not as counter to liberty but as the very condition out of which liberty arises and the condition to which it was integral… He famously defined "the best government" as the one that may discern those who were "unfit for liberty" or not capable of self-determination; his ideas on liberal government combined the state's necessary use of force to maintain "order and progress" with the civil education of people for self-government. In Mill's thought, the achievement of liberty was fulfilled within a progressive temporality exemplified by education, civilization, and government and his work has become the normative political theory that rationalized the governing of liberty as representative government for some and despotism for others. (107)

Mill's insistence in separating subjects by those 'who are fit for liberty' and 'those who are not' is done to maintain the power structure by denying agency to those who do not share the dominant worldview. Lowe even mentions the relationship between liberty and "civilization", which alludes to the cultivation-centered worldview that deems non-agricultural populations as cultureless, historyless people. Mill's emphasis on civil education is a perfect vessel for Wynter's autopoietic system because it allows this liberal worldview to be taught with objectivity. When Mill's formulations are applied to Fanon's passage about "emptying the native's head of all form and content", the malicious aspects of Mill's singularizing philosophy is revealed. In this way, the predominant *Homo narrans* have sadly accepted only one story as truth, the one that sees only one type of cultured human and deems all others as in the process of becoming human. Dipesh

Chakrabarty calls this the "waiting room of history" (8-9). This is a place where humans are imagined into chimeras, convoluted beings that can only be utilized for labor and resources until they have internalized the histories of their masters. Through forced migration, family separation, and material destruction, European colonists utilized the self-affirming system of conquest to fetishize the colonized and their descendants.

This dominant system sustains itself on singularity. The moral superiority of one way of life, one reality, can only be sustained by silencing alternative perspectives. By relegating other stories to fiction, this self-affirming system can monopolize objectivity, to control reality. In this way, the system interprets past events as manifestations of its own transumptive chains. The very existence of other realities and the stories that represent them are threats to this reality, so the autopoietic system looks to erase them by dehumanizing the bodies that possess these stories. The processes that this transumptive totality uses to render communities historyless is based on the elimination of marginalized experience through the erasure of their stories.

European colonialism and its aftereffects are particularly important to understanding the extent of the violence of this transumptive totality. The oppression that resulted from European conquest looked to position natives as culturally inferior by eliminating any semblance of agency for the colonial subject. In her book *The Intimacies of Four Continents,* postcolonial studies theorist Lisa Lowe expands on Marx's 'fetishism of commodities' through the lens of European colonization to show how this fetishization works to dehumanize subjects. The 'fetishism of commodities' is a process that results from the capitalistic mindset of setting a market price value for goods that disassociate it from the conditions of its production. The commodity is abstracted, removed from the

unique experiences that were a result of its production and circulation. Lowe argues that colonists not only alienated foreign commodities from their labor conditions, but also from their economic and cultural significance. Marx does not take into account the full extent of exploitation present in the system of colonial trade. She writes

> What I suggest is that Marx's formulation of the fetishism of commodities, which focused on British manufactured goods, simultaneously admitted *and* obscured the difference of colonial labor. On one hand, Marx grasped the importance of labor power to the creation of value and its subordination by the fetishism of market exchange, on the other, the abstract categories of use, exchange, and surplus value presume particular forms of production that do not exhaust the manifold forms of labor being abstracted exported and violated in colonial trades. (Lowe 83)

Any commodity that was a part of the colonial trade is part of a larger global system of persecution and suffering. A fetishization of such a good is much more expansive than that of something sold locally, as the good must enter a worldwide system of trade that is reliant on widespread exploitation and suffering. For example, in the nineteenth century, Indian kalamkari[3] tapestries became a popular purchase for middle class English households. While Marx recognizes that this phenomenon works to disenfranchise the workers who harvested the cotton and wove the textiles, Lowe helps us understand that this trade is an integral part of a system of forced labor, suffering, and bloodshed. The stories of these artists are farmers are purposely exoticized for the sale of these goods. As the sale of these textiles continued, English textile manufacturers began to produce

[3] These tapestries were known for their detailed depictions of scenes of Hindu epics on high quality cotton cloth.

standardized versions of the tapestries, further alienating the style from its significance. The effects of such a fetishization are crucial, as it looks to destroy the identity of these *Homo narrans* by erasing the significance of the stories that describe them.

Through this kind of abstraction, humans themselves are fetishized, removed from their past, detained in the present, and denied a future. Marxist theorist Asma Abbas explains how this mechanism of fetishization has helped to sustain the erasure of colored bodies and stories in Western liberalism. In her work *Liberalism and Human Suffering*, she criticizes the liberal understanding of suffering and injury, and the standardization through which it attempts to reduce marginalized people to an idealized form of anguish. Abbas writes,

> The premise is that the universal is stable and misrepresents the fluidity of experience. However, this universalism's supposed stability and power is hard-earned, and its upkeep is the responsibility of its subjects: the petrified amnesia of a fetish is sustained by the life activity of human beings subject to it and subjects of it. (132)

Abbas argues that the "universalism" through which liberalism understands the world does not account for the multiplicity and nuance of a suffering experience. To validate one's suffering through the eyes of a liberal government, they must reduce themself to the liberal tropes[4] of a 'victim'. Lived trauma must be standardized to fit the mold of a predetermined understanding of mental and physical suffering. This is where Abbas's brilliant term, "petrified amnesia of the fetish" becomes a crucial tool for understanding

[4] The vast influence of the story and its relationship to history rears its head here too, as the Western tropes of victim as one who is stuck in suffering and unable to continue with their trauma is reinforced by story tropes throughout history of the helpless victim who can only recover from trauma when freed from it through justice.

the disenfranchisement that takes place in this ideology. “Petrified” refers to the paralyzing effect of fetishization, as it removes potentiality from the object of fetishization. Like Chakrabarthy’s “waiting room of history”, this petrification is a denial of futurity, disallowing any sort of action or change. “Amnesia”, on the other hand, refers to fetishization’s ability to dismember the past. It breaks the interconnected transumptive chains and cultural particularity that makes up a human, leaving disjointed images of past identity. To fetishize one’s suffering is to ask them to explain their suffering through your worldview, or, in other words, to deny their worldview as relevant to their own livelihood. The fetishized are suspended in reality, unable to assume agency over their past life or to act on anything in the future. Throughout the colonial and postcolonial era, the other has been fetishized as inferior, as object, as slave, and as victim to make them internalize a lesser-than-human status for themselves.

In addition to scrutinizing the effect of fetishization, Abbas outlines the ways in which Wynter’s autopoietic system of European storytelling perpetuates itself. In order to survive socially and financially within liberalism’s system, the fetishized must assimilate into this system, which consecutively affirms and enforces the reality of the system. To leave the “waiting room of history” one must sacrifice their identity and become a subject of the very system that oppresses them. It is essential that the “upkeep” of the presumed universal is the “responsibility of its subjects” because it is the best way to affirm transumptive chains of eugenics. The remnants of conquest and imperialism is the robust totality through which humans are forced to understand the world, to question this is to risk social standing and survival. This totality works to completely abstract the reality of other societies into myth and fiction.

This abstraction is so wide-reaching and established that even Waswo cannot fully escape it within his own work. In an attempt to explain how stories can have tangible consequences, he describes the death of Captain James Cook in a way that is implicit in the mythification of Hawaiian worldview. He writes:

> The event in this case is the well-documented murder of Captain Cook by the Hawaiians, which is shown to be the result of his literally sailing into their mythology and being unable, because of a chance accident, to sail out of it. Accepted and treated as the god Lono, Cook unwittingly followed the fictional scenario of his annual celebration, right up to… the moment when the god was to be ritually killed by casting his image out to sea. (Waswo 542)

Waswo paints a familiar picture in his description of Cook's interaction with the native Hawaiians. From Brutus to Columbus to Cook, we are made to believe that the colonial captain is worshipped as a god by the people he is looking to conquer. However, by writing that Cook was "literally sailing into their mythology", Waswo takes this generalization a step further, implying that Cook *became* the god Lono when he arrived in Hawaii. The word "mythology" here implies that God Lono's visitation is a fictitious tale which only the inferior Hawaiian society would believe. He receives his understanding of this story from historian Marshall Sahlins and his book, *Islands of History*, in which Sahlins presumed that the Hawaiians killed Cook as an act of ritual and reverence to the captain as an embodiment of the god.

On the contrary, four years after Waswo's essay was published, postcolonial theorist Gananath Obeysekere points out in his book *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* that this telling of Cook's trip to Hawaii is skewed and mired by the remnants of European colonialism. He argues that it is very unlikely that the Hawaiians thought that Cook was an incarnation of their fertility god, Lono, but rather as a representation of the kind of fortune that only a god like Lono could bring about. It is much more likely that the Hawaiians quickly realized that Cook's arrival was not a sign of good fortune, as he and his men quickly spread disease and did not uphold their ends of resources trade. Given the logic of the Hawaiian people, it is more likely Cook died in a skirmish with the Hawaiians over resources. The idea that the natives worshipped Cook and his men is simply a fetishization of the native people, one that attempts to make them complicit in their own subjugation as lesser humans. Obeysekere understands Sahlins' interpretation of the event as one that is grounded in "European myth models" (24) and plays out as a physical manifestation of Shakespeare's "Prospero". His term "myth model" is very similar to Wynter's transumptive chain, as they both are used to highlight the way that because the story provides us with a lens through which we can understand the world. What we see in 'history' is often a repetition of the story itself. In Waswo and even Sahlins' cases, the 'divine right of the European conqueror' that was cemented by the *Aeneid* is deeply present even in works that look to dismantle this exact sentiment.

Cook's death is most likely a result of a clash of worldviews, of transumptive chains born from the fundamental stories that make up both Captain Cook's and the Hawaiian's realities. This example exposes the presupposition that the European Weltanschauung is the only origin of logic and the objective truth that the West makes when recounting their own history. Its most destructive element is its implicit devaluation of any other society as a lesser, subjective humanity.

In conclusion, the imperial structures of 16th century European colonization have looked to affirm white cisgender male superiority through the trivialization of other culture's stories and the assertion of their own as objective fact. This is an extremely dangerous force because of the importance of stories and storytelling in creating the collective consciousness of a people. By relegating colonized stories to inconsequential fiction, this domineering system fetishizes postcolonial communities and individuals by rejecting their understanding of the world. By refusing to recognize the stories behind other cultures, the colonized individuals were understood as historyless, and their descendants can only adopt agency if they acquiesce to a Western liberal mindset. Meanwhile, the systems of imperialism look to erase native worldview by contextualizing other civilization's stories as detrimental to scientific objectivity.

Chapter 2: An Infinite Play of Empty Shattered Mirrors

To challenge the history of oppression that marks our bodies, we must look to break the transumptive chains that deny us agency over our identity. However, this has not, will not, and will never be easy; as explained in Part One, the imperial mindset has morphed itself throughout history, taking on new forms to prey on those who possess alternative worldviews. This transumptive totality has become so much a part of Western reality that it can only be resisted through storytelling itself. Therefore, stories of resistance[5] must be world collapsing in nature, and look to reimagine our understandings of time and humanity.

Vietnamese documentarian and postcolonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-Ha's book *Woman, Native, Other* acts as a sort of guide for resistance storytelling, describing how non-white women writers can utilize their own cultural understandings to help dismantle the racist, misogynistic foundation of the imperial worldview. Trinh argues that the writer must let go of the conventional understanding of 'fact' and asserts that this understanding is an apparatus of subjection borne from the transumptive chains of European colonialism. She writes, "Since fictional and factual have come to a point where they mutually exclude each other, fiction, not infrequently, means lies, and fact, truth. DID IT REALLY HAPPEN? IS IT A TRUE STORY?... Which truth? the question unavoidably arises." (Trinh 120) By asking her audience "which truth?", Trinh brings to light the most overarching truth of all: that truth itself is plural. Namely, an event does not exist on its own, but it is a nexus in a larger system of events that are understood differently by every person who experiences it. Only when grounded in the multiplicity of experience can one

[5] The term "resistance" is from Barbara Harlow's excellent essay "Resistance Literature", where it is used to signify literature that works to break apart notions of singular identity, colonialism, and imperialism.

break through a singularizing worldview. The “self-affirming autopoietic system” that was highlighted in Part One of this paper is represented in this excerpt by the capitalized questions. In this passage, the questions act as a sort of rude interruption from her explanation of ‘truth’ and ‘fact'. It is representative of the first question asked in any Western classroom when a piece of literature is presented: “DID IT REALLY HAPPEN?”. When one grapples with the idea that reality is different, fluid amongst different backgrounds, the importance of individual-fact based truth is replaced by something much more holistic. The goal is not to reach an ultimate, objective truth, but to understand how convoluted and multifaceted the past really is.

How can a work of resistance literature be so revolutionary that it momentarily reshapes our view of reality? To Trinh, this begins with form rather than content. A multifaceted truth must start with a fragmented story, one that conveys the diversity of culture and humanity without gatekeeping objectivity and hierarchizing identity.

In her 2017 novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Indian author Arundhati Roy includes a poem that reads:

How
to
tell
a
shattered
story?

By
slowly
becoming
everybody.

No.
By slowly becoming everything. (442)

Roy's novel is a truly enlightening work of resistance literature, as this poem acts as a blueprint for the novel. The world collapsing characteristics of this story will be explored in Part three, but this section of the paper will use this poem as theory, as a guideline to the way that a resistance story can disentangle the transumptive chains of our reality. By analyzing this poem with a section of Trinh. T. Minh Ha's *Woman, Native, Other* titled "The Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors", we will uncover the key to telling a "shattered story".

At first glance, it seems highly implausible that one could become everybody, much less everything through telling a story that is not even whole itself. However, the very fragmented nature of this story is the very characteristic that allows it to become larger than an individual perspective. The fragmentation of this poem is so central to its meaning, it is even highlighted in the formatting of the poem. Outside of the last line, each word takes up its own line and gives off the notion that the poem itself is broken, shattered, like shards of glass from a broken mirror.

So, what does it mean to tell a shattered story? To begin to answer this, one must turn back to Trinh T. Mihn-Ha's work. Trinh also utilizes the imagery of mirrors in her work *Woman, Native, Other* in explaining how exploited and oppressed people can be represented through storytelling. In her section titled "Infinite Play on Empty Mirrors", she uses the metaphor of a mirror facing another mirror to describe how resistance writing can break apart the subject to object relation with which the West observes reality. To Trinh, the mirror is the "symbol of the very void of symbols" (22), and therefore is an object that is usually not valued for its reflection rather than its essence. In other words, a viewer's focus is rarely on the mirror itself, but rather the image that it is

reflecting. When one mirror reflects off another an infinite loop of reflections is created. If this concept is applied to narrative form, it creates a story that is fundamentally focused on the relationships between objects rather than objects themselves. She argues, "A writing *for* the people, *by* the people, and *from* the people is, literally, a multipolar reflecting reflection that remains free from the conditions of subjectivity and objectivity and yet reveals them both. All is empty when one is plural" (22). In the "multipolar reflecting reflection", meaning arises together as a whole rather than being based on one perspective. This is the only way in which an author can write something that is for, by, and from, "the people" because it can adequately tackle the plurality of ideas that makes up subjectivity. In the emptiness of Trinh's mirrors, objectivity is nothing more than the conglomeration of these subjectivities. Power structures look to order meaning by creating a hierarchy of being, but in the case of reflecting mirrors, structure is absent, and meaning must be found in the very reflection of images. This is what Trinh means when she says, "all is empty, when one is plural". This is not a truly nihilistic position because Trinh is not arguing that things do not exist, but that things do not exist independently. Nothing has inherent meaning; all meaning is born in relation and comparison.

While the mirror as metaphor has appeared in many religious and philosophical scriptures across Asia, the understanding that is most relevant to this paper is shared by the Yogācāra school of Buddhism and Kashmiri Shaivism. When Buddhism established itself in Southeast Asia in the fifth century, the mirror became a very popular symbol through which the foundational tenet of dependent origination is explained. Dependent origination, or Pratītyasamutpāda, is the idea that all phenomena arise only in relation to

others.[6] In the Yogācāra tradition, all external objects, events, and beings only exist in the mind as empty locusts in a web of connections. The universe lacks inherent substance. Around the same time as the rise of Yogācāra, Kashmir Shaivism established itself as one of the most idealist Hindu philosophical schools. Shaivism is the worship of Shiva, the Hindu god of death and destruction, as supreme being and soul of the universe. While the two religions have very different philosophical stances, they both agree that subjects and objects do not possess internal substance, but rather that meaning arises as a collective web of relations. For this thought process, mirrors are a very fitting metaphor because they are often colloquially understood as an object whose meaning arises from the scene which it is reflecting. Because of this, it is not surprising that both schools use the metaphorical mirror to explain their metaphysical position. As Alex Wayman writes in his 1974 article "The Mirror as a Pan-Buddhist Metaphor-Simile",

> Then there is the theory of the mind as a two-sided mirror-which the Buddhist tantra tradition has in common with Kashmir Shaivism. In this case, the phenomenal mind (*manas*), one one side, reflects with error the external world, and the superior discriminating mind (*buddhi*), on the other side, reflects errorlessly because it is devoid of images… In the language of the two-sided mirror, the *buddhi* side of the mirror can represent the Buddha because it is void of competing images. (256)

The two-sided mirror, as opposed to a two-way mirror, is meant to be imagined as a mirror that is reflective on both sides. The side represented by *manas*, or the object-making self, is the misguided way through which most of humanity understands the

[6] This is very similar to Trinh's conception of 'truth' as an emergent property that arises from connections between things in the world rather than things themselves.

world. This concept is very similar to Lacan's Mirror-Stage, where one who investigates the mirror sees a stagnant image of themselves. The "error" that Wayman mentions in this passage refers to the fact that the mirror of *manas* understands its reflections as a conglomeration of images of objects that have real, distinct essences. If the mirror is to be taken as a metaphor for the mind, the *manas* version perceives the world from the perspective of itself as subject. On the other hand, the *buddhi* side, which both religions view as the better side, perceives the reflection as universal harmony. The *buddhi* mind knows images are unstable, shifting throughout time and space and only finding true understanding in the network of totality that is the universe. In this state, existence is not understood from the position of the subject, and the reflection is not understood as an image. The mirror exists just as anything else one can conceive: as a thought that arises from relation. Through this understanding of the mirror, the imaginary and symbolic world that Lacan theorizes are left behind. While a Yogacarin would argue that the mindset that would accompany a *buddhi* side of the mirror is incomprehensible without a lifetime of meditation, Trinh presents it as a blueprint for understanding how this metaphor might inform resistance literature. Trinh herself is a student of Zen Buddhism (a sect of Yogacara) while Roy is versed in the many religions of the Kashmir region. It is only fitting that these two would use this metaphor in their works.

The key to transcending the fetishization of suffering in neoliberal thought today lies in the *buddhi* style understanding. If one's mind is like a *manas* mirror, it sees the world in stagnant images processed by a preconceived understanding of reality: "In the dual relation of subject to subject or subject to object, the mirror is a symbol of an unaltered vision of things" (Trinh 22). This simple subject/object reality is what we

search for because it is pristine, simple, unchallenged by time, space and altered perspectives. This is because the image that the mirror produces is not only static in time, but it is a singular perspective of the world around us. The self-affirming transumptive totality that has led us from Brutus to Columbus to Cook, from colonialism to imperialism to liberalism, goes hand in hand with the *manas* mirror, as they both work together to singularize perspective and truth. Of this, Trinh writes, "The very error that deceives our eyes inflames them; still, we persist in trying to fix a fleeting image and spend our lifetime searching after that which does not exist." This "error that deceives our eyes" is the mirror's ability to make us believe that we are a fixed entity, and the reason that this "inflames" our eyes is because it not only objectifies our surroundings, but it clouds our own vision and limits our own agency in the world. "To see one's double is to see oneself dead" (Trinh 22), meaning that the *manas* mirror works fetishize everything, including oneself. On the other hand, a mind like a *buddhi* mirror does not idealize anything, and, in doing so, is able to process the world as a system of relations. This way, nothing is fetishized, and everything is thought of in the context of the world. It can witness multiple perspectives at once, and therefore can understand the incongruities that engender our realities. Such a mind is highly implausible to someone who lives with the transumptive chains that help us process our realities, and there is debate in these religions as to whether such a mind is human. However, there is still value in us *homo narrans* understanding the *buddhi* mirror because it allows us to challenge our own transumptive realities. Such efforts may allow us to incorporate more perspectives into our own and prevent us from objectifying ourselves and others.

Roy's poem allows the writer and reader to apply this metaphor to narrative form, and, in doing so, pave the way for stories that resist against the prevailing transumptive totality. So, what does it mean to tell a "shattered story"? In *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh writes "A shattered mirror still functions as mirror; it may destroy the dual relation of I to I but leaves the infiniteness of life's reflections intact. Here reality is not reconstituted, it is put into pieces so as to allow another world to rebuild (keep on unbuilding and rebuilding) itself with its debris" (21). A shattered mirror further reduces the chances of a *manas* understanding of its reflecting nature. In the remnants of a shattered mirror, reflections are shown from multiple angles, warped, and distorted in ways that they would not be in a whole mirror. As they are rearranged, new realities are constantly being revealed and disguised. The connections that constitute an empty world reveal themselves in infinitely different combinations. A shattered mirror may once have been whole, but now it is stuck in the continual motion of recreating itself. While this might seem to make the mirror useless, the constantly changing view of reality never affirms one reality over another and prevents the tendency for reduction and categorization that results in so much of the oppression and suffering. If we understand Roy's mirror as one that has been shattered by the effects of suffering and disenfranchisement, the shattered mirror recognizes that it is only telling fragments of people's stories, and any fragment is useless in itself, but together it can reveal a totality of meaning through its reflections.

The shattered mirror narrative challenges reductive understandings of humanity primarily through its form. Trinh's work uses methods from her own community's stories to break apart the perceived objectivity with which 'History' operates. She begins

Woman, Native, Other by describing a village scene of her ancestors where they would engage in continuous, group-based storytelling. Through this multifaceted approach to storytelling, her community is able to reimagine and transform individual realities by avoiding definitive meaning. She writes

> The story never stops beginning or ending. It appears headless and bottomless for it is built of differences. Its (in)finitude subverts every notion of completeness and its frame is a non-totalizable one. The differences it brings about are differences not only in structure, in the play of structures and of surfaces, but also in timbre and in silences. (Trinh 2)

While this description may resemble postmodern notions of storytelling, it is much more overtly political in its attempt to dismantle the existing dominance of linear thinking.[7] In its collectivity, the story does not present the reader with a linear path. Instead, the story must be constantly building and collapsing, changing, and continuing to find new ways to contextualize society. The "differences" that Trinh mentions here are the reflections of the shattered mirror, play off one another in infinite ways, the only overarching moral being that true reality is fluid in a world where no one is fetishized. The excitement of the resistance story must come from the fact that it is simultaneously traversing multiple transumptive totalities, therefore allowing the reader to momentarily step out of their

[7] While Postmodernism does question notions of linear progress and conventional structure, they are not politically grounded in the way that contemporary postcolonialism is. Postcolonialism is a concerted effort to create work that exposes the tragedies of colonialism and how it attempted to kill other cultures and realities to further its own singular world. Trinh's postcolonialism is specifically rooted in this, as she recognizes the ways in which colored women are often among the most exploited population in a community. Because of this, she works to create a completely new understanding of art and reality.

own. If this is done correctly, the narrative will be one that creates world collapsing connections between content, structure, and tone.

Philosopher Paulo Freire argues that this sort of transformation of reality can only be collective. In his magnum opus, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire stresses the importance of dialogue that recognizes the multiplicity of existence, arguing that this is the only pathway to true acceptance between humans with different cultural realities:

> True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking- thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits no dichotomy between them-thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than a static entity- thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. (92)

Freire's "true dialogue" is based on understanding the multiplicity of truth. Only when two dialoguers can accept their own realities as subjective can they recognize each other. The shattered story is a prerequisite to this transformative dialogue because it presents the fluidity of existence in the universal pathos-based language of *Homo narrans*: storytelling. Freire also considers "the fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of *domination*" (103), echoing Waswo's theory of the dangers of objectivity and Abbas's fetishization of suffering. The shattered story has the power to momentarily collapse the transumptive reality in which one exists by showing them the plurality of experience and the mass suffering that exists behind 'History's' objectivity. It forces us to look past a singular understanding of reality and prepares us for true dialogue in Freire's terms.

Lastly, Roy's poem harbors a tension between "everybody" and "everything" in its answer to "How to tell a shattered story?". Because the *buddhi* mirror model does away with the subject/object relationship that haunts the dominant understanding of the world, there is no longer a distinction between humans and their surroundings. In "becoming everything", the shattered story looks past the need to standardize or control in appealing to a universal harmony. The fragments of the mirror reflect off of one another in countless ways, allowing for countless perspectives to coalesce in ever-changing ways. Therefore, the story must "s*lowly* become everything". Meaning is not revealed with one fragment of narrative, but the revealing develops as the narrative jumps from one fragment to another. This process is collective, as the narrative finds its meaning in engaging with itself and the reader. The infinite play of shattered mirrors is the recognition that decay and regeneration defines humanity, and though it may be true that nothing in and of itself has any lasting meaning, together empowerment for all can be found.

Chapter 3: Narrative Resistance and Becoming

This section will explore three varied examples of the shattered story: *Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy, *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi, and *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich. Each of these authors utilize the novelic form to transcend the fetishization of marginalized people, yet they write about people from different regions of the world in vastly different time periods. Just as all shattered stories are told through reflections, the differences between these three works will reflect each other to arrive at a better understanding of how to challenge our misrepresentational totalities. In all these stories, structure is not only imperative to the story, but paramount to the stories' meaning.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is a sprawling narrative that traverses the modern-day cultural borders within India erratically, introducing the reader to a vast array of characters with ever changing personal identities. Roy pushes the boundaries of conventional literature by presenting an overtly political work that challenges conventional notions of clarity and language in ways that align deeply Trinh's theory of truth. On the other hand, the *Homegoing* narrative follows the bloodline of two estranged sisters of the African Gold Coast who lived during the arrival of European slavers. Each chapter of the book is told from the point of view of a consecutive descendant, alternating from the bloodline of one sister to the bloodline of the other, brilliantly allowing the reader to compare Africans and African American experience throughout history without dismissing the generational oppression and trauma because of the Atlantic slave trade. Similarly, Alexievich's *Voices from Chernobyl* utilizes its structure to retell the history of the nuclear outbreak in Chernobyl by first-person accounts of the tragedy. In the book she

compiles multiple interviews she has done with the survivors of Chernobyl, removing her questions and editing the responses for coherency. These excerpts come together to contain the complexity of the aftermath of the nuclear explosion, pushing the reader to understand the incongruities that existed at such a time in the Soviet Union. *Voices From Chernobyl* is not closely related to European colonialism, but it does follow the aftermath of Soviet imperialism and its effects on the people of Chernobyl. In all these stories, the narrative is told from multiple character perspectives, each character experiencing dehumanization in a way unique to their individual identity.

The adverse trauma that these characters experience cannot be explained through a simple, linear story because such a story cannot display the sheer complexities of mass human suffering. Roy conveys this cleverly in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in a section where one of the novel's main characters, Tilottama, is reading a series of vignettes she has written. The stories have no essential information to contribute to the plot, yet Roy proceeds to write in this format for almost 12 pages. The vignettes are in the format of a reading comprehension section in a standardized test: they are followed by discussion questions that allude to a moral behind the short story. The last vignette, titled "Nothing", explains why this section is included, and, more largely, her intentions behind the novel:

> I would like to write one of those sophisticated stories in which even though nothing much happens there's lots to write about. That can't be done in Kashmir. It's not sophisticated, what happens here. There's too much blood for good literature.
>
> Q1: Why is it not sophisticated?

Q2: What is the acceptable amount of blood for good literature? (Roy 288)

The discussion question format recalls the way in which traditionally popular literature is put forth to aid the reader in understanding the overall morality in the work. However, Kashmir, devastated by war and death as it is, cannot be reduced to structuralist binaries. Truth cannot be captured by a neat proverb at the end of this section because this mass trauma is just too chaotic and complicated. She has rejected the old adages of 'high literature' to write a work documenting the violence and fascist politics that underlies much of India's current events today. By asking the question "Why is it not sophisticated", Roy forces the reader themselves to question the literary canon and its colonial underpinnings. She argues that a book in which "nothing much happens" is inherently elitist and cannot be written about a people who are constantly faced with the trauma of being considered less than human. In this way, the book attempts to reclaim agency for the ones affected by this violence through fragmented narrative and subversive writing style. Trinh argues that "Clarity is a means of subjection, a quality both of official, taught language and of correct writing, two old mates of power: Together they flow, together they flower, vertically, to impose an order" (17). With her lengthy asides and unpredictable structure, Roy's novel breaks the order imposed by clarity. In 'sophisticated' literature, clarity is used to "persuade" (16), but Trinh argues that these explanations remove the paradoxes and contradictions that are inherent in reality and suffering and, in doing so, reinforces the prevailing power structures. As the Hindu nationalist party in power of the Indian government works to reduce the meaning of the word 'Indian' to a Hindu of high caste, Roy attempts to capture plurality that rejects the language of power and oppressive order. In this way, the shattered story cannot be

idealized or ‘sophisticated’, it must be, as Freire explains, “constantly immersed in temporality.”

However, to be “immersed in temporality” does not mean the story must be told in a linear fashion, in fact, it means the opposite, the story must understand the ways in which past, present, and future all confront one another constantly in our own minds as we try to understand reality. Namely, past, present, and future are complicated in our minds because of the transumptive chains that we use to contextualize the world. Therefore, truly temporal events exist on all three temporal planes and can only be understood through multiple perspectives. *Homegoing* achieves this plurality by following generational change in attitude and mindset. After a chapter from one character’s perspective exploring their struggles in the present and wishes for the future, she will switch to the perspective of their child in the next chapter, who often views their parent’s past in a different way, forcing the reader to simultaneously question and absorb multiple perspectives on each character based on their existence throughout time. This is clearly depicted by one African character, Abena, and her relationship with her father. In Abena’s father’s chapter, he chooses to forsake his old life by faking his own death and changing his identity to become a layman farmer. At the end of the chapter, Abena’s father expresses his jubilance in finally taking agency over his life and is filled with hope for the future. Yet, in Abena’s chapter, the father is depicted as a failed farmer who lives in abject poverty. When Gyasi writes about Abena’s father’s struggles from her perspective, Abena pities her father:

> The plants had all died, withered to brown leaves littering the land in front of the hut… All she knew was that every morning her father

> watched over the plants, prayed over them, and that each season the inevitable happened, her father, a man whom she had never seen cry… would lift his head high and begin again. And so, that time, she cried for him. (144)

From her father's chapter, the reader is given insight into her father's life that Abena does not have. Because of this, the reader can witness the child attempting to recognize her father's suffering without a full understanding of his plight. The reader understands that the father's perseverance comes from the fact that he chose to live this sort of life. Yet, when Abena "cries for" her father, the reader not only sees the limited nature of a child's understanding of their parents, but also starts to question whether the father's decision was justified. This lament of the futility of her father's efforts foreshadows the powerless suffering she is soon to experience in her own life, as her father's decision to leave behind a life of wealth eventually leads to Abena's tragic death. In this way, Abena's perspective reflects off her father's, giving the reader a more holistic understanding of the ramifications of her father's decision.

The genius of the structure of *Homegoing* is that all the stories reflect off of one another seamlessly to document the way violence and exploitation of Africans has travelled through time. While the reader can compare Abena's story to her father's, they can also compare this to other character's relationship to their parents to formulate deeper meaning. For example, Gyasi's character Sonny is born much later than Abena in the United States, but both are deeply inhibited by the persecution of their parents. In Sonny's story, the reader again witnesses a child attempting to coax his parent's pain:

> One year, out of sheer desperation, his mother had tried to get him into one of the fancy white schools in Manhattan. She'd march into the office wearing glasses and carrying her best pen… they'd told her that it just wasn't possible for him to go there… Sonny could remember Willie [his mother] squeezing his hand with one of hers as they walked back to Harlem, wiping away tears with the other. To comfort her, Sonny said he didn't mind the schools because he never went. (249)

While Abena ponders why her father will not cry, Sonny attempts to appease his mother's tears. Sonny is two generations younger than Abena, but their stories have strong similarities. Both Abena's father and Sonny's mother migrate to the place where they would raise their children, and because of this, are the most disadvantaged in an already financially struggling community. Additionally, both narratives end with the tragic disenfranchisement of the main character more or less because of their childhood poverty. However, in this moment, the reader can understand that both characters (Abena in her crying and Sonny in his attempt to appease) learn emotionality and resilience in these moments of witnessing their parent's hardship. Through comparing these two character's experiences, not only are the perpetual struggles of poverty touched upon, but also the formative effects of these events.

However, these depictions also reveal a plethora of differences. When Abena's father tells her why he does not weep over the failure of his crops:

> My father was a slaver, a very wealthy man. When I decided to leave Fanteland, it was because I did not want to take part in the work my family had done. I wanted to work for myself… Every season I feel

> lucky to have this land, to do this honorable work, not the shameful work of my family. (Gyasi 153)

Abena's father can live through continual failure and difficulty because he chose to pursue this life for himself. His work, no matter how unsuccessful, is a reminder of the fact that he was able to take agency over his own life. Sonny's mother, however, does not have the same relationship with her struggles. She must raise Sonny as a single mother in an under resourced area because of the systemic racism that has been passed down to her. Abject poverty is forced upon her by her inability to find sustainable work because of her black skin. In "wearing glasses and carrying her best pen", it is evident that she is striving for an appearance of wealth that she currently does not possess. Sonny's lack of proper education is not a product of his mother's choice to live in poverty, but a result of the fact that she is stripped of her agency when she arrives in Harlem. Through this comparison, Gyasi is able to remind the audience of Abena's father's privilege as an African man to control his fate, something that was not offered to a black woman in America at the time. The connections between personal agency and childhood poverty are explored in a complex way, refusing to provide the reader with a complete and easily digestible moral. The marginalization and oppression of Africans and African Americans is not standardized, it is explored through many different perspectives through this novel, and in these perspectives reflecting one another, the plurality of black suffering and its varied ramifications unfold. The true extent of her dive into generational exploitation of Black and African people can only be understood through witnessing the totality of connections Gyasi constructs with her continuously unravelling novel.

In *Voices from Chernobyl*, the variability of experience is made even more apparent because the book has no underlying plot. The book is an overload of short accounts of the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl told by a variety of people who were connected to the incident in some way. The stories are not organized in any discernible ways, as similar people or similar sentiments do not seem to be intentionally grouped together or split apart. In addition to this, the book possesses three sections which Alexievich calls the "Chorus" (33,128,216). In these sections, Alexievich begins by listing the names of multiple people who she has interviewed along with their occupations. Then she proceeds with short vignettes from each of these people's lives. The names do not appear in the same order in which their stories are told because the listed occupations for these people do not line up with the subject matter of the story. For example, a chorus might begin by listing a traditionally masculine name with the occupation "liquidator", then the corresponding story by number will be from a female midwife's perspective. In turn, the reader is forced to receive the series of voices together even if some are contradictory, others oddly reminiscent of the ones before them, but all are honest and cutting, providing a unique account of the unfolding of this suffering. The "Choruses" act as individual shattered stories inside of a larger one.

The contradictions within these choruses show how such a mass event of trauma can be remembered in dramatically different ways. The lasting effects of the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl will never be fully quantifiable, but in reading the stories of the people affected, the reader is pushed to recognize the humans that have suffered and lost. In the chorus titled "People's Chorus", many accounts of childbearing and birth are spliced together with stories from doctors, schoolteachers, and nuclear liquidators. The

first two vignettes of this chorus provide a great example of contradiction, as the first vignette acts as a tale of unprecedented change, while the second explores the ways in which the response to the outbreak is an example of Soviet immutability. In the first account, a midwife discusses the distinct behavior of pregnant women who had been exposed to radiation: “such strange dreams. Women didn’t used to have such dreams. Or I never heard them. And I’ve been a midwife for thirty years” (139). Here, the disaster has brought about unprecedented consequences. The new dreams signify a distinct change in Chernobylites after the event. In the next account, a schoolteacher claims “but we always lived in terror, we know how to live in terror, it's our natural habitat” (138). To him, the Belarussians were prepared for the disaster at Chernobyl. He sees it as just another hardship for a people with a legacy of hardship. While one argues about the ways that reality has altered for Chernobyl mothers, the other argues that while the disaster did have negative effects, it did not change the psyche of Chernobylites. We, as people who are currently living through a horrifyingly effective global pandemic, should be able to understand that a societal crisis will bring about contradictory notions simultaneously. It is very understandable and even inevitable that a veteran midwife and a schoolteacher who prides himself in teaching patriots, would have different views of the continued effects of such a massively life-altering event. They both have different lived experiences, which contributes to different understandings of the unfolding of this reality. In their experience, they can both be correct. Chernobyl’s tragedy had long-lasting psychological effects on Chernobylites, but it may have also affirmed the Soviet soldier-like mentality of that generation of people. By placing these accounts in the same chorus,

Alexievich makes them meld together, providing a clear example of how the truth of life-altering events are not singular.

This is all brought together in the final passage of this chorus, where an old Chernobylite is reflecting on the state of Chernobyl years after the collapse. Because of the lingering effects of the nuclear outbreak, she realizes that her son, who is a student in a faraway city, has become so estranged from her lifestyle, that he does not have a home to return to. When describing a particularly gleeful holiday evening in modern day Chernobyl, her son responds,

> "Mom, I pictured the scene myself. It's crazy. That Chernobyl land, our house. The New Years tree is sparkling. And the people at the table are singing revolutionary songs… As if they haven't gone through the Gulag, and through Chernobyl." I [the mother] became frightened not for myself, but for my son. He has nowhere to come back to.
> (Alexievich 149)

Here, the importance of Chernobyl's destruction is depicted. To the son, peace and happiness for his people is unimaginable. Their futures are resigned to be a continuation of the initial suffering from these events. When his mother says that "He has nowhere to come back to", she is remarking upon the fact that to him, there is no future for Chernobylites as something other than the disabled products of nuclear destruction. In this way, a home is lost, and a place is broken and made stagnant in time. In comparing this passage to the previous two, one finds that the nuclear disaster altered locations, identities, and ideologies in many ways for these people. The cacophony of voices present in the chorus are extremely distinct, but they work together as surfaces, using

their differences to give a much more holistic perspective of the situation and its unfolding throughout time. These vignettes are small fragments of an individual's musings and experiences. Some understandings of the trauma and destruction of Chernobyl can be achieved through Alexievich's writing, not only because she interviews real people who have experienced it, but also because she allows those experiences to interact with one another, creating a profound, ever-shifting way of processing a tragedy that is impossible to directly fathom.

This style of narration is *mirrored* by Roy, who uses it in her own novel to describe the chaotic nature of revolt in India. This is best described in the scene depicting Jantar Mantar, a famous square in New Delhi where activists from different movements gather to protest side by side. In this scene, Roy jumps from group to group, explaining how violence and poverty has brought them to this chaotic square. In the span of sixteen pages, Roy explains the protests from the perspectives of more than twenty different people and groups. Their stories appear one after the other in what is initially an overwhelming experience for the reader. But as the reader acquaints themselves with this style of writing, it is revealed to them that the true value in this passage lies in the ways in which these people interact with each other. Some, who seem to be fighting for opposing things, come together to demean those who are considered lesser by society. As the reader continues to work their way through the glimpses into the lives of Jantar Mantar, a hierarchy of protest groups starts to reveal itself. This social hierarchy is based on class, gender, caste, as those who are denigrated by a higher-class group turn around and denigrate the ones lower than them. Even in protest, India is not able to escape its hierarchical transumptive systems in this scene in Jantar Mantar. However, all these

movements still gather in the same place, and display their dissent side by side. Even this display of resistance is multifaceted, with incongruous goals and a malicious underbelly of crime and suffering.

At this point, one may ask, if a resistance narrative is so predicated on being various and multifaceted, with no clearly identifiable overarching meaning attached to it, what is the point of the shattered story? The goal of the shattered story is resistance itself. The now globalized self-affirming autopoietic system that constitutes our reality sustains itself on the petrification of those it deems lesser-than-human. The shattered story fights this transumptive totality by eliminating the fetishization of suffering and eliminating the European imperial monopolization of objectivity. By affirming the humanity in all, the shattered story eliminates the idea that those who do not have privilege are historyless, and therefore, without agency.

All three of these novels depict characters whose identities are not overtaken by their trauma. They live through their trauma, and with the help of this fragmented form, undermine reductive understandings.

Homegoing begins with the character Effia, who is born in the Gold Coast of Africa during the commencement of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. Gyasi provides Effia with an understanding of the world that is unfamiliar to the Western reader. Effia uses descriptions and metaphors that are based in her culture and time period, and through this, Gyasi is able to bestow Effia with a form of intelligence that is uncelebrated in the modern world but nevertheless admirable to the reader. For example, when Effia first observes a white man, she observes that “his face was red, as though his neck were a stump of fire. He was fat all over and sweating huge droplets from his forehead and

above his upper lip. Effia started to think of him as a rain cloud: sallow, wet, and shapeless" (Gyasi 5). Here, the American reader is confronted with a description that is heavily nature based, with a perception that does not line up with the contemporary way of seeing the world. Yet, the language is extremely salient, as the reader not only understands what Effia means, but also understands the differences in her perspective from their own. In this way, the reader is forced to respect Effia's point of view, though it belongs to a drastically different reality from their own. This is made even more evident when James Collins, the British slaver and colonizer is introduced. As opposed to Effia, Collins seems to understand humans and the world as static binary symbols. By making Effia the protagonist of this chapter, Gyasi is able to question Collin's point of view through Effia throughout this section. When Collins accuses Effia of 'black magic', Effia argues that "she'd discovered that only the white men talk of 'black magic.' As though magic had a color" (23) Effia questions the kind of charged language that continues to target Black people to this day, and, in doing so, subverts a structuralist understanding of binaries. Effia continues: "The need to call this thing 'good' and this thing 'bad,' this thing 'white' and this thing 'black,' was an impulse that Effia did not understand. In her village, everything was everything. Everything bore the weight of everything else." (23) Effia's beliefs *mirror* that of Trinh's, appealing to a moral complex understanding of reality, one that is not controlled by standardization. She not only rejects simple binaries but produces an understanding of the world that revolves around relation. In saying that "everything is everything", Gyasi is able to convey a sense of unity and relationality in this understanding of reality. More importantly, Gyasi is able to make Effia a well-spoken, perceptive, and intelligent character without having her appeal to a Western

understanding of the world. By giving the reader a reliable likable character who asserts her non-western understanding of the world, Gyasi prepares the reader for the form of this shattered story that looks to break apart conventional reality.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the characters are fluid, ever-changing in their identity and suffering, therefore never allowing space for the fetishization of their suffering. This is most apparent in the novel's main protagonist, Anjum, a Hijra (a term in North India used to refer to those who are assigned the male gender at birth but do not identify with the distinction). Anjum's identity as an intersex hijra manifests itself in different ways throughout the novel, just as it would in reality. Her lifestyle is a product of the fact that she is from a marginalized and oppressed group in India, but she lives through this identity, understanding it as part of her existence in a journey to find the happiness she is in search of. When Nimmo Gorakhpuri, another Hijra, contemplates the state of the transgender people in the beginning of the book, she says

> *Arre yaar,* think about it, what are the things normal people get unhappy about?... Price-rise, children's school admissions, husband's beatings, wives' cheating, riots, Indo-Pak war- *outside* things that settle down eventually. But for us the price rise and school-admissions and beating-husbands and cheating-wives are all *inside* us. The riot is *inside* us. The war is *inside* us. Indo-Pak is *inside* us. It will never settle down, It *can't*. (Roy 22)

Here, Nimmo explains the capricious role that Hijras play in the Indian psyche. Referred to in the Indian legalese as the "third gender", Hijras usually live in communities together and must constantly negotiate their way through the strict gender binaries that so much of

Indian cultures uphold. The hijras in the novel have been so alienated by the rest of society, they refer to anywhere outside of the hijra community as the "Duniya" (13), meaning 'world' in Urdu, while places within the community are referred to as 'home'. Because this passage appears in the beginning of the novel when Anjum is young, the reader could anticipate that this foreshadows her struggles in the rest of the novel. In this sense, one envisions that Anjum will struggle with her identity for her whole life, fighting the constant war of the masculine and feminine sides of her personality. This passage represents a troublingly simplistic and transphobic fetishization of the hijra mentality. Yet, throughout the rest of the novel, Roy quickly undercuts this narrative. By the time Anjum becomes a prominent member of the Hijra community (which happens within the first chapter of the novel), the reader rarely sees her struggle with her gender identity. She remains alienated from conventional society for her whole life because of her hijra status, as she never has a typical job or committed lover, but nevertheless she continues to pursue the life she desires. Her most traumatizing experience comes in the form of living through a politically motivated Muslim massacre in Gujarat, where she survived simply because the Hindu murderers believed "killing Hijras brings bad luck"(66). Even when she settles in a graveyard, she is eventually left alone because the neighborhood is afraid of offending a hijra, who are known to have supernatural powers. However, the limited third person dialogue never delves into Anjum's internal struggle with her gender identity after the first chapter. This is because, while recognizing the ways in which her gender identity has oppressed her throughout her life, she is comfortable with herself and proud to be a Hijra. Indian society deems Anjum as 'injured', or at least alienated from the rest of the population, because of her intersex birth. If liberal universalism was to fetishize

this character, she would be locked within the picture that Nimmo puts forth early in the novel, weighed down by marginalization and unable to imagine a future for herself. However, Anjum pursues her wish to be a mother and creates a community for herself and others like her through the majority of the book. In this way, Roy makes Anjum a realistic character whose identity is grounded in the politics of her society and time. She refuses to make her characters into simple symbols and images, and by doing this, she embraces a more fluid understanding of her characters as beings rather than objects.

In *Voices From Chernobyl,* Alexievich challenges reductive symbolism through a storytelling that brings to light its absurdity. This is masterfully executed in the "Monologue About a Man Whose Tooth was Hurting When He Saw Christ Fall", where Alexievich transcribes an interview that she attributes to Arkady Kilin, an emergency liquidator in response to the 1986 disaster in Chernobyl. In his narrative, he refers to the Soviet flags that were placed by soldiers on top of the destroyed reactor that emitted the radiation that he was working to contain. He says that

> Just four days after the catastrophe the red flag was already flying over the fourth reactor. It blazed forth. In a month the radiation had devoured it. So they put up another flag. And in another month they put up another one. I tried to imagine how the soldiers felt going up on the roof to replace that flag. These were suicide missions. What would you call this? Soviet Paganism? Live sacrifice? (91)

The reductive storytelling of history literally blazes forth in this passage. The red Soviet flag is installed as a sign of control over the disaster. It is an attempt to take the trauma caused by the negligence of the government and rebrand it as bravery and savior heroism.

Additionally, the flag itself is given meaning through this transumptive chain. Only through transumptive chains can such a strong symbolism exist. This passage forces the reader to question the meaning and worth of this flag. After reading 91 pages of accounts of torment and mourning because of the deaths associated with the disaster, the reader is able to truly come to terms with the sheer importance attributed to symbolism in humanity's existence here. The Soviet government is not looking to uncover the ways in which this tragedy affected their citizens but rather capitalize on the situation that can be another avenue to display military valor. Kilin goes on to declare that he is recognized as a military hero for his efforts in Chernobyl, but in the moment, he could think of nothing except the fact that his wife had left him for another spouse.[8] This liquidator was willing to sacrifice his life not because of Soviet heroism, but because he had lost the will to live and needed something to do with his life. Even then, he did not choose to come to Chernobyl, he was forced by government officers. He describes the liquidators during the crisis as "nutcases, who didn't care about their own lives, and I had enough craziness myself but it wasn't necessary. I have medals and awards- but that's because I wasn't afraid of dying" (87). Before this passage was published, the speaker, and soldiers who shared his view were abstracted by their medals and awards, frozen in time as the heroes who saved the world from radiation poisoning. On the contrary, this is not the reality for this man, he looks back at himself much differently, and understands himself much differently. Yet, because of his political position, he had lost agency over his own experience, utilized to paint a picture of this tragedy that is much brighter. Alexievich

[8] The title of this monologue (Monologue About a Man Whose Tooth Was Hurting When He Saw Christ Fall) is itself based on a story that Kilin tells in his account. It is a parable by Leonid Andreev that talks of a man who could have seen Christ fall and rise again, but he did not register what was going on around him because he was focused on his tooth hurting.

portrays him, or whoever he represents, as a person who grows through time, and without this his point of view would be lost in tomorrow's history.

Alexievich concludes her book with an epilogue where she writes from her own perspective about the storytelling of Chernobyl:

> I often thought that the simple fact, the mechanical fact, is no closer to the truth than a vague feeling, rumor, vision. Why repeat the facts- they cover up our feelings, the spilling of these feelings past the fact is what fascinates me. I try to find them, collect them, protect them. (236)

"Simple fact" is an apparatus of domination and dehumanization. In looking past the facts, one can find liberation, acceptance, and empowerment in "feeling". Infinite worlds of culture, love, and suffering can be reached and validated through these shattered stories. Roy, Gyasi, and Alexievich all produce masterpieces of literature that repossess stories that have been submerged by history. By "finding, collecting, and protecting" these stories they are reconstructing the reality of the *homo narrans*, affirming the stories that make us human.

Chapter 4: Can We Listen?

The stories we tell are not just entertainment. They are us. Each human is a patchwork of stories, stories of culture, ancestry, country, and community, sewn together to make us *Homo narrans*, the storytelling species. When Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asks in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", she is asking if the stories of those who are most disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed by the predominant singular understanding of history can be understood as human instead of other. We are a patchwork of our stories. If the subaltern cannot be heard, we, as the intellectuals and academics of society, can never witness their humanity because we do not understand their reality. With a singular understanding, we succumb to a false reality that objectifies the subaltern and sustains itself off their disenfranchisement. With a singular understanding of history, we cannot witness the storytelling of those who are othered.

I do not know if the subaltern can speak. Speaking itself has an ableist connotation, so I must rephrase the question: Can the subaltern tell us their stories? With our globalized system of domination that can only fetishize suffering when it surfaces, such a thing is not possible, but with the shattered story, we can work to break the bonds that hold us. Shatter the violence of objectivity and collapse our own realities by engaging in meaningful dialogue with those who do not possess the same reality as our own. I do not know if the subaltern can tell us their stories, but the shattered story asks us: Can we even *listen*?

At the end of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, a dung beetle lies "on his back with his legs in the air to save the world in case the heavens fell" (444). Only through storytelling that is active in connecting all the world's contradictions can the most

disrespected of creatures rise to save us all. Only through storytelling can we find a future that unites us all.

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