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Brown Bleakness/Brown Greyness: A Textual Analysis of My Body in Australia

Abstract

Every visible sign of this body is coloured by the imagination of the gaze of its civilization¹ others. This body suffers/relishes in its very brown visibility. Black hair, black eyes and very brown skin evoke exotic images of Indian monsoons and at the same time signify the 'dark' unhistorical and mythical times of the writers of kama sutra. This body is also a site of contestations where different discourses compete with each other for dominance. These discourses make a spectacle, an obscene spectacle that displays maimed possibilities, incomplete events, anxieties of the state apparati, victories of the legalities, thwarted subversions, half-born counter-strategies, dynamic negotiations and unpredictable teleologies of fictional desires or desires for fiction - a counter-reality that is always waiting to foreground itself and replace the authorized reality.

SAEED UR-REHMAN

Brown Bleakness/Brown Greyness: A Textual Analysis of My Body in Australia

Do you know why one writes? To be loved.

Michel Foucault

I speak three languages, write in two
dream in one.

Kamala Das

Brown bleakness:

Every visible sign of this body is coloured by the imagination of the gaze of its civilizational others. This body suffers/relishes in its very brown visibility. Black hair, black eyes and very brown skin evoke exotic images of Indian monsoons and at the same time signify the 'dark' unhistorical and mythical times of the writers of kama sutra. This body is also a site of contestations where different discourses compete with each other for dominance. These discourses make a spectacle, an obscene spectacle that displays maimed possibilities, incomplete events, anxieties of the state apparati, victories of the legalities, thwarted subversions, half-born counter-strategies, dynamic negotiations and unpredictable teleologies of fictional desires or desires for fiction – a counter-reality that is always waiting to foreground itself and replace the authorized reality.

This is a body whose authorized, legalized, and monitored visibility in Australia, if one accepts the linearity of the bourgeois invention called 'time', can be traced back to the 8th of January 1996 with the technologies of surveillance, such as computers, photographs and other governmental and official apparati. This body has been subjected to (in)visible violence/coercion from the moment of its origin in Australia and the most notable sign of this violence is that this body is always sutured to a surveillance instrument called passport. Though the passport is an instrument which is external to this body, it operates in such a way that it infiltrates the material body and internalizes itself into memories and desires of the subject that inhabits this body. The internalization of this surveillance instrument is achieved through a battery of coercive practices, such as threats of deportation or removal from Australia and a complete rewriting/revision of the identity – from an authorized international/overseas student to an illegal alien. The process of

infiltration of the (de)humanized subject that is situated outside/inside this body is achieved with such insidiousness that the subject recognizes the validity of this instrument and often identifies itself with this and other state instruments and fears a complete dispersion and erasure of its identity at all public and private spaces without them.

Surveillance of this international student body aims at neutralizing all the possibilities of subversion and transgression in advance. It means that this body is subjected to/through its own visibility because it is monitored by the panoptical gaze of the state. The above statements operate on a certain amount of amnesia of the violence/coercion that this body has been subjected to before its visibility in Australia. I am aware of the difficulties to erase the continuities of coercion and surveillance that exist between the state of Pakistan and Australia but my purpose, at this moment, is to stage a textual analysis of my body as it enters a different racial and cultural discourse in white Australia.

Because of the laws of immigration and multicultural affairs in Australia, this body becomes a temporary and ephemeral body and the teleology of the (in)visibility of this body in Australia is fixed as well as revisable at the same time. If this body does not transgress the containing authorities and their prescriptive laws, such as a private health cover, and complies with the coercion, it remains unrevised but, still, always revisable. Because of the legal discourses regulating the overseas student body whose visibility in Australia is authorized with a temporary visa, this body has to be a 'full-time' student as long as it is in Australia. The number of working hours per week is also fixed as an international student body cannot work more than twenty hours in a week. Thus, the institutional and institutionalized sites where this body can remain visible and the temporality of the visibility are all measured. The cataloguing gaze monitors this temporal aspect of the institutionalized (in)visibility through the state taxation system.

If this body does not comply with the coercion it is always subjected to by the immigration laws of Australia, the identity and subjectivity of this body can be revised and the body can be rendered invisible from Australia in the similar manner as criminals are removed from public spaces. But there is a crucial difference in the ways in which a nativized criminal body is rendered invisible from public spaces and the ways in which an international student body is rendered invisible: an international student body can be deported or expelled out of Australia; whereas, a nativized body remains within the same state surveillance. The subject of this body can be dehumanized and objectified into an unwanted, unauthorized, fallen and contaminated body that must be expelled out of Australia. If this authorized visibility turns into an unauthorized visibility, the cataloguing gaze of the state assigns this body the status of an alien, a leper, a source of disease in the state of Australia. The institutional sites where this body can remain visible (i.e. a university

or workplace) can also change and this body can be put under even more obscene surveillance which will end only with deportation.

The (in)visibility of this body is coercively linked with the economies of a bourgeois state. These economies of authorization of visibility turn the visibility into a consumable product which the subject of this body can buy and consume by paying an upfront student fee as an international/overseas student. But despite the fact that this body consumes its visibility in Australia, the visibility is never fully possessed by it. The legal discourses that regulate and monitor the consumption of the visibility that this international student body has in Australia also brutally consume this body through non-educational state machinery by extricating more capital through medicines, train and bus fares, and health insurance.

The subjectification of an international student body by immigration and legal discourses of the Australian government and educational institutions happens in a different and more brutal manner than the subjectification of the nativized and immigrant bodies. It is this contradiction and brutal visibility of violence that I want to broach in this essay. I will continuously draw upon my body because my perception of my own body has changed after my arrival in Australia. There is another reason why I am performing a textual analysis of my body rather than anyone else's body or an abstract body. I do not want to speak on behalf of another body because representing or speaking for an-Other is a form of colonization. Colonial discourses often speak on behalf of the natives in such a way as if they were representing the Other only because the Other wants to be represented by them. This position is expressed in Karl Marx's sentence that Edward Said has used as an epigraph to his book *Orientalism*: 'They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented'. Though the desire to represent oneself does not place oneself in any extra-discursive space even if one desires to, there are still some possibilities of recuperating some unmapped or problematic spaces to exorcise the ghosts of the authoritative discourses that inscribe one's body and make (un)erasable grooves on its inside and outside. I speak with the awareness that this 'I' is a historical and cultural effect of my subjectivity and subjected ontology.

As an international student body from Pakistan, an ex-colonized country, in a white Australian university, this body experiences a web of discursive differences and relationships of institutional powers. It is in this abject subjectification of this body that all the post-Enlightenment discourses of humanist education of the West reveal their noble lies as they proceed onwards with their (post)capitalistic brutalities and coercions. Through its very brown visibility, this overseas student body ruptures the monolithic discourses of humanism as it experiences the unashamed violence. The postmodern decadence of Western civilization becomes even more visible when institutional sites of liberal-humanist

education have to create excessive laws, regulations, offices to monitor the trajectories and teleologies of a foreign body.

Brown greyness:

Though an international student body is subjected to an army of legal discourses, it is also a source of ruptures on the horizon of white Australia. During its temporary and temporal visibility, this brown international student body and the subject of this body can cause some ruptures in the dominant and homogenizing white Australia.

Though the threats of identity (such as the title of tag of an illegal alien and/or deportation) are extremely powerful, the possibilities of the mobilization of a counter-discourse also exist within the same discursive spaces. 'International Offices' in almost all Australian universities, which operate to ensure the consumption of a certain number of educational units by an international student body, are one of the many sites where a counter-strategy originates. There is an International Office at the University of Wollongong which this body has often frequented since its arrival in Australia. As this very brown body approaches the counter of the International Office, the subject of this body observes a metamorphosis in a white body when its civilizational Other suffers a momentary amnesia of all other vital bodily functions and turns into a gigantic Ear, an Auditory body, to receive the different accent and tonalities of intonation from this Other non-English speaking body. It is at such moments that the violence of the bourgeois state and its educational institutions turns upon its own instruments of power and turns their bodies into post-human dismembered bodies: only ears (coming forward to fully understand the spoken words), fingers (pointing silently to a direction), heads (nodding instead of saying 'yes').

The subject of this body can often rupture the syntactical and phonetic tyranny of the English language, the vehicle of colonialism, in different institutional sites to carve out a space for the visibility and arrival of the Other tongues. Though the state has measured the degree of fluency the subject of this body possesses before and for granting a visa through the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the state cannot force the subject to speak 'proper' English in all social contexts. Thus, language, the instrument of the law, the curriculum, the state and the moral code, becomes an important source for recuperating and asserting the radical otherness as it conjures up its own fictions and lies. The traces of other languages contaminate, infiltrate and disrupt the lingual and linguistic hegemonies through speaking their personal fictions which assert and empower their agency. The affected stutters, the conscious hesitations of the accent, the literal translation from native languages (Punjabi and Urdu) and fictional narratives about the culture of original country can all be used to subvert the monolithic structures of the bourgeois state of white Australia. The lie, as Spivak has illustrated in *The Postcolonial*

Critic, can mobilize a disruptive discourse that can help the marginalized subject carve out some (un)mapped territory. The functionality of the moral goodness of truth as an instrument of surveillance is suspended through fictions and lies that the subject of this body can create. Foucault has also pointed out the possibilities of mobilizing counter-strategies. He illustrates how the power that inscribes our bodies also turns our bodies into desirable bodies:

once power produces this effect, there inevitably emerge the responding claims and affirmations, those of one's own body against power, of health against economic system, of pleasure against the moral norms of sexuality, marriage, decency. Suddenly, what had made power strong becomes used to attack it. Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in the same body. (Foucault *Power/Knowledge* 1980, p. 56)

The fictions that this body can give birth to during its ephemeral visibility are not only the limit experiences of the subject of this body. The awareness of one's body also changes when one encounters the contingency of one's body in social situations. The relationships, interactions with class-mates and their awareness of the ephemeral visibility of this body in Australia are all the sites to launch counter strategies. The subject of this body is aware of the stereotyped image of the duplicity of people from the Indian sub-continent. This duplicity is a testimony that the technologies of surveillance of civilizational others cannot fully map all the possible actions of this body.

