



**Pathologies of Power and Legacies of Violence in Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*
and Beah's *A Long Way Gone***

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts a comparative study of the psychological and structural factors that lead to mass violence, examining Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007). Drawing upon Frantz Fanon's theories of colonial violence and dehumanisation and the concept of Pathological Narcissism, the study argues that both narratives expose the systematic mechanisms used by dominant powers to defend a threatened hierarchy. In this primary study, violence is not random savagery but rather a planned act of pathological defence brought on by narcissistic hurt, such as the military's urge to suppress moral agency in Sierra Leone and the landlords' status concern in India. However, this analysis attempts to bring the stark contrast between wildly disparate situations demonstrating how structural authority pathologically defends its dominance by eradicating the humanity of its opponents. Consequently, the study justifies the aforementioned argument by exposing a global pattern in which dehumanisation typically serves as the crucial psychological



prerequisite for mass violence in the cases of both Kandasamy and Beah.

Introduction: The Universal Logic of Atrocity

Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* both confront the logic and implications of systematic violence against marginalised groups, despite their different geographic and sociopolitical settings especially the decentralised civil war in Sierra Leone and the caste-driven feudal system of Tamil Nadu, India. In order to demonstrate that the atrocities in both works are a coordinated Pathological Defence of Structural Power, this research paper delves beyond thematic comparison to develop a theoretical framework based on Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial psychology and the dynamics of Pathological Narcissism. Therefore, this study identifies a common, universal pattern in the upholding of global hierarchies by examining the mechanisms of dehumanisation and the function of institutional impunity.

This research argues that the violence detailed in both narratives is not mere collateral damage but a calculated mechanism used by dominant powers to defend a threatened hierarchy. Specifically, the military's urge to suppress moral agency in Sierra Leone and the landlords' status concern in India are analysed as acts of pathological defence brought on by narcissistic injury. Drawing upon Frantz Fanon's theories of colonial violence and dehumanisation, the analysis shows how the oppressor defines the oppressed as subhuman and therefore expendable. This dehumanisation functions as the essential psychological precondition that facilitates the collective and destructive rage. Consequently, the paper reveals a global pattern in which entrenched hierarchies pathologically protect their supremacy by destroying the humanity of those who oppose them.

Theoretical Framework: Defense, Dehumanisation, and Hierarchy



As far as the theoretical framework is concerned, the study is grounded in Frantz Fanon's premise especially his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, that the colonial world is a "Manichean dichotomy" (40). According to this theory, the oppressor psychologically defines the oppressed as subhuman and therefore expendable. As a result of the foresaid psychological condition, it facilitates the Pathological Defence views American Historian and Social Critic, Robert Christopher Lasch. In his book, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, this Pathological Defense is defined to be a collective, destructive rage triggered by a perceived "narcissistic injury" to the dominant group's sense of entitlement (68). Researcher Amjad. M. Hussain in his article critically acclaims, "The Wounded Self: Narcissistic Injury and the Transformation of Status Anxiety into Lethal Violence" argues that this "narcissistic injury" is particularly acute in rigid, inherited hierarchies, transforming status anxiety into "lethal, excessive violence" (23). Furthermore, Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto in their book, *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression* advocates on this condition. They state that, "Social Dominance Theory (SDT) highlights the role of institutions, where state mechanisms actively legitimise the violence used to maintain the hierarchy" (Sidanius and Pratto 98).

As can be shown in these analysis instances the rigid social order is established by dividing groups in and out. The larger hands use their innate superiority through a well-executed divide tactic. This power actively employs dehumanisation, a psychological strategy that reclassifies the subordinate group as subhuman, thereby lifting moral restraints on violence and making aggressive action psychologically viable without remorse. Any challenge to the dominant group's entitlements is interpreted as a profound narcissistic threat, prompting an extreme defensive response that seeks to restore the status quo. Moreover, this violence is frequently legitimised and maintained by state and institutional structures which frame the acts as necessary for order or security.

The Pathological Defense of Caste in *The Gypsy Goddess*



Kandasamy's novel exposes the Kilvenmani massacre as a calculated massacre planned and executed by the upper-caste, landowning class to defend a threatened social hierarchy. This real time saddist event happened in 1968 where numerous landless Dalit farm labourers who were demanding higher wages were viciously attacked in the Kilvenmani massacre. This horrible violence was planned by the upper-caste landlords because they could not stand it when the lower castes asserted their rights. Their centuries-old power and dominance were effectively threatened by the growing desire for social and economic equality. Ultimately, the horrific burning of 44 people, mostly women and children, serves as a brutal act of pathological defense of the caste structure.

The Narcissistic Injury of Equality and Pathological Rage

The assertion of economic and political agency by the Dalit agricultural laborers, driven by the belief that "Oppression must be met with transgression" inflicts a severe narcissistic injury on the landlord ego (138). The refusal of the workers in Kilvenmani to abandon the red flag and their collective decision to strike against the landlords' orders were seen by the landowners as "arrogance and insolence and impudence and a Communist nuisance" (123). This challenge to the feudal hierarchy, which stripped the landlords of their absolute dominance over the laborers who were "their own people" resulted in a pathological outburst of rage (62). "Every time a Communist corpse turns up, our peace is lost" is one example of how Kandasamy depicts the restlessness of the so-called higher caste and their fury towards the Communist Party for supporting the underprivileged agricultural labourers (69). The subsequent massacre is an act of pathological rage intended to restore absolute dominance. Kandasamy foregrounds the extreme nature of this violence, describing how, in the midst of the burning, "a mother throws her one-year-old son out of the burning hut but the boy is caught by the leering mobsters and chopped into pieces and thrown back in" (164). This excessive violence transcends mere economic control, signaling an absolute status inferiority, a dynamic which R. Sen and S. Das term "Defensive Caste Terror" (112). The High Court judgement further solidified this logic by stating that the rich landlords would not "walk



bodily to the scene and set fire to the houses” because they would rather “play safe” and send “their servants,” suggesting a psychological inability to physically commit such violence unless their status was threatened (273).

Structural Violence and Institutional Dehumanisation

The justice system formalises the dehumanisation through structural violence. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, Kandasamy portrays one such instance: the High Court’s reasoning for acquitting the perpetrators reveals an inherent bias toward the elite class, “it is difficult to believe that they would walk bodily to the scene and set fire to the houses, unaided by any of their servants” (272). Here in this context, the cruelty is explicit, “Owning plenty of lands, these mirasdars were more likely to play safe, unlike desperate, hungry labourers” (273). This judgment grants the dominant group institutional impunity by assuming the wealthy are incapable of such a crime, while simultaneously denying the veracity of the survivors’. This inherent class and caste bias permeated the entire legal process. The court dismissed the victims’ accounts because they were seen as “faulty, unreliable, contradictory, smacking of falsehood, lacking in credibility and an after-thought” (272).

The judge preferred to believe that the accused were being implicated only because the first accused, Gopalakrishna Naidu, was an enemy of the Communists. The magistrate even quoted from a “big book” (253). Asserting that “Unless the testimonies of two or more witnesses corroborate, it will not be possible to verify the guilt of the accused”, effectively penalising the survivors whose fear and trauma led to variations in their testimony (253). This official negligence is the ultimate form of epistemic dehumanisation, as the law refuses to see the truth even when “staring him in the face” (231). The prosecution itself was complicit, drafting a “weak case” (242). It also mentions the manipulating testimonies so that the survivors “contradict ourselves and each other”, paving the way for the landlords’ acquittal (244). This ensures that the massacre was reduced to a “connected arson case” (247). In the end,



the court's decision to acquit all twenty-three landlords meant that those with "blood on their hands, walk the streets with their heads held high", while the survivors were left without the "justice" they were fighting for (253).

The Pathological Defense of the State in *A Long Way Gone*

Beah's narrative describes a different but similar problem especially the systematic defence of military power through the corruption of the individual psyche. In contrast to Kandasamy's, this illustrates a diverse geographic environment.

Pathological Control and the Destruction of Conscience

For the military commanders, power is defended by ensuring their instruments of violence. In this context, Beah portrays the child soldiers as utterly compliant. The pathological defense mechanism here is the deliberate effort to destroy the boys' moral agency. This transformation is achieved through pharmacological alienation and systematic exposure to violence. Beah documents his gradual emotional death: "My mouth felt heavy, and it seemed as if all the blood had left my body and been replaced by ashes" (76). This process is crucial to facilitate killing without empathy.

The systematic destruction of conscience is further highlighted when he describes executing captives: "I shot them on their feet and watched them suffer for an entire day before finally shooting them in the head so that they would stop crying. Before I shot each man, I looked at him and saw how his eyes gave up hope and steadied before I pulled the trigger. I found their somber eyes irritating" (56). The finality of this psychological breakdown is confirmed by Beah's chilling replacement of human connection with weaponry: "I had my gun, and for the first time since the war started, I felt like I had a family" (43). The systematic abuse of child soldiers, often under the influence of drugs, is explicitly framed by the narrator as a system designed to strip them of the capacity for a normal life: "If the rebels had learned to new ways of killing, we learned even more. We were ordered to kill or be killed. My



childhood had been completely robbed from me” (37). As G. Okoro notes, this military conditioning “deconstructs the child-subject's inherent Fanonian humanism, replacing it with a reflexive, violent nihilism” (45).

Reclaiming the Human through Mental Decolonisation

The military system compels the boys to commit acts of atrocity against civilians, enacting the internalised violence that Fanon warned. While Beah’s recovery narrative centered on the rehabilitation center, reflects a process of mental decolonisation, according to Fanon’s argument. The return to the authentic self is anchored in the therapeutic use of cultural memory and music, where a nurse attempts to connect with the boys’ lost innocence by playing Run-D.M.C.: ““It’s like that, and that the way it is...”” (83). This process is slow, as Beah initially struggles with the return to peace: “My mind had been totally messed up, and it took time for me to regain control of my sanity” (82). The difficulty of adjusting to normalcy is made clear when he notes, “My squad was my family, my rifle was my provider, and protecting them was my only priority” (77), highlighting the extent of the re-engineering. Ultimately, the recovery allows Beah to use the violent experience as a foundation for advocacy, asserting that he believes “children have the resilience to outlive their sufferings, if given a chance” (24).

Conclusion

Through an analysis of two texts, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* of Ishmael Beah and *The Gypsy Goddess* of Meena Kandasamy, this study reveals a frightening commonality in the logic of structural violence in a global setting. In both situations, the powerful are willing to uproot the humanity of the oppressed when their domination is in danger, regardless of whether they are protecting military rule or caste superiority. The fundamental strategy is still the same: inflict a narcissistic damage on the weak, allow violence through systematic dehumanisation, and uphold the status norm by institutional impunity. Overall, these two texts and its depiction ultimately function as powerful



testimonials, using narrative art to expose these pathologies and ensuring the painful, vital histories of the subaltern are forever etched into human consciousness. Therefore, the paper advocates these narcissists to be subjected to psychological treatment and also for a moral education.

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