

Political Violence and Necropolitics in Omar Shahid Hamid's *The Prisoner*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines violence and necropolitical experiences in the management of life and death in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi and its representation by Omar Shahid Hamid in his debut novel *The Prisoner* (2013). Pakistan's western border and the largest city Karachi have long been epicentres of violent actions in the backdrop of wars (for instance, the Soviet and the 'War on Terror') in neighbouring Afghanistan. The relationship of governing authorities with violence and necropolitics is analysed in the light of critical approaches from the works of Michael Foucault (2008), Achille Mbembe (2001 & 2003), Giorgio Agamben (1998 & 2005), and Judith Butler (2004). Through the analysis of the fictional narrative, this paper examines local and global deployment of various strategies of occupation, domination and subjugation that aims to manage human bodies through social, economic, political and religious discourses. This article argues that violence and death are used as a means of control over human bodies as represented in the novel, a situation in which some lives are disposable and are reducible to 'bare life' by state and non-state actors. Against this backdrop, the article highlights how some lives matter more than others in Karachi's political landscape. This article also suggests that the landscape in *The Prisoner* is an embodiment of what Agamben called the 'state of exception', a state where (some) people are deemed unworthy of life, and are therefore, removed. It is hoped that this article will be useful to understand complex issues of Karachi.

Keywords: Violence; necropolitics; state of exception; Karachi; Pakistani fiction

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the management of life and death in Karachi as represented by Omar Shahid Hamid, the serving police officer of the city, in his debut novel *The Prisoner*. The article examines the violent structures through which life and death are managed. The novel presents how political violence is used as a tool to control lives in the city of 16 million population. Through the analysis of *The Prisoner*, the paper argues that life in Karachi is managed through violent structures, theoretically speaking biopolitics has failed to regulate life and more violent apparatuses, which Mbembe (2003) calls necropolitics, have replaced it. The narrative explores the inner working of the city where death is sanctioned equally by the law enforcement agencies and the powerful gangsters of the city. Drawing upon Agamben's (1995) notions of *bare life* and *state of exception*, the article analyses the fictional characters shuttling between life and death and the way their bodies are managed through religious, political, linguistic, and geopolitical discourses, such as, for example, the imbricated narratives of the ethnic and religious minorities in Karachi portrayed in

in *The Prisoner*. In such situations, death is sanctioned through the suspension of juridical order and special acts to tackle the crisis threatening the state, and the sovereign prevails over the others.

The Prisoner represents how the politics of Karachi city become violent after the wars in the region. It examines how political violence increases in the city with the rise of a political party whose leader controls the city while he himself is in self-exile. Hamid as a serving police officer has the inside information about connection of politics and violence in the city. *The Prisoner* examines the nexus between ruling political party and the crimes in the city where the decisions of life and death are taken. It highlights how death becomes a mode of government and how decision of taking the life of ‘some’ in certain political situation is taken. The novel is set in a cramped city of more than 160 million people comprised of political rivals, gangsters, idealists, humanist, zealots and state forces besides commoners who witness the use of violence and death in everyday life.

The narrative shows political violence and killings at large scale by the United Front—the militant ruling party—and the Pakistan Intelligence Agencies. It seems that the situations such as Karachi in *The Prisoner* prove that the apparatuses and strategies of biopolitics and necropolitics are entangled and how represented life is subjugated to the power of death in Karachi. The use of weapons by the United Front and the torture cum death centres in the ward offices deny the people of Karachi their fundamental right to live and they in fact become the living dead. This is similar to the condition described by Foucault with context to holocaust. The power exercised by the United Front in the narrative proves significant notion of Mbembe that exceptional spaces are no more the only domain of military or governmentalized state and the private group can exercise the right to kill. They can create exceptional spaces and set the law aside which is evident in the context of Karachi in the novel. The regular army is no longer the only means to create exceptional spaces and to exercise the right to kill. The United Front is one of the Mbembe’s listed armies about whom he says that “Urban militias, private armies, armies of regional lords, private security firms, and state armies all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill” and here Karachi is that urban space where the workers of the ruling political party have their own small death-worlds (“Necropolitics” 32). The paper highlights the grounded political situation to show how necropower and necropolitics deal with the political situation represented in the novel.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An overview of significant theoretical research into both Anglophone Pakistani literature and necropolitical experiences of the world is given with a view to situating this research in relation to them. Cara Cilano’s *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation and State* (2013) is a significant work which explores and analyses Anglophone Pakistani fiction comprehensively. Cilano (2013) explores the ways in which the literary texts imaginatively probe the past, the present and the future. This work covers the literature from the time of the partition until the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Her focus is on how Pakistani fiction written in English portrays a sense of “what happened” at certain times in Pakistan’s history but does not deal with why that happened.

Muneeza Shamsie’s *Hybrid Tapestries: The Development of Pakistani Literature in English* (2018) divides Pakistani writers into pioneering writers such as Hanif Kureshi, Zulfikar Ghose, Tariq Ali and Sarah Suleri and young writers such as Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie and Uzma Aslam Khan. Similarly, Aroosa Kanwal’s *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction* (2015) discusses issues such as identities and notions of home,

issues which have changed for Muslims in the post-9/11 scenario. Kanwal (2015) links the stereotyping of Muslims and Islam in the West to the roots of current Jihadism and to the rebirth of ethnocentrism in the subcontinent and beyond. Concepts such as the globalization of Islam, Muslim identities before and after 9/11, the war on terror, nationhood and the impact of Zia's rule on contemporary Pakistan are discussed. Kanwal (2015) deals with the themes of identity crises, a sense of belonging, home and gender-related issues with the problems of communities suffering from pre and post 9/11 trauma. Peter Morey (2018) examines Islamophobia and its representation through Anglophone fiction.

Besides book-length studies, a considerable body of scholarship have been produced on Anglophone Pakistani literature around the globe. For example, Claire Chambers (2011), in her article, "A Comparative Approach to Pakistani Fiction in English", compares contemporary Pakistani fiction with that of other Muslim countries. She attempts to clarify the concept of Muslim Umma by analysing and comparing different works from South Asia, Arab countries and Africa. She concludes that, although the works belong to different regions, they could be categorized under one cannon as Muslim literature. Debjani Banerjee (2020) analyses British Muslim identities in Anglophone Pakistani fiction. The most recent work on fictional representation of violence and politics is of Ahmed (2021) who analyses the fiction of Fatima Bhutto and Jamil Ahmad in the context of tribal region of Pakistan. He argues that more violent structures have replaced the old traditional structures of tribal region between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In short, Anglophone Pakistani fiction contributes to political, regional and global discourses.

Besides books and research articles a great number of research theses have been written on Anglophone Pakistani literature in different universities around the world but there has been little research carried out into such literature that looks at necropolitics and political violence in the context of Karachi. However, Morton's (2014) article explores the sovereignty of the Indian government over Kashmir and her necropolitics at the line of control; Davies, Isakjee and Dhesi's (2017) article concerns the necropolitical experiences of refugees in Europe; Dehm (2020) explores the necropolitical experiences of refugees at border crossings; Stumer (2018) also explores border politics and necropower in Europe; Estevez (2018) highlights the necropolitics at the US-Mexican border; Cerecer (2020) also explores necropolitics at the San Diego-Tijuana border between the US and Mexico; and Allinson's (2015) article about the US necropolitics of drones are some of the more recent publications describing necropolitical experiences in different parts of the world. Jahangeer and Rizwan (2018) analyse *Invisible People*, a collection of short stories by reconceptualising human rights through biopolitical and necropolitical lenses and highlight the failure of biopower to regulate human rights in Pakistani society. The analysis of *The Prisoner* is significant in its attempt to highlight the nexus of politics and violence in Karachi, which has witnessed extremism and terrorism in the past three decades, as portrayed by Hamid.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The major axes of my interpretation of the management of life come from Foucault's (2008) *The Birth of Biopolitics*, in which he presents the concepts of biopower and biopolitics as means of examining the relationships between power structures. Foucault (2008) argues that the life of an individual is controlled and managed through biopower and biopolitics but that actually it is the whole population which is the target of the art of governmentality. Biopolitics governs individuals through a certain number of disciplinary procedures, for example, "military technology and

technology of police” (Foucault, 2008, p. 106) and takes control of the management of individuals to control populations. Military technology deals with other states and police technology strengthens the state from within. He also describes the techniques of “police science”, which develops biopolitics to treat populations as a mass of living and co-existing beings (Foucault, 2008, p. 106).

Nevertheless, biopolitics, which deals with the management of lives may not be sufficient to deal with the populations whose lives are considered disposable, as shown in *The Prisoner*. A similar condition is discussed by Mbembe (2003) in “Necropolitics”, in which he, while departing from Foucault’s (2008) notion of life as an essential element of power, discusses politics as a form of war. He argues that biopolitics is no longer sufficient to explain contemporary relations of power. Unlike biopolitics which governs from the perspective of the production and regulation of life, necropolitics regulates life from the perspective of the production and regulation of death. Therefore, he proposes looking at death-worlds and the importance of necropower in the construction of political, financial and public relations. When death-worlds are created, power does not target life but death.

In *The Prisoner*, death-worlds are created by state and non-state actors to maintain their positions of dominance through political and religious groups to accomplish the project of physical elimination. People in Karachi are eliminated through political, linguistic and religious groups to keep their domination — a complex interface that I intend to explore in this article. This is why Mbembe (2003) asserts that biopolitics is not adequate to deal with the political reality of the contemporary world. It is precisely against this backdrop that this paper analyses *The Prisoner* in order to highlight the ways life and death are managed. In the management of 160 million people in the city, violence and death are used as tools by the sovereign to maintain their power and domination. The causes of such situations might be deeply rooted in the military interventions against Afghanistan which resulted in large migrations of extremist groups into Pakistan, which, in turn, has led to thousands of people perishing in suicide attacks, target killings, sectarian violence and military operations across the country. In such situations, the elimination of some lives is justified in the name of the public good; the eliminated lives do not matter. Here Mbembe’s (2001, p. 25) idea of “the right to dispose” is useful in describing postcolonial situations where individuals are deprived of their humanity and their right to live. He discusses colonial and postcolonial situations where some lives are worthy of full rights but others are disposable and can be removed.

Agamben (1998), too, argues that the state of exception decides that some bodies are disposable and reducible to “bare life” (p. 47) whilst others are not. The “bare life” is in contrast to natural life — rather it is a politicised form of natural life — a life which is exposed to death, especially by way of sovereign or political violence. The inhabitants of Karachi are denied at times basic human rights; for example, in the name fighting against terrorism, military operations in Karachi kill thousands of people and the intelligence agencies act as sovereign. Butler (2004) and Agamben (1998 & 2005) explore the concept of sovereignty, which is useful in the analyses of the represented Karachi as means of analysing who is operating above the law. Butler (2004) examines the relationship between sovereignty and contemporary political issues in the context of the historical conditions that characterised US politics after 9/11 and the situations afterwards. She takes Guantanamo and the Iraq war as exceptional conditions where political management takes on a new form of sovereignty. Butler (2004) examines her notion of sovereignty in the context of American conditions whereas Agamben (1998 & 2005) discusses it in relation to the state of exception. He examines the notion as a political category where sovereign exercise the power by

setting the law aside to create certain conditions. He discusses the relationship between exceptional spaces and sovereignty, where these spaces are excluded from the normative juridical power: “The exception is a kind of an exclusion” (Agamben, 1998, p. 18). The idea of a state of exception is significant in the analysis of situations represented by Hamid.

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE NOVEL

The Prisoner is a story of a cramped city of more than 16 million people comprising political rivals, gangsters, idealists, humanists, zealots and state forces as well as commoners, who witness the use of violence and death in everyday life. The novel is set in Karachi and the narrative begins with the kidnapping of an American journalist named Jon Friedland by a group of religious extremist days before the official visit of the American President. All the law enforcement agencies work together for the safe recovery of the journalist. The main characters are two police officers: Constantine D’Souza, a Christian police officer, and his former colleague, Akbar Khan, who is imprisoned for a crime he did not commit and whose professional capabilities and contacts are necessary to trace down the kidnapped journalist. Through these characters, the author navigates the streets of Karachi, where they encounter the gangsters of the city including the militants of the ruling political party, the United Front. The United Front is headed by Don, who is in self-exile in New York and controls the city from there.

The narrative is based on true events and the personal experience of the writer as he is a serving police officer in the city. His in-depth knowledge and deep understanding of the policing in the city enable him to cover all the aspects of urban-terrorism-related issues. He portrays that the nexus of law enforcement agencies, political parties and religious extremism lead to the loss of thousands of lives. The other main characters include Nawaz Chandio a politician, the city’s Don in exile, IG Dr Death, Home Minister Pakora and officials from the Intelligence Agencies. The narrative includes political violence and killings on a large scale by the United Front—the militant ruling party—and the Pakistan Intelligence Agencies. The use of weapons by the United Front and the torture-come death centres in the ward offices deny the people of Karachi their fundamental right to live.

VIOLENCE AND NECROPOLITICS IN *THE PRISONER*

Violence and necropolitics are significant themes on which to base an examination of the contemporary Pakistani political structures in the novel as a backdrop to its participation in wars in neighbouring Afghanistan (both the Soviet war and the war on terrorism). Hamid (2013), in his debut novel *The Prisoner* shows how sovereignty creates figures such as *homo sacer* and *bare life* and how different spaces are created where decisions regarding life and death are taken (Agamben, 1998 & 2005). Through the analysis of *The Prisoner*, this article shows how death becomes a mode of government and how sovereign decides to take the life of ‘some’ in certain political situations in the city. In the analysis of the novel, this research focuses on highlighting the grounded political situation to show how necropower and necropolitics reflect the political reality of Karachi. In order to analyse their role in violent management practices, the use of violence and death in the narrative can be divided into two categories: state (police and intelligence agencies) and non-state (political parties and religious groups).

INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES AS AN EMBODIMENT OF SOVEREIGN

The role of intelligence agencies in the narrative is that of the Sovereign, as they operate above the law and with unlimited powers (Mbembe, 2003, p. 12). There are two agencies which Hamid (2013) refers to in the narrative: “Kallaey (Black) Gate Wallahs (residents) and the Bleak House Wallahs” (p. 36). Major Rommel and Colonel Tarkeen are the representatives of these Agencies and are working with police officials to resolve the case of kidnapping of the American journalist Jon Friedland. Hamid (2013) highlights how military officials consider themselves superior and interferes in the jurisdiction of the police department without any judicial or legal cover. For example, Major Rommel asks the Superintendent of the central jail, Constantine D’Souza, to hand over a prisoner in these words: “Mr D’Souza, you are to hand over one of your prisoners, No. 2377, Akbar Khan, to my custody” (p. 10).

The cover the military official uses here, and in most of the cases of the sovereign assuming power, is national urgency, for which any law can be set aside and the sovereign can operate without any fear. As the Major states: “My associate will go and fetch him and I am to interrogate him on the matter of the *utmost* national urgency” (Hamid, 2013, p. 10). National security and the national urgency are used as tools at the hands of the sovereign to implement their agendas to manage human populations. Butler (2004) describes a similar situation when, “In the name of security alert and national emergency, the law is effectively suspended in both its national and international forms” (p. 52). This secret interrogation which the Major demands in the name of national security and emergency, and that too outside the prison, shows that the army personnel have unlimited powers in the city of Karachi and can take anyone from anywhere without taking the law into account. To this demand of the Major, the author being part of the police force, highlights the issue through his character by saying:

To take him without any court order, no paperwork? And for interrogation? He understood very well what an ‘interrogation’ entailed. But who was responsible if something happened to the prisoner? The bloody two-bit major was ordering these things as if he was the ultimate authority.
(p. 10)

These questions which are being asked in the mind of the police officer, and his evaluation of the situation, are important here as a way to begin examining the relationship of the two state forces and the power they hold in *The Prisoner*. The situation is further explained when the police officer refuses to hand over the prisoner, quoting the law as not permitting it and the reaction of the Major is quite informative for the readers:

Look here, you bloody civilian, who do you think you’re dealing with? I am not some village idiot off the street. I know exactly what’s going on here. All of you bloody police people are corrupt! Let me tell you, if I don’t get some cooperation from you, I will call Colonel Saleem in the Accountability Bureau to investigate you. I have heard all the stories about corruption in the jail. Taking money from people just to have their home-cooked food delivered to them, or for them to have an extra five-minute meeting with their families. I’m sure the Accountability chaps will be interested in knowing how you can afford to wear that expensive Rolex wristwatch on your government salary.
(Hamid, 2013, p. 12)

The attitude and the language used by the military official with a senior police officer reflect the way the sovereign deals with such issues. The display of power by the military official here is termed by Butler (2004) as, “the executive power”, which constitutes sovereignty (p. 62).

A similar situation occurs when the Major meets the prisoner, Akbar Khan, who himself is a police officer and has been jailed for the last two years and who also used to work for the Agencies, and refuses to help in the matter of solving the kidnapping case of the American Journalist. Akbar Khan's reply to the Major when he asks him to help for the sake of country's honour is again significant in determining how security, honour and similar tools are used to tackle issues through unlawful means. When Major tries to threaten and blackmail him using patriotism and nationalism, Akbar Khan replies:

I am not some child still suckling at his mother's breast! I know how your people work and how long they've been raping the "nation's honour" as if it were some two-bit randi (prostitute) standing at the street corner. You people use words like "honour" and "country" to get people to do what you want them to do, then throw them away like a used condom! I'm one of your condoms too! Tell Tarkeen I haven't forgotten that!
(Hamid, 2013, p. 21)

This conversation between the Major and the imprisoned police officer reflects how the Agencies have been operating as the representative of the sovereign and dealing not only with officers in the police department but with other people in the city, legally or illegally, and abandoning them when they are done with their tasks, as happened with Akbar Khan. Now there is a high-profile American journalist kidnapped by some religious extremist group, who will be assassinated on the visit of the American President, and therefore, Akbar Khan's abilities and contacts are required to help them to find and save the American journalist. The handling of army personnel with the police officers also suggests the extent to which they could go in dealing with the commoners in the city. The agencies operate above the law and create figures of "bare life" and "homo sacer" through forced disappearances and torture-come death cells in unknown places in the city.

VIOLENCE AND NECROPOLITICS OF THE UNITED FRONT

A private parallel political force which actually turned the city into a death-world is the United Front, the ruling political party in the province. Before this political party, the city seemed to be managed through social and biopolitical structures without any violence as described by DSP D' Souza to Major Rommel when he visits the prison to meet Akbar Khan:

Back when Akbar and I started out, policing was very simple. Burglars, pickpockets, the odd phadda (fight) at the university. Simple criminals for a simple time. We were junior officers and when our Station In-charge sent us out into the field, we would round up a few miscreants, slap them around and that was the end of it. The only weapon they had were knives and knuckledusters.
(Hamid, 2013, p. 23)

This description of Karachi city indicates that it has been a very calm and peaceful city where there were no significant signs of 'subjective violence' (Žižek, 2007). The groups challenging and working against the state were under control and the police department was able to regulate and control the life of people in the city, as suggested by what DSP D'Souza goes on to say: "All the big badmashes (gangsters) of Karachi were tough guys in front of ordinary people, but when the lowliest head constable summoned them to the thana, they meekly obeyed" (Hamid, 2013, p. 23).

However, after the United Front, Karachi became in which the police force is the least capable of fighting the criminals. The United Front arrives as a major force that not only challenges

state institutions such as the police but also decides the fate of the people of the city through violent apparatuses and turns itself into a form of government controlling and regulating the life and death of the people of the city. The politics of the United Front is violent; they control everything through torture, kidnapping and target killings. The way this political party operates is explained as:

Their leader, the Don...created the wards and ward bosses where crews of young men who were supposed to create a party structure at the very basic neighbourhood level. But in reality, they created a parallel government where they had the power of taxation, dispute resolution, punishment, even life and death, over the citizens of the city. That's when the terror began.
(Hamid, 2013, p. 23)

As described above, the peaceful, progressive city turned violent after the United Front is set up and starts controlling the life of people as the sovereign ruling body. All the state institutions and the general public seem to obey them and they can go to any extent in breaking the law of the country, challenging the state and the state institutions, without any fear of reprisal. Rather, all the forces responsible for enforcing the law and the writ of the state seem to work for this political party. Even in educational institutions, violence has begun to show itself, Hamid (2013) writes: "The campus violence began between the UF boys and everyone else. Things got nastier after that—massacres on buses, firing between rival groups, target killings" (p. 24). This violence and the large-scale killings by the United Front represent the spaces where necropower operates and the party controls the whole city as its sovereign. The British Broadcasting Corporation writes, on March 27 2011: "775 people died in political and sectarian shootings and bomb attacks in Karachi in 2010. Although the government puts the figure lower, at about 500 people, Karachi has become a perilous place" (n.p). Similarly, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan writes in their annual report of 2009, "Political violence between rival political parties continued during the year. There were 256 targeted killings in Karachi alone.

Those killed included 69 members of the MQM, 60 from MQM-Haqiqi, 28 from the PPP, and 23 from the ANP and other political parties." (n.p). The state, on the other hand, which is sovereign in normal circumstances, is perhaps unable to cope with the power the new political party has achieved through modern ammunition smuggled through Afghanistan via tribal areas. The police officer compares the situation with that of the past in his own way: "I remember the only rifles we had in the police station were World War II surplus rifles. I still remember their name—303 Lee Enfield. But none of us was prepared for the wave of violence that swept this city over the next few years" (Hamid, 2013, p. 24). The power and influence of the United Front, which was originally founded at a university, spread throughout the city and then actually came to power and the whole city witnessed the necropower of this political party.

Their only way of controlling the people of city was the threat that they could be killed anytime, anywhere by their militant wing. People's lives and deaths are regulated by these political workers and they seem to create spaces where necropower operates in an unlimited way by setting the existing laws of the country aside. How they governed the city is described by Hamid (2013) as:

When the UF first came to power, it was as if a mafia had taken over the city. Their rule was absolute. They crushed anyone who stood in their way. They made fake cases against their opponents and had them locked up. But all politicians do that. The UF went further than anyone else. They had hit squads to bump off their rivals. No case could be registered against their workers in any police station... The ward bosses extorted money, ran gambling dens, carried weapons openly, kidnapped people's daughters.
(p. 24)

This description of the city after the United Front came into power proves how exceptional conditions are created by political workers and how “bare life” is created. They seem to have sovereign power to decide who matters and who does not. The law is set aside and target killings of those who are, to them, not worthy of life are eliminated. Not only is the law set aside, but the law enforcement agencies such as the police are corrupted and people are given posts by the ruling political party to serve their interests.

Therefore, instead of enforcing the law, the police work for the political party and provide a cover for their dirty deeds. The Sub-Inspector Ali Hassan tells his senior how he got posted to a particular station: “Do you know how many times I had to go sit outside the ward office to get my posting here” (Hamid, 2013, p. 29). All the postings and transfers are done through the ward offices of the United Front.

The ruling party, the United Front, seems to possess the powers of a sovereign body in the context described by Hamid (2013), in which death, target killings and the tyranny of this political party divides the power between government authorities and their political workers to dominate the city’s population and control them through torture, rape, persecution and bombs. Targeted killings are used as the main apparatus of governmentalisation through the militarization of political workers. It seems that human rights violations in the city are the result of the necropolitics of the United Front, run by their Don from New York. For example, the DSP D’Souza tells a story of a girl and the role of police silence:

I remember, one day I was the duty officer at Preedy Police station and an old man came into the station, crying that his daughter had been kidnapped by the local UP ward boss because he fancied her. The old man sat in front of me on the station floor all day, crying and begging us to go with him, to try and save his daughter from getting gang-raped. We even knew which room of which building they were fucking her in. But none of us did anything because they were in power.

(p. 25)

Therefore, in this context, it can be argued that the perpetrator of these violations are not only the political gangsters but also the law enforcement agencies such as the police because they are equally involved or do not intentionally prevent such violations. In this context, the biopower and governmentalisation constitute biopolitics and necropolitics to regulate life in the city. There are layers of power structures which at different levels decide the fate of the people living in the city. The United Front, the police officials and the intelligent agencies are the main players working in a sovereign capacity at different points in the narrative and carrying out large-scale extra-judicial killings of one another and of other groups working in the city. This triangular power structure can be easily understood from the explanation of the complex situation given by the police officer D’Souza to his colleague when he is afraid of his death at the hands of the United Front’s gangsters. D’Souza explains:

These UF madarchods (mother fuckers) aren’t the final authority on life and death in the city. There are forces more powerful than them also...

Arre Chutiya (Oh idiot), I am not talking about God, I am talking about the agencies—the Kaaley (black) Gate wallahs (residents) and the Bleak House wallahs...

Arre baba (Oh boy), the Agencies are never under any party or government. They are above the government. They decide who gets to rule and who doesn’t. And if they have decided that they are not happy with the UF, then it means these ward thugs are on their way out.

(Hamid, 2013, pp. 7-36)

This explains the complex power structure of the city, which two intelligence agencies being considered to be in the top position of power and deciding on the mode of government. They hold unlimited power and decide who matters and who does not. The second most powerful group is the United Front, which operates as a mafia in the city. They possess advanced ammunition used by armed forces on the battlefield. They also have private death cells where they take those who do not obey. Businessmen are kidnapped for ransom; women are raped and police officials are targeted freely. Hamid (2013) describes one of the ward houses: “The UF has a massive ammunition dump there, living quarters for their men and torture chambers in the basement” (p. 44). This is how the party operates in the city and all is done through government machinery because they are in government, and, therefore, no institution can question them about their actions and any attempt to do so is met with retaliation. The party also has a hierarchy in which the Don is in the top position with absolute power and controls the city from New York. His words are the final authority in every matter; if he asks for someone to be killed, the person won’t last for the next minute because “the Don’s word is law in this city” (Hamid, 2013, p. 59). The city is a perfect example of a modern state where power is institutionalised and it is used for subjugation.

Foucault (2008) identifies three different types of power working in a society: bio, disciplinary and sovereign, each of which has different strategies and apparatuses. Similarly, in *The Prisoner*, the triangle of the United Front, the police department and the security agencies use different strategies and techniques as classified by Foucault (2008). Sovereign power is exercised through judicial and disciplinary means. Biopower, on the other hand, operates differently; the sovereign body sets objectives and uses different tools and the emphasis is on the management of life, deciding whether to allow people to live or let them die. Biopower controls the lives of people through different processes such as birth, diseases and different policies which regularise life. The focus of biopower is not to target life directly but to control it in indirect ways— in other words, through government. Castro (2004) defines governmentality as a set of tactics used by different organisations to control populations through political economy and security apparatuses. It even targets peoples’ particular actions such as their specific desires for something. Foucault (2008) differentiated between political governmentality and other types by declaring political governmentality to be “Governmentalization of the state” (p. 460). This combines the apparatuses of dominion with the apparatuses affecting individuals such as those motivating people to focus on their fitness, to get health insurance or to have a particular life style. Castro (2004) calls this a shift from the sovereign state to the managerial state.

Hamid’s representation in the *The Prisoner* does not reflect the management of life aimed at the apparatuses discussed above. It seems that these apparatuses and tools to regulate life are not relevant in the case of Karachi because in these situations the governmentalisation of the state seems to focus more on death instead of regulating life through biopolitical apparatuses. The way the United Front, the police force and the Agencies in the narrative operate, the target is not to regulate lives of people through managing their motivation and health and so on, but to control them through violent apparatuses targeting their life and creating fear among them. This is another form of politics, mostly operating in the third world, which Mbembe (2003) calls *necropolitics* (p. 3) and Valencia (2010) calls the *politics of death* (p. 140). *The Prisoner*, which represents the lives of people living in Karachi and governed through the politics of death, depicts the different techniques and strategies of domination and the consequences from the world which only adopts biopolitics as a form of governance. The point here is not that biopolitics and necropolitics are opposite categories but to show the significance of the distinction in order to highlight the

differences between the regulation of life and the regulation of death; in the context of *The Prisoner*, the difference is obvious.

It seems that a situation such as that in Karachi in *The Prisoner* prove that the apparatuses and strategies of biopolitics and necropolitics are entangled and how represented life is subjugated to the power of death in Karachi. The use of weapons by the United Front and the torture-come death centres in the ward offices denies the people of Karachi their fundamental right to live—they, in fact, become the living dead. This is similar to the conditions described by Foucault (2008) in the context of the holocaust, where necropolitics operated instead of biopolitics. The power exercised by the United Front in the narrative contextualises Mbembe's (2003) assertion that exceptional spaces are no longer the only domain of the military or the governmentalized state but that private groups can exercise the right to kill; they can create exceptional spaces and set the law aside, which is evident in the context of Karachi in the novel. The regular army is no longer the only means of creating exceptional spaces and of exercising the right to kill. The United Front is one of Mbembe's (2003) listed armies, about which he says: "Urban militias, private armies, armies of regional lords, private security firms, and state armies all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill" (p. 32); in the novel, Karachi is that urban space where the workers of the ruling political party have their own small death-worlds. Mbembe (2003) further explains that the production of such necro-empowered groups with advanced technologies of killing can create similar situations such as ghettos and plantations anywhere and this is the case under discussion in the context of Karachi.

The Prisoner discusses illegal detentions by the United Front as a space of oppression where they operate as a parallel state through necronologies (necropower and technologies) to control, maintain and profit through killings, abductions and tortures. They operate as a sovereign state and it seems that the ruling party through its political workers has taken over the city completely and govern the city by exploiting the basic fundamental rights of its citizens. They collect huge amount of finances through extortion and kidnapping in the guise of providing citizens with private security. This is not only the case for the common citizens but also for the police officials who pay money and obey the ward bosses for their own safety and security but who are tortured and exposed to death if they challenge authority. Moreover, the bodies of the citizens are used as commodities; women are used for sexual pleasure and exchanged with favours from the government officials. A ward boss, Ateeq Tension, is example of this; he repeatedly raped the daughter of a police officer in front of her mother. There are many such instances where woman bodies are used as commodities, at another point, the Home Minister is provided with two girls for sexual pleasure by the SHO on the call of a ward boy. If they (girls) are going to resist or disobey, they will be eliminated and this fear makes them work for them for the sake of their lives.

The necropolitics in Karachi produces a war-like situation where there are multiple groups fighting and killing one another. The police, the United Front, religious groups and the state agencies are in a state of war with one another. Akbar Khan describes the situation thus: "It's the law of the jungle out there. Either we survive, or they survive" (Hamid, 2013, p. 87). The police force is fighting with the gangsters of the ruling party and other criminals of the city. All of them exercise unlimited powers in different conditions and as a result people are exposed to violence and death. The bodies eliminated by these groups have to be analysed differently from their perspectives. At one point it matters to one party and does not matter to another. For example, when a ward boss is killed by Akbar Khan, the whole party reacts against his murder and government ministers go to the head of the police, the Inspector General who calls Akbar Khan and tells, "They say that their activist was killed extra judicially. He was the nephew of one of the

MPs” (Hamid, 2013, p. 86). It is worth noticing that the person eliminated was the nephew of an MP, he is therefore more important to them and the reaction against his murder is unprecedented. On the other hand, there are other killings of ward boys by police which get almost no reaction. In this way, there are lives which matter more than others not only for the United Front but it also applies to other bodies in the city. For example, the whole narrative revolves around solving the kidnapping of a journalist who happens to be an American and this demonstrates how the life of the American journalist is more important than an ordinary journalist or citizen. Similarly, for the police, some criminals matter more than others. They go after them with full force and kill them extra judicially. The phenomenon of who matters and who does not is a complex one. Necropolitics operates in this way in conditions like those in Karachi where some people are more worthy of life than others and the sovereign exercises the power in deciding who matters and who does not. Apart from death and violence, the gloomy underworld of Karachi represented in the novel is a complex blend of gangsters, corrupt government officials, filthy politics and religious radicalism. All these groups operate through autonomous systematic apparatuses but are interlinked.

CONCLUSION

The examination of *The Prisoner* shows that the life in Karachi is not controlled through biopolitical structures but, rather, that violent apparatuses are used by state and non-state actors to maintain their dominance. Mbembe’s (2003) claim that biopolitics is not adequate to deal with the contemporary issues of the world proves true in the context of Karachi represented in *The Prisoner*. The research confirms that violence and death are used as tools to regulate and control a population by the sovereign. The political violence in the city increases with the rise of the United Front. The power exercised by the United Front in the narrative proves what Mbembe (2003) asserts that exceptional spaces are no longer only the domain of the military or the governmentalized state and that private groups can exercise the right to kill; they can create exceptional spaces and set the law aside, as shown by Hamid in the novel.

The connection between politics and violence is very deep. It is shown that the ruling political party through its militant wing decides the fate of people, whether they live or die. Moreover, the research highlights how death can become a mode of governing and how decisions to take the life of ‘some’ in certain situation by certain groups can be justified. In such conditions, the apparatuses and strategies of biopolitics and necropolitics are entangled and represented life is subjugated to the power of death in the city. It is also revealed that not only do the state institutions regulate life, but private armies such as the militant groups of the United Front also work as agents of the sovereign. This study, in fact, explores the relationship between politics and violence and its representation in *The Prisoner*. The article contributes by examining the represented Karachi from a different perspective and it is a humble effort in the existing scholarship in the area. The representation of Karachi in print, electronic and social media over the last few decades are significant areas of future studies in this field.

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