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## **INTRODUCTION: HOPE AND UTOPIA IN GLOBAL SOUTH LITERATURE**

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**Abstract:** Within academic disciplines, the category of Global South is highly contested with no agreements on the definition of the term. One cannot deny the amorphous nature of the term, yet its gravitational pull can be potentially effective in connecting the different forms of ongoing exploitation – both of humans and more-than-humans. This special issue aims to focus on how to think of the episteme of the Global South in ways that could be enabling, liberating, capacious enough to sharpen our imaginative and performative utopian lens.

**Keywords:** global south, hope, utopia, periphery, episteme

Antonio Gramsci popularised the use of the term “South” in the context of capitalist exploitation. In his essay, “Some Aspects of the Southern Question” (1926), Gramsci sums up the core problems underlying the existence of the South. He contends,

the South is the ball and chain which prevents the social development of Italy from progressing more rapidly; the Southerners are biologically inferior beings,

semibarbarians or total barbarians, by natural destiny; if the South is backward, the fault does not lie with the capitalist system or with any other historical cause, but with Nature, which has made the Southerners lazy, incapable, criminal and barbaric...

(Gramsci 4)

Although Gramsci's formulation refers to the southern part of Italy, one has to agree that "the South" continues to be characterized by the problems Gramsci identifies. Immanuel Wallerstein's 'world-system' theory foregrounds the division of the world into two categories – 'core' and 'periphery.' Admittedly, the 'core' turns out to be the untenable mindset of coloniality that drives and underpins neo-imperialism, thus deflecting the profits and security measures towards the North. The imagination and structuration of the South work to erode the democratic rights and human rights of its people. While the march of the North remains unchecked and self-directed, Southern lives are deliberately and coercively cornered and regularly damaged.

Within academic disciplines, the category of Global South is highly contested with no agreements on the definition of the term. Russell West-Pavlov argues that the "Global South is a protean term, shifting its meaning chameleon-like, across various epochs and contexts" (West-Pavlov 1). One cannot deny the amorphous nature of the term, yet its gravitational pull can be potentially effective in connecting the different forms of ongoing exploitation – both of humans and more-than-humans. As Editors of this special issue, we do not want to rehearse the historical genealogy of the term here. Our aim is to focus on how to think of the episteme of the Global South in ways that could be enabling, liberating, capacious enough to sharpen our imaginative and performative utopian lens. While critics can question the critical purchase of the term due to its homogenising nature, we argue that the Global South may differ in terms of its geopolitical space, but modes of resilience and solidarities within and across the South are vital to challenge and downplay the cannibalistic nature of globalisation. Hence, we suggest that the term Global South can be radically transformative not just to redress historical injustices, but also to render commitments to the injustices, suffering, and precarious lives. It is with a sense of hope that we argue for the South-South relationship to challenge the extractives forces of the North. Likewise, Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell advocate the use of "a resistant Global South" up against Global North as "an alternative to the concept of 'globalization'" (Dados, Connell 12).

In the introductory issue of the journal, *Global South*, Alfred López suggests the, “Global South’ can and does serve as a signifier of oppositional subaltern cultures ranging from Africa, Central and Latin America, much of Asia, and even those ‘Souths’ within a larger perceived North” (López 8). The linking of the South/North dialectic to modes of knowledge creation, dissemination, and the subsequent control over economy, cultures, and political autonomy allows us to understand why the term “Global South” may succeed in bringing all the Southern voices together, in its attempt to challenge the aggressive exploitation of the Global North. Perhaps, when seen from this angle, the Global South assumes the role of a community of the globally marginalized, who speak truth to power, stand in resilience against oppressive forces, and formulate the construction of a new global political society, which is driven by a sense of collective well-being, not conditioned by coloniality.

Irrespective of the negative connotations of the term, we suggest that the potentiality of the term “Global South” lies in its resistance to north-oriented globalization. Deprived of normative structures, the north-oriented globalization persistently formulates mechanisms to lock the circulation of resources within certain groups, mostly within the Global North. The conversion of and control over almost everything as resources for this selective group of valued lives has led to the emergence of a superstructure, which thrives on unregulated power to dispose of and eliminate weak bodies. Under such extreme life conditions, morality and social justice are no longer viable. The efficiency of unprivileged lives and their maximised risk have become the procedural codes of neoliberal regime, ensuring the supply of vital resources for selective valued lives – coercively, systematically, even legally.

To counter these oppressive structures, the performativity of literature can be of immediate vitality, creating stories of resilience from different cultural contexts of the Global South, to break up and recontextualize experiences of freedom, restoring focus on heterogenous forms of life and sufferings, thereby lending credence to Arif Dirlik’s idea of the Global South as “one form of alternative global alliance” (2007). This alliance could be the counter-structure, offering meditative frameworks and actions to one more attempt to regain the lost ground of humanity and affection. The term “Global South” may be a protean category, but its heterogeneous nature, studied through comparative lenses and literatures, can help us create collective voices of hope and utopia.

As terminologies, hope and utopia may sound weak, but when these terms are tested against the backdrop of the resilience evident in the region, one might derive the energy and determination to discover cognitive tools to help decolonize the Global South from new modes of imperialism. There is always a hope for one more try to overcome the oppressive structures. No wonder, then, that Russell West-Pavlov considers the “Global South” as a paradigm that “would open up spaces in which hitherto vibrant but elided traditions and ongoing routes of cultural transactions become visible in new ways.” (West-Pavlov 18-9) We end this introduction on a note of hope that the Global South narratives can create counter structures of resilience and conditions for decolonization, and as such must be seen always pitted against structures of power and violence. Following Walter D. Mignolo, we believe that the “we have to unlearn what is taught from canonized narratives, sacred or secular. Exploring the meaning, today, of ‘Global South’ is part of this process” (Mignolo 169).

The articles included in the special issue highlight the precarity rendered by the neoliberal ideologies and extractive forces. In the wake of rising precarity, contributors have offered imaginative frameworks on hope and utopia as tools for starting the planetary-making exercise anew. The lead article by Dwivedi conceptualizes “bioprecarity” as our present planetary disorder. It looks at the neoliberal capitalist economy that renders *bios* precarious. The article highlights how disposability of *bios* triggers and expands neoliberal economy, thus turning entire life forms on the planet precarious. This horrendous task of erasing life-sustaining conditions and strengthening value-generation process can be abundantly found in Ambikasutan Mangad’s novel, *Swarga* (2017), which narrates the precarious man-nature relationship as a result of the extractive forces of neoliberalism. In the last section of the article, Dwivedi turns to Phillip E. Wegner’s framework of “close-critical reading” as a poetics of hope in these dark times, thus highlighting how hope nourishes the fight of the Enmakaje people against the capital-state complex.

Nilanjana Chatterjee adds to Dwivedi’s critical approach to bioprecarity. In her article, “Ecological ‘Self’ vs the Ecological ‘Other’: Indigenous Naga Ecotopia for the Dystopic World,” she identifies the imperialistic agents of environmental disasters and cultural suppressions and proposes an eco-sensible reading of the Naga Anglophone literature to make visible the unique sustainable ways of indigenous lived lives. Her specific focus is the work of Easterine Kire. The silencing of the Naga people under various imperial rulers has survived, and the ecological sensitivity of the people offers

a crucial lesson to the rest of the planet. The “slow violence” perpetrated upon the Naga people and their environment is set out here, and also the manner in which the Naga people have survived this attack on their lives and place of living. Hope rises from these stories of survival and ecological care.

The unfortunate effect of misogyny is the subject of Uchechukwa Umezurike’s exploration of Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, first published in 1967 and reissued in 1997. Beginning with an account of an incident that took place in Sudan in May of 2018, Umezurike explores the shocking effect of patriarchal treatment of women, both in the real-life Sudan where a Sudanese court sentenced nineteen-year-old Noura Hussein to death for killing her husband (he had raped her in front his smiling relatives), and in Salih’s novel, which depicts a similar treatment of women. Umezurike’s argument is that no hope for a better future, no utopian possibility is possible until women are accepted as independent agents equal to their male counterparts. A vision of this possibility appears in the carnivalesque closing to the novel where Salih presents “a moment of openness to the world, a utopian kinship, unconstrained by politics or religion. Perhaps there is something of the carnivalesque in African postcolonial utopianism.”

Jey Sushil in “Making Sense of Fragmented Bodies Across Generations” focuses on two novels, Kamleshwar’s *Kitne Pakistan* (2000) and Bhisham Sahni’s *Tamas* (1972) in order to reveal how the two authors find relevance for contemporary times in the Partition of 1947. Sushil points out that the earlier novel concentrates on the events of Partition, whereas Kamleshwar’s *Kitne Pakistan*, published nearly three decades later, is a postmodern whirl through time and space that touches on the ramifications of Partition throughout the globe. For Sushil, *Tamas* points out that “despite all the differences, violence perpetrated by people against each other, there is a possibility, a hope to exist together forgetting or putting the trauma behind.” *Kitne Pakistan*, on the other hand, “doesn’t give us hope in the ending but a utopian idea of a tree, a Bodhitree—where Buddha got enlightenment. The fragmented narrative of the troubled times of 90’s all over the world, the history of Indian partition (which the novel has dealt) and traumatic personal stories ends with the utopian intention rather than a definite design of hope.” Both novels traverse similar territory, but with quite different narrative strategies.

In “Imagining Utopia through Communities in Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West*,” Andreas Aleksandr Wansbrough and Tegan Jane Schetrumpf investigate Hamid’s

utopian vision, a vision that they consider in two ways: “a radical embrace of possibility amid crisis” and “a whimsical type of escapist and magical realist ... negation of contemporary injustice.” Using a doorway as means of relocating the central characters, the novel parses migration, indicating that it takes many forms. Specifically, the novel offers three visions of the future for the characters Nadia and Saeed. These visions challenge our notions of the nation state, of capitalism, and of community. The critique of futurity and the capitalist present here takes the theorists, Theodor Adorno, Slavoj Žižek, and Frederic Jameson as a starting point. In the novel, Hamid undertakes three “thought experiments.” These experiments take the form of three communities, one in an abandoned hotel in Kensington, one at the Halo Project, workers camps for migrants in London, and the third the shanty city in Marin, California. The novel ends with some indeterminacy regarding the future; however, “Hamid’s thought experiments provide glimpses of near-futures that are alternatives to the present and are arguably generative.”

Andreea Mîrț’s article, “Translating the Global South in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* and Elaine Castillo’s *America is Not the Heart*” extends Wansbrough’s and Schetrumpf’s argument on migration. Mîrț examines the concept of the Global South as represented in two contemporary novels, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* and Elaine Castillo’s *America is not the heart*. Situating these two novels within the rubrics of “born translated literature,” Mîrț identifies that any emigrant’s identity is always a hybridization between languages, experiences, and memories. Likewise, she highlights how these novels are an attempt to define the continuous negotiation between different identities and the constant construction of the subject. The article also discusses the Southern identity of the protagonists of the novels *in relation* (Pashmina Murthy) to the places and the characters they relate to, and in so doing, it proposes an analysis of the Southern identity performed by the characters in the public space and in the interaction with other communities from the Global South.

The next article by Binayak Roy analyzes Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay’s *Hansuli Banker Upakatha* (1946-51), translated by Ben Conisbee Baer as *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* (2011). The novel narrates the life of a village in rural Bengal which experiences modernity thrust upon it by the forces of war in the mid-twentieth century. It has at its core the life of a hugely hybrid and socially mobile marginalized community known as the Kahars. They are depicted not only as marginalized by the caste system but also

criminalized and exploited for furthering the interests of the colony and then treated as pariah by the dominant system for their licentiousness. This rural space also witnesses the stratified layers of caste segregation ranging from peasant farmers (Sadgops and Mondols), landlords, landowners, and rural gentry (Ghoshes, Chaudhurys, and unnamed Brahmin gentry) and the landless sharecroppers eking out a living in village or country town. It thus dismantles the notion of the idyllic pastoral, idyllic rural India of Gandhi's imagination. Unlike many other postcolonial texts, *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* re-conceives the present by re-telling the past without being nostalgic. Hence it offers a different and alternate way of being in the present, resisting the forces of history with its transformative vision. Roy suggests that the essence of humanity, after all, is hopefulness. In this sense, utopianism, rather than marking the eradication of difference in the form of the Utopia itself, is recast as a desire for difference from the neoliberal Utopia of global capitalism as a total and seemingly closed system. In this sense, a postcolonial utopia would not be associated with closure but is instead imagined as a horizon beyond late global capitalism and its neoimperialist world-system as an opening up of possibility.

The last article in this special issue takes a different approach to the Global South by analysing the graphic narrative *Becoming Bone Sheep*. Paul Paraschiv's turn to graphic narrative is interesting and gives a visual turn to environmental criticism. Paraschiv's article pays minute attention to theoretical concepts such as gaze, identity, assemblage, de-flocking, racial proximity, zoe, affirmative transformations or networks, resulting thus in an apparatus for the defence of planetary life. Paraschiv highlights how the graphic narrative can make us see the flawed condition of man in relation with the nonhuman by representing a singular interaction between species – the gaze – which manages to dislocate the subjects from their individuality. Moreover, it draws on spatial confines that serve as an expression of parcelling the apparently unseen differences between the species, introducing in the discussion the re-evaluation of agency through what Braidotti calls *zoe*-centric ethics of becoming. Finally, it intends to delineate approaches for a further debate on countering oppressive structures in the context of Global South literature.

This issue also features an Editor's Choice section. This section does not relate to the special issue's theme, however given the journal's focus on comparative literature, István Berszán's article, "Dislocating the Theory of the Contextualist Approach", has been included. It focuses on the exceptional nature of theory, while also advancing the

need to study the local embeddedness of circulating theoretical trends from before the new historical turn.

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