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ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

The Politics of Inversion: Carnivalesque Subversion in *Nobody Killed Her*

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Abstract— Carnivalesque subversion operates through the inversion of entrenched hierarchies and established doctrines. It dismantles the preconceived notions of power and authority. The present study employs Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque founded in *Rabelais and His World* (1984) to unravel and dismantle entrenched paternalistic and political power hierarchies through the textual analysis of Javeri's (2017) *Nobody Killed Her*. Addressing the research void, the present study has employed both grotesque realism and laughter simultaneously to unfurl the embedded marginalization within these potent authoritative dynamics. While contemporary academic corpus has exhaustively investigated the carnivalesque grotesque and its subversive potency, a considerable gap exists in the scrutiny of how the fusion of grotesque realism and laughter within this paradigm can function as a revolutionary strategy for challenging enrooted power hierarchies and unveiling marginalized voices. Preceding studies often deliberate on either the carnivalesque or grotesque features individually, leaving uncharted grounds regarding their collaborative effect, specifically in the backdrop of revealing and challenging patriarchy and marginalization. The present research is remarkable in its holistic perspective of the carnivalesque grotesque by applying the lens of grotesque realism and laughter simultaneously. By integrating these features, this study, through the textual analysis, strives to unearth the nuanced strategies in which laughter, as a subversive instrument within the carnivalesque grotesque, accentuates the intensity of grotesque realism in revealing power hierarchies. Moreover, the study peculiarly situates the carnivalesque grotesque as an active space where peripheral voices not only defy but dynamically reconstruct power mechanics through deliberate strategies of subversion and laughter. In this way, this research bridges an extant gap in the literature by furnishing the interplay between grotesque realism and laughter and affirms the collective potential of the carnivalesque grotesque for a radical social critique. This exploration utilizes carnival-inspired imagery to transcend and subvert conventional borders. By plummeting into the varied features of the carnivalesque grotesque, this study seeks to articulate its inherent potential as transformative agents, orchestrating a discourse that dismantles societal norms and inverses power politics.

Index Terms— Bakhtin, Carnivalesque, Grotesque realism, Subversion, Laughter, Patriarchy, Marginalization

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Introduction

Javeri (2017) *Nobody Killed Her* defies societal mores through grotesque imagery, laughter, and subversion of stereotypical canons. The narrative probes into political chicanery and patriarchal dominance by exploiting bizarre and uncanny to dismantle conventional realism. Seen through the Rabelaisian aesthetics of Bakhtin (1984) notion of carnivalesque, grotesque realism, and grotesque laughter

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as expounded in *Rabelais and His World*, the chronicle exposes the inherent paradoxes of the paternalistic society where women are restricted to the hearth. The novel serves as a critique of exploitative officialdom, giving a voice to the marginalized and opposing established power structures. Through mockery and grotesque imagery, Javeri (2017) unveils the victimization of various societal groups, challenging stereotypes, hierarchies, and societal norms.

Amid a milieu where women are muted and segregated from political discourse, the carnivalesque grotesque embraces a crucial role as a strategy of protest and defiance. Characters of Nazo and Rani Madam act as catalysts for defiance against a system that strives to imprison and suppress women, pushing them to the periphery.

In the scrutiny of literary and cultural dimensions, the intersectionality of the carnivalesque grotesque arises as a riveting prism through which to decipher the subversive dynamics embedded within societal structures. This scholarly inquiry embarks upon a subtle analysis analysis, centring its focus on the acclaimed work *Nobody Killed Her* (Javeri, 2017). Within the narrative, the carnivalesque grotesque serves as an evocative mechanism of subversion, strategically wielded to challenge the entrenched norms of patriarchy and politics. Grounded in the theoretical profundity of grotesque realism and punctuated by the emancipatory groove of laughter, this examination strives to unearth the subtle intricacies through which the carnivalesque grotesque evolves into a transformative force, subverting conventional power mechanics and dismantling prevalent narratives of victimization and marginalization. This inquiry, drawing inspiration from Bakhtinian discourse, aspires to contribute nuanced insights into the intricate dynamics of subversion within the realm of literature and cultural analysis.

Statement of problem

The present research explores the subversive nature of the carnivalesque grotesque in *Nobody Killed Her* (Javeri, 2017). Investigating the transformative potential of the carnivalesque grotesque as a subversive mechanism in challenging patriarchal structures and political paradigms, this research employs grotesque realism and laughter as integral tools. The study aims to unravel how these elements collectively operate to subvert traditional power dynamics while concurrently dismantling narratives of victimization and marginalization. Through the textual analysis of *Nobody Killed Her*, this research seeks to illuminate the intricate interplay between the carnivalesque grotesque, subversion, and the deconstruction of oppressive socio-political constructs.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical foundation framing this research is firmly anchored in the theories of Bakhtin (1984), specifically his notions of the carnivalesque, grotesque realism, and laughter as enunciated in *Rabelais and His World* . Bakhtinian theoretical canon furnishes a strong underpinning for scrutinizing how the dynamic interaction between carnivalesque facets, directed by the principles of grotesque aesthetics and laughter, serves as an effective mode of subversion within varied cultural and aesthetic depictions.

Intrinsically, Bakhtin's carnivalesque notion reflects the subversive and emancipative spirit of festive rituals. The present study exploits this theoretical paradigm to explore how grotesque imagery, defined by bizarre, surreal, and exaggeration of body forms, navigates the artistic and literary milieu to defy entrenched norms.

Bakhtin asserted that the grotesque realism of the middle period emerged from the cultural roots of medieval folk humour that was embodied in the carnival rituals.

> The striving toward renewal and a new birth, 'the thirst for a new youth' pervaded the carnival spirit of the Middle Ages and found a multiform expression in concrete sensual elements of folk culture, both in ritual and spectacle. This was the second festive life of the Middle Ages. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 57)

Bakhtin establishes the carnivalesque upon a somewhat utopian perception of folk culture by grounding the carnivalesque in the unruly traditional festivals of the Medieval and Renaissance periods. During these fiestas, the collective potency of the simple ordinary folk of society is uninhibited in a quasi-Bacchanalian mirth during which "all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" are upended (Bakhtin, 1984). Bakhtin believes that all becomes one in the carnival. The old order is thrown away, and a new life begins, which is the collective life of all the people. In this vein, carnivalesque is both a site of death and rebirth that casts away the prevalent, enrooted hierarchical social order while simultaneously creating a new equitable relation. In Bakhtin's opinion, the carnivalesque does not function merely through an ironic reversal in which the existing social strata are reoriented so that there is a shift in official, authoritative power. Carnivalesque manifests itself through grotesque realism and laughter. The grotesque, as elucidated by Bakhtin, acts as a mode for exposing societal paradoxes and unearthing the complexities of exploitative power structures. Its innate disarray evolves into a means of resistance, subverting prevalent ideologies and fostering critical introspection.

Moreover, Bakhtin's theorization of laughter as a carnivalesque element is integral to comprehending the subversive potential inherent in humour.

Literature Review

In the domain of academic investigation, the symbiotic interplay between the carnivalesque and the grotesque has been a recurrent leitmotif that piques scholarly interest. Within this literary milieu, the present study manifests not merely as a continuity of already recognized trajectories but as a foray into the uncharted realm of subversion. The integration of carnivalesque features with the grotesque to expose the marginalization signifies the core of the present exploration, and this singular interaction sets this research apart.

Castle (1986) explores the controversial yet popular role of masquerade in the entertainment world of the 18th century and how the carnival masks camouflage the identity of the participants to permit moral liberty. She brings out that masquerades were connected with sexual adventures, the upending of decorum, and the nuisance of lechery and corruption. She delves into the history of masquerades enrooted in ancient civilization. By throwing away the shrouds of identity, they serve as icons of anonymity and liberation. She presents a keen historical chronicle of masquerade, investigates its catalytic function in the progression of the plot through the discussion of Richardson's Pamela, Burney's Cecilia, Fielding's Amelia and Inchbald's A Simple Story, and also prompts the fundamental query into the role of masquerade as a cultural artefact. She states the masquerade's "dream of a perfected human community, free of the ravages of difference and alienation" (p.108). and presents the masquerade as "a fantastical, beautiful island at the heart of eighteenth-century culture" where one could experience or imagine "love conceived as a profound mingling of opposites, an absorptive, endlessly satisfying embrace of self and other" (p.109). Warner (1988) says, "For Castle, masquerade becomes how culture interiorizes the general truth of the masquerade that one can be different from one's self, that one can change one's dress or mask and become what one is not" (p.4). Like carnivals, it serves to subvert.

In the unique redefining of the Esther narrative, Craig and Mayo (1995) offers a novel paradigm, throwing light on this often neglected and misconstrued tale. Craig argues that the real crux of the narrative resides in the literary carnivalesque, a genre that has been disregarded by scholars. The mainstay of the carnivalesque is the festival and ritual itself, its backdrop structuring the narrative, shaping the tenor, and instilling life into the story's figurative aspect.

Webb (2005) critically evaluates the Bakhtinian perspective of the English coastal retreat. It implies that resorts evolved in England as nodes of cultural defiance against the burdensome pressure of modernity, a peripheral space in which the utopian operations of conventional recreational norms were nurtured. The flourishing of the ocean-side 'leisure industry' is then defined as a hegemonic power, ripping the social mores and rituals of the people apart from their cultural affiliations and implicating them with the discursive exploration of modernity. The article picks the Blackpool resort as a case study and furnishes a somewhat unique stance. First, it signifies that the social interactions and engagements of the 19th-century English oceanside resort were nowhere close to 'carnivalesque'. Moreover, it proclaims that the recreation sector is open to thoughtful appraisals other than those that centre on elitist hegemony and social manipulation. Popular culture.

Ravenscroft and Gilchrist (2009) have explored the flourishing inquiry of deviant practices within stereotypically leisure-linked times and spaces. Deriving inspiration from Bakhtin's scrutiny of medieval festivals, the article subverts prevailing notions that simply perceive deviance as an exclusively monetized dimension. On the contrary, it advocates for a proficient insight into Bakhtin's work, underscoring the hegemonic and manipulative role performed by permitting deviant activities in such festivities. It also emphasizes Bakhtin's timeless pertinency for dismantling contemporary social interactions, specifically when analyzing 'playful deviance' such as unlawful sexual behaviour transcending simple medieval and modern festival comparisons.

Santino (2011) avers that public congregations secure a significant 'ritualesque' feature, an idea connected with Bakhtin's 'carnivalesque.' This perspective emphasizes the transformative potential of symbols, encompassing images, music, and movement, in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of participants or spectators. Rather than merely celebrating festivity, the ritualesque involves a performative use of symbols to actively bring about social change.

Køhlert (2012) analyses the comics of Julie Doucet in the light of Bakhtin's notion of carnivalesque and discerns its expressive aesthetics in grotesque realism. Anchored in the bizarre and grotesque, Doucet defies conventional notions regarding the female body, employing parody and unconventional corporeality to reconceive the cultural and social norms. This paradigm is in harmony with resistance theories, particularly Judith Butler's, and structuralist approaches to comics' meaning-making process.

Karimova (2014) employs the literary criticism concepts of Mikhail Bakhtin to propose an alternative methodology for analyzing advertising text. By applying a carnivalesque framework, the study explores the incorporation of carnival culture in advertising, examining examples like an online commercial for JBS Men's underwear and print advertisements for Glassing Sunglasses and Mattel Scrabble. The carnivalesque analysis reveals that advertising, considered a part of popular culture, is shaped by earlier carnivalesque forms.

Tallant (2017) talks about the role of carnivalesque humour in the educational backdrop, especially kindergarten education in the UK, and reveals that the kindergarten system presents a disparity in apprehending the role of humour and laughter. Despite recognizing their significance, prevalent authoritative and hegemonic discourses often discern them as defiance of gravity and reason. The article implies that grown-ups might foster negativity, while children espouse a more positive outlook owing to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque approach to humour.

Bore, Graefer, and Kilby (2018) examine offensive humour in protest posters from the 2018 Women's March that target Trump's body and behaviour. Analysing Instagram and Twitter posts, it portrays offensive humour as a contemporary expression of the carnivalesque, demonstrating its dual radical and conservative aspects within the context of social change.

Burley (2019) investigates the 'grotesque body' in myriad contexts, linking it to the festival's temple setting and possession in diverse cultures. The analysis highlights motifs of divine possession, animal sacrifice, and unconventional rituals that challenge societal norms. This throws light on the festival's cultural and religious dimensions.

Moosavinia and Mazloumian (2019) examine Sylvia Plath's poem Metaphors through Bakhtin's carnivalesque-grotesque realism, challenging societal ideals of pregnancy and motherhood. Plath uses metaphors and grotesque imagery in a carnivalesque atmosphere to degrade the romanticized image of the pregnant mother, revealing the true, complex experience. Her humorous expression defamiliarizes the idealized concept, exposing its objectification of women and questioning the autonomy of the pregnant mother, turning her into more than a mere carrier of life.

Buckley (2020) explores how Penny Dreadful (2014–2016), a post-feminist TV series, reimagines gothic fiction for contemporary audiences through the depiction of two female "grotesque" characters resisting patriarchal control. Drawing on Mary Russo's concept of "female grotesques," the study uncovers the ambivalence in portraying women as both resisting and associated with monstrosity. It reflects on Penny Dreadful's attempts to challenge objectifying representations while acknowledging blind spots and the marginalization of lower-class femininity, showcasing the rise of the female grotesque in post-feminist media.

Ekmekçi (2021) examines Angela Carter's use of the grotesque in "The Passion of New Eve" to subvert traditional codes and deconstruct the idealized image of the female body. Carter's subversive narrative techniques challenge conventional notions, establishing an authentic atmosphere that rejects classical body concepts.

Erickson (2021) probes into the confluence of the grotesque body in Carnival with polity discourse, exploiting ethnographic data from Vilanova i la Geltrú, Catalonia. Relying on Bakhtin, it unveils how Carnival uses popular festive imagery to manifest the cyclic repetition of death, disease and rebirth via the grotesque body.

ŞENSOY and Meryem (2022) scrutinizes *Sexing the Cherry* through the lens of Bakhtinian grotesque realism and provides an ecocentric paradigm. It explores the novel's portrayal of the negative influence of paternal and authoritative attitudes on humans and nonhumans simultaneously. The author, Jeanette Winterson, employs the idea of grotesque realism to subvert the Cartesian binary opposition and propagate a more balanced relationship between humans and their environment.

Imran, Javed, and Arshad (2022) probe into the voices of the marginals in Shafak's (2019) *10 Minutes and 38 Seconds in This Strange World* and Javeri (2017) *Nobody Killed Her*. It has used Spivak's theory of Subaltern to bring to focus the systemic oppression in society, relegating women to an inferior position. It scrutinizes how identity is reconstructed by the hegemonic discourses and can be reconfigured only through an honest depiction of the subalterns.

Bawardi and Ghanayim (2023) explore the use of grotesque elements by Algerian author Waciny Laredj in depicting the Algerian reality and the struggle against Islamic and state terrorism. Laredj's experimental novelistic writing employs features like sarcasm, irony, and exaggeration. Notable in his novels "Ḍamīr al-Ghā'ib" (Third Person Pronoun) (1990) and "Ḥārisat al-Ẓilāl" (Guardian of the Shadows) (1997), the grotesque is linguistically and stylistically evident, portraying human transformations and blending state and Islamic terrorism in a comedic horror atmosphere.

Mizikiyan (2023) examines the grotesque portrayal of the female body in John Milton's Paradise Lost, particularly in Book IX, highlighting how characters like Eve and Sin disrupt patriarchal norms as a "monstrous-feminine." Drawing from Bakhtin's carnival concept, the analysis contends that the feminine, challenging male dominance, is depicted as a threatening form of sexuality. The narrative unfolds a world turned upside down as Eve and Adam partake in the forbidden fruit, subverting the established order embodied by God.

The literature review brings to light the nuanced layers of academic exploration encompassing the carnivalesque and its subversive prospect within the domain of literature. While the earlier research has proficiently scrutinized the carnivalesque as a space of inversion and revolt, this review emphasizes the current research gap concerning the probing of grotesque realism and laughter simultaneously within this framework. The integration of these features offers a novel approach to exploring subversion within the carnivalesque, reinforcing its transformative prowess and shedding light on the subtle approaches in which marginalized voices actively interact with, resist, and redefine power mechanics. The present study navigates the unexplored realm of the carnivalesque grotesque as a dynamic and holistic space, where the collaboration of grotesque realism and laughter assumes the role of a potent catalyst for social criticism, defying entrenched norms and cultivating a deep insight into subversion in literature.

Analysis and Discussion

At the core of Javeri (2017) *Nobody Killed Her*, a political carnival emerges, drawing us to traverse its chaotic territory, where grotesque political shenanigans and the predatory exploitation of a nation under the guise of religion and nationalism hold the central position. It also exposes the predicament of women under the paternalistic power hierarchy.

Feminist rebellion: Grotesque realism exposing patriarchal absurdities

Grotesque is congruent with bizarre and surreal. It has been utilized as a potent literary mode to resist the power paradigms of society. Semler (2018) contends that "grotesque is a powerful word. The concept and realities it indicates are intriguing, enduring, and profound" (p. 1). Grotesque realism in *Nobody Killed Her* acts as subversion to dismantle the degenerating stereotypical old regime and ensure the sovereignty of a new epoch of change. The grotesque has also been deployed to challenge the disgusting persecution of the marginalized oppressed by the power-rapacious authorities.

In *Nobody Killed Her* (Javeri, 2017), a harrowing chronicle of social dissonance and male chauvinism is reflected. The figures of Nazo and Rani Madam manifest as potent icons of resistance and defiance against the dominant male hierarchy, evolving into the architects of transformation and liberation. The carnivalesque reversal of norms, ideologies, and hierarchies exposes the pharisaism of a society that contests the inclusion of women in political mechanisms, concurrently unveiling the budding potential for radical restructuring through the autonomy of characters like Nazo and Rani Madam. Grotesque realism "reflects cultural shocks and shifting traditions, offering new ways of experiencing a world that is no longer quite familiar" (Gniadek, 2005, p. 24)

Amid the backdrop of a social milieu dictated by a deep-seated patriarchal society, (Javeri, 2017) *Nobody Killed Her* explores the intricate laminae of duplicity that enshroud the feminine realities, specifically those akin to Nazo, who audaciously challenges the established orthodoxy. Nazo, a fearless character, confronts the injustice that infests her society and raises her voice in a system where only men can speak. "Women's voices are "often more 'inarticulate' than men" (Barkman, 2018). She subverts not just the constrictive gender conventions but also the duplicitous ethics that ground her entire existence. Rowe (1995), however, suggests that transgressive texts that "show women using in disruptive, challenging ways the spectacle already invested in them as objects of a masculine gaze . . . might suggest an alternative view of female subjectivity" (p.5).

Nobody Killed Her (Javeri, 2017) exposes the ironical predicament of the modern Pakistani woman and her journey to liberate herself from the entrenched norms imposed upon her by society. Russo (1986), has compellingly phrased the argument.

> The masks and voices of carnival resist, exaggerate and destabilize the distinctions and boundaries that mark and maintain high culture and organized society. It is as if the carnivalesque body politic had ingested the entire corpus of high culture and, in its bloated and irrepressible state, released it in fits and starts in all manner of recombination, inversion, mockery, and degradation.(p.218)

The very start of *Nobody Killed Her* (Javeri, 2017) evokes the grotesque imagery of death, violence, murder, bloodshed and conspiracy through the words of Nazo in the courtroom. The Subtitle 'Who Killed Her?' excites curiosity and the sense of mystery and uncanny, which are the hallmarks of the carnivalesque grotesque. Nazo's words evoke grotesque imagery.

> Death doesn't knock on the door before entering, Your Honour. It comes suddenly, unannounced and uninvited. A bomb blast, a bullet gone astray, a blow in the head and before, you know it, boom! The life has gone out of you. (Javeri, 2017, p. 1)

The imagery of the bomb blast, a bullet and a blow ignites an uncanny and morbid sensation of death amid the tumultuous spectacle of life- a very carnivalesque presentation of the inherent dichotomy between life and death. The grotesque portrayed is not negative but rings out the existing paradoxes to bring about a positive change. Karlyn (2010) derives from Bakhtin and contends that "the term grotesque is not negative but rather ambivalent, deriving its representational and social power through its embrace of conflicting poles of meaning" (p.11). Nazo's first description of the atmosphere where Rani Shah's murder takes place is steeped in the spirit of the political carnival. It exposes the hollowness of a system where the woman ascends against all odds only to be sacrificed at the altar of lust for power and authority.

Javeri uniquely frames her novel. Each segment starts with the trial scene for the murder of Rani Shah- the first Pakistani female Prime Minister, in a political rally. Nazo is being accused of the murder. Through the courtroom melodrama and arguments, Nazo reveals what is happening in the characters' lives. This unique way of exposition agrees with the carnivalesque tradition of defiance and revolt. The structure of *Nobody Killed Her* (Javeri, 2017) goes against the stereotypical norms of writing.

The way Nazo describes the demeanour of Rani Shah is significant as it reflects the defiance and revolt inherent in Shah's blood. She becomes the very embodiment of the spirit of the carnivalesque as she revolts against the official culture of oppressive patriarchy.

> Your head was defiantly uncovered, your frizzy hair as rebellious as your nature, your heart-shaped mouth stubbornly set...I had never seen a girl of your stature smoke. Or sit publically without a veil...I noticed your forehead crease in a frown as you crossed your legs like men do. (Javeri, 2017, p. 3)

Rani Shah's 'defiantly uncovered' head, 'rebellious' frizzy hair, 'stubbornly set' heart-shaped mouth and the manner she perches 'publically without a veil' all stand in glaring disparity to the stereotypical conventional roles assigned to women and restrictions imposed on

them in the Pakistani society in the General's rule. All these images are the expression of a soul tortured by the relentless patriarchy. The depiction of such feminine resilience aligns with the carnivalesque spirit, where the unconventional and unofficial hold sway. Eagleton (1981) admits that the carnivalesque dynamics are a kind of utopian narrative, "a temporary recontextualizing of the social formation that exposes its "fictive" foundations" (p.49). As elucidated by Bakhtin (1984), the carnivalesque notion presents a liminal space where socially ingrained norms are transitorily toppled, and the grotesque is employed to question and critique the prevalent social order.

The feminist undertone is deepened when Rani Shah's words at a political rally before returning to Pakistan from exile mark the spirit of the carnivalesque tradition. "No one can silence us now. No one can take our voice away, now that our words have become the voice of so many" (Javeri, 2017, p. 7).

Her proclamation highlights the idea that the marginalized and the suppressed have found a congruent collective voice. This exhibits the carnivalesque's propensity to destabilize the enrooted power structures as the voiceless surge to challenge those who have stifled their narrative. The carnivalesque often proffers a transient deliverance from the restraints of society. Rani Shah's words insinuate that this debuting voice is a moment of emancipation, a hiatus from the persecution confronted in exile.

The grotesque, within the framework of the carnivalesque, often comprises the overstatement of and twisting of societal norms. Bakhtin (1984) asserts, "Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered attributes of grotesque style" (p.303). Rani Shah's declaration, 'Our words have become the voice of so many', can be perceived as a hyperbole at this stage when she had not yet entered into the active political arena.

The carnivalesque spirit pervades the feminist character of Rani Shah, who breaks the norms regarding women's education and raises her voice for their empowerment. Her fervent standpoint on women's education in the turbulent Pakistan of the 1980s reverberates with a puissant defiance. Her unflinching conviction, despite being challenged by religious Jihadists' extremism against women and her ardent empowerment of Nazo, the refugee maid, to educate herself conjures the spirit of the carnivalesque, a boisterous fiesta of social norms reversed. It seems as if she, attired in the colours of rebellion, carouses in the euphoria of subverting enrooted hierarchies and addresses the issue of female regression in society.

> Look, all that stuff the Jihadists say about education being haram for women is wrong. Just imagine that the very first word revealed to the prophet was "Iqra". It means to read, Nazo. It means to read! So, how can it be a sin? (Javeri, 2017, p. 12)

Her relentless defiance against the religious Jihadists reflects a vibrant carnival where the impoverished and the oppressed in a moment craft their narrative, no matter even for a brief moment. She claims the platform amid the grand charade of transformation.

Again, she reiterates in a questioning way, "Good. As I was saying, the very first word of the Quran was "Iqra". Why would God do that if He didn't want us to educate ourselves?" (Javeri, 2017, p. 13). Rani Shah's logical question emphasizes the feminist idea of women's enfranchisement through the right to education. By citing "Iqra" (read) as the inaugural word of the Quran, she advocates the feminist ideals that education is not just sanctioned but also endorsed in Islam. This subverts patriarchal hegemony that constricts women's ingress to education.

The feminist agenda in defiance of the paternalistic regime is further enhanced when Javeri delineates the picture of a country ruled by the misogynist despot, the General confederated by the Army, and the extremist faction to bring out their collective atrocities against the people of the country, especially women.

> It wasn't the most liberal place to begin with, but now it was a prison, one giant cage for women and children, elderly and disabled, and all those others who weren't men enough or Muslim enough. We were the waste, to be swept under borders of black cloth. My country was once colourful, but now it is a black sea. Black burqas, black beards, black burnt-down buildings pockmarked with bullets…But amidst all this darkness, you appeared like a white dove, a messenger of peace. Nobody really knew how you had managed to escape the General's prison, but there you were, carrying on your martyred father's mission (Javeri, 2017, p. 17)

Nazo's evocative words conjure a sombre picture of Pakistan, a nation once marching on the road of progress, which has now been presented as a monochromatic confinement where the heterogeneity of her people has been superseded by a sea of black. The black veils (burqas), black beards, and the abrasions of violence and abuse imprinted into the very psyche of people act as potent metaphors for the tyrannical forces that have eclipsed the future of the country. It is within this dystopian terrain that Rani Shah, an emblem of hope and a symbol of feminism, ascends in grave contrast to the overarching gloom. Armstrong (2020) opines, "Women's subordination was neither biologically natural nor God-given; instead, the class relations of capitalism enforced the gender hierarchies that anchored women's oppression" (p.4). The carnivalesque grotesque is perceptible in the reversal of social norms, as Pakistan transmutes from a locale of cultural diversity into a bleak land, a complete distortion of its older self.

Rani Shah's arrival back home is a significant event in the novel as it acts as a shaping juncture in the life of Rani Shah. The melee

gathered to welcome her forms a carnivalesque atmosphere. This event also sets the stage for the political carnivalesque as it marks the start of Rani Shah's political journey.

Local journalists, foreign media, party workers, supporters-even women came to receive you. Veiled in black with only their eyes showing through the slits, they stood behind the men, their voices matching the men's in strength and in spirit. Everywhere the eye could see, the ground was filled with people welcoming you. Not an inch was left uncovered. And only one name lay on everyone's tongue. 'Leader Rani Shah, Rani Shah, Leader!' The crowd chanted madly. 'Our Leader lives on in you, Rani Shah. Long live our Leader!'. (Javeri, 2017, p. 43)

Here lies the carnivalesque instance as the socially constructed orthodox gender roles are momentarily obstructed. Women, masked in obsidian, are positioned behind the males. This reversal of conventional gender norms upset the regular pattern of hierarchy, setting a transient realm of liberty and equity during the ritual of welcoming Rani Shah.

The gathering and the crowd form a liminal space, a cusp, or an interim where the normative conventions and hierarchies are upended. As the women assemble veiled and in solidarity after the men, they ingress in this transitional space, which permits a singular expression of power. The inversion of ingrained values is patent in women's voices, matching the men's in vigour and spirit. This questions the silencing of verbal articulation of women in patrilineal societies and foregrounds the idea of equality in such social milieus.

The patriarchal mindset of the society is highlighted to denounce the enrooted norms and to underscore the feminist vision. Javeria portrays the social psyche through the perspective of wise and old characters like the mother of Rani Shah. Shah's mother (Begum) asks her to leave politics as the patriarchs in the country won't let a woman rule. She asks her to accompany her out of the country. But Rani Shah wants to accomplish the mission of her late father. Begum tells Rani,

> Your father wanted to change things, but even he knew he couldn't install a woman on the head of these fools. They will never let a woman rule over them. Come back to Manhattan, my darling. Leave this jungle of a place. You never have to come back here. (Javeri, 2017, p. 116)

She again jolts Rani out of her sentimental patriotic stupor when she says, "I can't leave you to these dogs. They will rip you to shreds" (p.116). Rani rejects the idea by saying that Balgodi will take care of her as he is powerful. The grotesque image of 'rip you to the shreds' evokes disgust as the society has reached its nadir, devoid of any morality and sense. To be a woman is a crime, and to be a woman engaging in the process of politics is a transgression beyond imagination.

Carnivalesque alludes to a spectacle, a place of festivity and revelry like the medieval period, where all the ranks are diminished, and social power prevails. Exploiting inversion, ridicule, and travesty to defy societal norms, carnival "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 10).

Rani Shah's election campaign is one such event that serves as a backdrop for the political carnivalesque against which the marginalization of the underprivileged, deprived of necessities of life in society, has been exposed. Rani Shah visits the far-off villages.

> People lined both sides of the road, beckoning you, cheering you, urging you. Visit our village, they screamed. 'Come and see how we live'. 'We have no medicine'. 'We have no electricity'. 'No drinking water'. 'Give us medicine', more voices shouted. (Javeri, 2017, p. 167)

Rani waved and replied,

> The days of darkness are over. Light is here. I will complete what my father began. Vote for Shah, and soon there will be food, shelter, work and education for every one of you. We are here to serve, not to rule! (p.168)

People were frantic in the political caravan. Even the crowd of women came out to greet Rani Shah. "They pawed at you like animals," I thought. Their faces were sunburnt, their skin coarse, and their touch rough. But you didn't back away. Instead, you reached out and shook their hands" (Javeri, 2017, p. 168).

The scene is steeped in the riotous exuberance of a political entourage, where the passion and eagerness surrounding Rani Shah's political crusade has been exhibited. Through the lens of the political carnivalesque, the narrative unveils a performance defined by the reversal of conventional power mechanics and the momentary halt of societal values.

The notion of carnivalesque is strengthened through the inversion as after the victory in the elections, Rani Shah was elected as the first female prime minister of the country, reversing the existing pattern of politics. The atmosphere of festivity marks the carnivalesque backdrop.

> There was celebration all around. Shots were fired. Sweets were distributed. Alms were given to the poor. Even I who never bowed down before Him, found myself falling to my knees in gratitude. This was it. The darkness

> had lifted. It was time for light. The light you would bring to us, your people. (Javeri, 2017, p. 190)

In the upshot of Rani Shah's monumental victory, the lens of political carnivalesque manifests a medley of jubilations and social tumult, signifying the rise of the first female prime minister. The celebration that eventuates, marked by felicitous firing, distributing confectionaries, and almsgiving, acts as a political carnival where rigorous norms are briefly interrupted, and the political arena witnesses a radical inversion.

Sabin integrates the carnivalesque setting with the grotesque imagery related to the feminine body to reveal the subjugated position of women where her body is an object of commodification, determining people's likes and dislikes for her. Grosz (1987) argues that the body acts as "the means by which power is disseminated and a potential object of resistance to power" (p.12). When Rani Madam avoids Nazo, she considers it because of her gross physical condition as she reflects; "At first, I thought it was because of my leaky breasts, the smell of putrid blood and reeking sour milk that put you off, made you shrink away from me" (p.194). The grotesque imagery underscores the uncouth physical state of women after childbirth, which people abhor. The notion of motherhood is a blessed one, but Sabyn inverts it into carnivalesque tradition by representing it with gross images of body, blood, smell, sourness and putrid. The body becomes a space for a struggle against power hierarchies and, according to Butler (1987), "a region of cultural unruliness and disorder" (p.131).

Bakhtin underscores the principle of degradation connected with the grotesque, as Javeri emphasizes. Bakhtin (1984) argues, "The carnivalesque celebrates the act of degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (pp.18–20).

Political carnivalesque: Rebellion and defiance against authoritative regime

No body Killed Her by Javeri (2017) is a riveting tale that interweaves the domains of politics, power, and gender in Pakistan. Through the lens of political carnivalesque, the novel mirrors a multifarious delineation of the intricacies, absurdities, and intrinsic theatricality of the political panorama. Clark and Holquist (1984) have argued, at the level of "political allegory, the utopian conception of carnival constructs a liberatory alternative to the repression of the totalitarian regime" (p.309).

At its nucleus, political carnivalesque, as theorized by Bakhtin (1984), embodies the reversal of social constructs, the dismantling of hierarchies, and the transient break from entrenched structures. *Nobody Killed Her* (Javeri, 2017) portrays these facets by navigating the nebulous realms of political intrigue, where truth is sly, and narratives are constantly contested.

Nobody Killed Her Javeri (2017) exhibits the spirit of carnivalesque against the backdrop of the political landscape. Imbued with the essence of intrigues, conspiracies, deceptions, and authoritative exploitation, it portrays the politics of Pakistan as a muddle of stinking corruption, lawlessness and brutality where power operates as a manipulative instrument in the hands of official authority in the persona of the General who is an autocrat and ruling the country as a sovereign, not ready to relinquish his control.

The very opening title of the novel *'Who Killed Her?'* is enigmatic as it starts with the lamenting news of the former first female prime minister, Rani Shah. Her close confidante and secretary Nazo is interrogated as the main suspect because of her proximity with Rani Shah in the convoy at the moment of the bomb blast and escaping unscathed. The story proceeds as every section starts with a court trial through which Nazo, as a narrator, unfolds the tale of Rani Shah's political journey, her fierce bond with Rani Shah, and her personal life. Furthermore, Pakistani society is dissected and viewed to reveal the crevices, paradoxes, incongruities and hypocrisies inherent in military and religious imperialism.

Sabyn projects a country drenched in patriarchy and fanaticism. Nazo is the strong narrator of the novel, and she is sent to Rani Shah by her friend Aijaz Sahib. On meeting Rani, Nazo says,

> He said you help people fleeing the General's regime. My whole family was murdered in the coup. My father was a doorman at the Parliament. He resisted when they tried to break in. Later, the General's men came to our house and killed everyone. I hid under the bed…survived somehow…' I could not carry on talking" (Javeri, 2017, p. 4)

This first occurrence of the word 'the General's regime' alludes to a state of chaos and unrest where only the power holds sway, and the tyranny of the General is reflected through the butchery of his manners. The General stands for absolute power and control. His killing of the doorman's family is the manifestation of his deep-seated hatred for his opponents and adversaries. Viewed with the lens of Bakhtinian carnivalesque, the novel sets the stage for the political theatre where the drama of atrocities and intrigues is unfolded. Grotesque images of murder enhance the carnivalesque atmosphere of the novel. More references to the General's autocratic regime abound as Rani Shah speaks at a rally in Down Town Manhattan in 1983, "The General has been exploiting the country. Sending our people to the borders to fight a war that isn't ours. In fact, it's nobody's war" (Javeri, 2017, p. 7). The Reference to the General making crucial decisions involving the life and security of his people without any sensible consideration reflects his sovereign stature. He is a selfish ruler concerned with

his power and privileges. The political overtones are obvious and mirror the official authority of the General who is sacrificing his people in the bloody war between America and Afghanistan.

The evil intriguer 'The Jackass General' (p.10) calls the elections but shrewdly and strategically bans all the political parties. Sabyn's satire here is subtle yet penetrating. It reveals how the power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Political inversion takes place as the elections can't be held without the engagement of the political parties. This inversion of the established norm is a carnivalesque feature enrooted in the political atmosphere. This political farce reveals the dichotomy of the political system, exposing the marginalization of the weak and the oppressed.

Sabyn's skilful exposition of the chronicle is unique as Nazo is not only her narrator but also her spokesperson, observer, and analytical advisor through whom the stink and squalor underlining the political hierarchy of the country is revealed. Talking about the country (Pakistan) where the father of Rani Shah was executed as a result of political revenge by the General, Nazo explodes,

> But now it was a prison, one giant cage for women and children, elderly and disabled, and all those others who weren't men enough or Muslim enough. We were the waste, to be swept under borders of black cloth. My country was once colourful, but now it is a black sea. Black burqas, black beards, black burnt-down buildings pockmarked with bullets…But amidst all this darkness, you appeared like a white dove, a messenger of peace. Nobody really knew how you managed to escape the General's prison, but there you were, carrying on your martyred father's mission. (Javeri, 2017, p. 17)

The powerful imagery of black and darkness brings out the decay and chaos running parallel to the fate of the country. The delineation of the country under the rule of the General depicts the deplorable political and social state of affairs where the weak and the miserable have no life at all. The black burqas represent the patriarchy subjugating the female in black wraps. Black beards represent religious exploitation, and pockmarked burnt-out buildings represent the destruction and deterioration of the political system of the country.

Laughing against oppression: Grotesque humour's subversive power

In the intricate trajectory of *Nobody Killed Her* (Javeri, 2017), the repetitious echoes of grotesque laughter resound, enriching the narrative with a defiance that goes beyond the conventional realm of laughter. It is the carnivalesque laughter which is not engendered by true mirth but rather a deviant expression of the dichotomy between power and fragility, integrity and deception. Bakhtin (1984) notes that the simplicity of the primitive laughter was replaced by the complexity of medieval carnival festivities, such as the Feast of Fools and the Feast of ass, which were performed in Europe:

All these forms of protocol and ritual based on laughter and consecrated by tradition existed in all the countries of medieval Europe; they were sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal and political cult forms and ceremonials. They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extra ecclesiastical and extra-political aspect of the world, of man and human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year. (p.6)

Carnival laughter subverts the power of established doctrine by emphasizing the "gay relativity of prevailing truth and authorities" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 11), and grotesque degradation performs the same function by diminishing "all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" to "the material level, to the sphere of earth and the body in their indissoluble unity" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 19-20).

This grotesque laughter is manifested in a chiaroscuro, where the boundary between comical and gruesome blur. It is laughter that doesn't evoke glee and jubilation but, instead, portrays a society entangled in its convoluted norms and values. This laughter acts as a weapon, handled with surgical proficiency, dismantling the social facade to reveal the unbridled underbelly of power relations. In this way, the carnivalesque laughter not only mocks but also affirms "it buries and revives" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 12). Likewise, its tradition of debasement and scoffing does not entail "absolute destruction" of the derided object but "[its reviving] contact with the reproductive and generating power of the earth and the body" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 21-22).

Against the backdrop of the political carnivalesque *Nobody Killed Her* (Javeri, 2017) brings to light the grave concerns relating to the power dynamics and voicelessness of the marginalized, especially the female section of society, through the use of grotesque laughter. Javeri's skill mastery is reflected through the weaving of her narrative as grotesque laughter becomes a part of the narrative. Her laughter is not the boisterous laugh of mere sneering and jeering but subtle and artistic, rectifying the very fabric of social and cultural practices. When Nazo, political leader Rani Shah's servant cum assistant whose task is just to manage her diary, steps forward to stop Rani from indulging in a romantic escapade and meeting some newspaper for interviews, Reed-Rani's lover and Rani herself scold her. Nazo's words in that instant wake Rani out of her slumber and bring out the laughter of social jeering aimed at people advocating the education of the girls.

> You were the leader, Rani. That was the name your father had given you. You, and not your younger brother Shanoo, were his legacy. Did you forget that? He believed in you. People used to laugh at your father for educating a daughter, but he didn't care. Your father championed you. They called his faith in you fatherly indulgence. But the day the General killed him, you were the one who stood up for him. You, not your younger brother who went into hiding, faced the General. That day, you became Madam Shah. (Javeri, 2017, p. 21)

The Bakhtinian grotesque laughter is skillfully evident as people scoff at Rani Shah's father for educating her. People here reflect the perspective of the society breeding on the established values. Bakhtin's notion of laughter underscores the subversion of social values and power structure, often expressed through laughter that questions the enrooted system of beliefs. According to Bakhtin (1984), "the complex nature of carnival laughter is mainly festive, communal, universal, and ambivalent" (p.12). The laughter aimed at Rani's father for educating a daughter functions as a means of social mockery and defiance of the uprooting of typical gender roles. Bakhtin contends that the grotesque body and laughter are the vehicles transmitting rebellion against rotten societal beliefs and authority. Bakhtin (1981) describes the power of laughter in the following words.

> Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one finger is familiarly on all sides, turning it upside down, inside out, peering at it from above and below, breaking open its external shell, look into its centre, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it. (p.23)

When the autocratic General is not ready to relinquish power and addresses the nation on TV that he can't take the risk of handing over the rule of the country "into the hands of corrupt and power-hungry disbelievers" (Javeri, 2017, p. 56), and that "the women could neither vote nor contest for office" (p.56), Rani Shah breaks into hysterical laughter. "You laughed at me. That mad carefree laugh of yours that did nothing to mask how frightened you were" (p.56). This laughter represents the Bakhtinian grotesque laughter aimed at highlighting the brutality and hypocrisy of the despotic General on the one hand and the powerlessness of the women on the other hand, who are made a scapegoat in the guise of religion and so-called morality. This laughter serves to bring out the decadence of the General, who is so much hated by the people that, in the words of Nazo, "Even he knew that not even a cockroach would vote for him" (p.56). Bakhtin (1984) intimates that carnival can be discerned as "the people's second life, organized based on laughter" and describes it as "a festive life; second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (pp.198-199).

Javeri's grotesque laughter is not vindictive. It aims to bring to notice the grave injustice done to the marginalized when even the police and judiciary give a deaf ear to their misery. Instead of depending on hyperbolic corporeal or situational grotesqueries, the laughter in *Nobody Killed Her* reverberates emotionally. It imparts collective insight to the individuals who perceive the injustice and empathize with the oppressed. Javeri's laughter unobtrusively challenges accepted traditions and power dynamics. It questions the stasis without pronounced attention, permitting a subtle kind of dissent. "The cheerful vulgarity of the powerless is used as a weapon against the pretence and hypocrisy of the powerful" (Stamm, 1982, , p.47).

In Bakhtin (1984) opinion, laughter defeats fear and "could never become an instrument to oppress and blind the people. It always remains a free weapon in their hands" (p.94). Laughter also "unveils the material bodily principle" leading to a "festive liberation of laughter and body" (p.89)—the display of "the generating, devouring, and defecating body" (p.425).

Bakhtinian grotesque laughter defies the male-centered patriarchy. The rejection of the daughter's incapacity to 'answer back' can be viewed as an endeavour to gain control of her voice and authority. Bakhtin's notion of grotesque laughter is a medium of revolt against the silencing of marginalized voices. Bakhtin (1984) considers laughter as a subversive weapon that has the potential to demolish tyrannical structures, as Balgodi's mindset has been brought to the attention to mock and ridicule it. Grotesque is generated from the realization of the irrationality of rigid gender mores and the illogical notion that a woman's credibility is established only by her marriageability.

Conclusion

The lens of the carnivalesque grotesque as a means of subversion, intertwined with grotesque realism and laughter, manifests as a potent instrument for denuding and questioning oppressive and exploitative structures in *Nobody Killed Her* (Javeri, 2017). With grotesque imagery and laughter, the narrative dismantles patriarchal mores and destabilizes the powerful political hierarchies through the resilient characters of Nazo and Rani Madam. This literary ploy acts as a mode for unearthing the insidious systemic exploitation endured by the marginalized, furnishing a radical and transformative impetus that wrestles with entrenched paradigms. In the locus of grotesque realism, the account not only underscores social disparities but also fervently commits to carnivalesque defiance of challenging and resisting

enrooted institutions of tyranny. The present study serves as a poignant critique of societal change and the subversion of systemic inequities and fosters an environment for social change and enlightenment. The appraisal of the carnivalesque grotesque, characterized by grotesque realism and augmented by the liberating tone of laughter, exhibits a potent subversive force within *Nobody Killed Her*. The characters of Nazo and Rani Madam rise as pivotal forces of resistance, formidably revolting against the oppressive restrictions of patriarchy and the strategic manoeuvring of political structures. The research illuminates how Nazo and Rani Madam not only defy their predefined roles but also proactively contend and dismantle the ingrained power paradigms. Nazo, with her unyielding spirit, negotiating the intersectionality of social norms, and Rani Madam, fomenting a rebellion against deep-seated political norms, collectively personify a profound repudiation of preordained fates. Their narratives outstrip mere defiance; they manifest a dynamic form of subversion, 'a subversive resilience' that, when represented within the carnivalesque grotesque, undermines the core principles of societal constructs. The defiance exhibited by Nazo and Rani Madam in the backdrop of Pakistani society is not just a dissent against hegemony; it evolves into a unified engagement against the oppressive forces that strive to constrict and define them.

This study asserts that the carnivalesque grotesque, when harnessed through defiant characters like Nazo and Rani Madam, morphs into a powerful instrument of subversion, disrupting the stereotypical patriarchal and political paradigms with dauntless defiance and emancipatory laughter.

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