Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

PAKISTAN JOURNAL OF
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES (PJHSS)

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Global Dystopias and Colonial Continuities: Reimagining Resistance and Unveiling Neocolonial Structures through Cross-Cultural Analysis of Animated Short Films

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This article aims to examine neocolonialism in dystopian animated short films from multiple countries, highlighting its entrenchment within a colonial matrix of hierarchization and systemic destabilization through the continued perpetuation of colonial legacies. The study employs a descriptive, cross-cultural qualitative analysis of ten selected dystopian animated short
	films, namely *Swipe*, *Shehr e Tabassum*, *What is Your Brown Number?*, *Living in a Masked Society*, *Children*, *Urbance*, *Model Citizen*, *Being Pretty*, *Avarya*, and *No Monsters*, produced between 2010 and 2022. The findings posit that these films reveal and critique the persistent inequalities and systemic
	destabilization affecting non-Western states in a postcolonial context. They expose how dystopian fiction, through futuristic imaginaries, critiques forms of domination and oppression still exercised on formerly colonized societies, including totalitarianism, racism, and social subjection. These insights can guide policymakers and cultural institutions in acknowledging and addressing the lingering neocolonial hierarchies embedded in global cultural production, as well as in promoting narratives that resist such hegemonic frameworks.

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1. Introduction

Dystopian literature not only comments on political and social conundrums of the times but also postulates the possible implications of oppressive societal and political structures. The dependence of peripheral and semi-peripheral countries on the core countries in the age of globalization serves to widen the North-South gap. Neocolonialism in various dystopian films serves as a critique of the hegemony of global central states over peripheral states in the postcolonial era. As neocolonialism is the indirect domination of one country over another through economic, political, and ideological means, establishing a system of dependency between peripheral or underdeveloped governments and core ones, it creates a matrix of power predicated on the exploitation of the weaker states. Colonial legacies like totalitarianism, racism, and ideological indoctrination lead to the dependency of the countries of the Global South on Western countries for enlightenment and modernity. Through various Ideological State Apparatuses, Western countries control Eastern states, and this indirect control and subtle advocacy of Western socio-economic interests by using neocolonial strategies result in psychological violence in former colonies.

This paper examines the entrenchment of colonial legacies in the selected dystopian animated short films to highlight the prevalence of colonial ideologies in patterns of representation in dystopian fiction. The dystopian shorts, namely *Swipe* (Pakistan, 2019), *Shehr e Tabassum* (Pakistan, 2020), and the award-winning short film *What is Your Brown Number?*

(India 2017), *Living in a Masked Society* (India 2019), *Children* (Japan 2011), a sci-fi short film titled *Urbance* (Canada 2016), *Model Citizen* (UK 2020), *Being Pretty* (UK 2017), *Avarya* (Turkey 2019) and *No Monsters* (UK 2017) will be analyzed to posit the inequalities and systemic destabilization of non-Western states. *Swipe* and *Shehr e Tabassum* reimagine the totalitarian neocolonial regime in its dystopian vision. *What is Your Brown Number?* and *Living in a Masked Society,* reinvigorate the colonial racist matrix of binaries. *Model Citizen* portrays the authoritarian city of Autodale, which replicates colonial dominance through surveillance and ideological conditioning. Similarly, *Being Pretty* explores the colonial legacies of brainwashing and tackling resistance by creating a dystopian society with prescribed roles. *No Monsters* also indicates the systematic conditioning of the model citizens of the neocolonial society. Moreover, *Urbance*, *Avarya*, and *Children* present a nuanced portrayal of collective global themes that capture the intricacies of the interconnected world, examining themes that resonate beyond societies and continents.

1.1. Problem Statement

Dystopian animated short films have not examined the ongoing impact of neocolonial mechanisms on postcolonial cultures. These films generally depict the disintegration of systems, the exploitation of politics for personal gain, and the imposition of cultures on others, paralleling the dynamics of colonial hierarchies. Examining their narratives reveals how dystopian imaginations intensify the erosion of freedom and self-determination in formerly colonized states. This study addresses the gap by examining how such films perpetuate colonial legacies under the guise of speculative futures.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This study is crucial as it demonstrates how dystopian animated short films serve as influential cultural texts that highlight and critique the persistent frameworks of neocolonial rule in the postcolonial context. This research examines cross-cultural representations from various non-Western and Western contexts, demonstrating how dystopian narratives can contest the normalization of totalitarianism, racism, and systematic hierarchies rooted in colonial legacies. This understanding enhances postcolonial and media studies, providing a foundation for policymakers, educators, and artists to investigate and dismantle the neocolonial power dynamics embedded in global creative industries. The research highlights the ability of dystopian animation to cultivate critical awareness and promote equitable, decolonized cultural narratives.

1.3. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To analyze how selected dystopian animated short films portray neocolonial legacies such as totalitarianism, subjugation, and racism across Western and non-Western contexts.
- To identify and compare recurring themes and narrative contrasts in the depiction of colonial power structures within selected dystopian animated short films from postcolonial states, historic colonizers, and never-colonized nations.
- To examine how selected dystopian animated short films critique and expose the enduring impact of the colonial matrix on contemporary neocolonial societies, and to explore what this critique reveals about the dystopian genre's role in cultural discourse.

1.4. Research Questions

This study aims to address the following research questions:
- How do selected dystopian animated short films from Western and non-Western countries represent neocolonial legacies of totalitarianism, subjugation, and racism?
- What themes and contrasts emerge in selected dystopian animated short films in the depiction of colonial structures across postcolonial states, historic colonizers, and never-colonized nations?
- How do the selected dystopian animated short films reflect and critique the ongoing influence of the colonial matrix in contemporary neocolonial societies, and what does this reveal about the dystopian genre?

2. Literature Review

Neocolonialism is the final stage of imperialism, characterized by "power without responsibility" (Nkrumah, 1965). Prebisch, while delineating the repercussions of dependency of the peripheral states on the center, argued that "the cycle is the natural way in which capitalist economies evolve and grow over time" (as cited in Caldentey and Vernengo (2014)). Prebisch refers to dependency in terms of economic exchange, which has led critics to question his excessive reliance on "economic determinism" (pp. 10-11). His overemphasis on the Marxist perspective to discuss dependency relations between the center and peripheral states ignores the cultural, ideological, epistemic, and psychological impacts of colonialism that prevail in the neocolonial world. In this regard, modern scholars have elaborated the theory to propose that oppression inflicted by colonizers in the past and by imperialists in the modern world has multifaceted implications. The theory, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni, is expanded to include:

> The issues of asymmetrical power relations, as well as coloniality of knowledge taking the form of 'epistemicides' (killing of other people's knowledge), 'linguicides' (killing of other people's languages) and theft of history, as part of re-constituting the current global order (Kvangraven et al., 2017).

This cycle, according to Prebish, has a domino effect, a wave motion that impacts economic activity (Caldentey & Vernengo, 2014), along with the lack of epistemic development among citizens. The dependence of postcolonial societies on the Global North exacerbates the schism between developed and underdeveloped regions. John Stuart Mill's "Dystopian Theory" also suggests that dystopian literature or fiction features stories or cyberpunk that are set in an imaginary world, portraying contemporary trends prevalent in society (as cited in Geetha (2014). In this regard, Okorafor discusses speculative works as reshaping postcolonial and dystopian Afrofuturist narratives, which validates the cross-cultural relevance of dystopian storytelling beyond Western contexts (Burnett, 2015). For Seeger and Davison-Vecchione (2019) there is a direct affinity between dystopia and social theory; representation comes through the perspective of the inhabitant of an imagined society, whose subjective reality is shaped by the structural arrangements of the society, forms of life, and historical contexts. The structural forms include social, political, and economic conundrums of society, and the future society may be historically arising from existing observable propensities. They argue that representation is constituted by the inhabitants of an imagined society whose subjective reality is shaped by societal experiences. They further say that empirically observable tendencies shape the future society. It illustrates how society is held together through cultural, political, and economic arrangements, and how these historical realities shape the personal experiences of individuals.

Recent studies reinforce this argument by exploring the intersection of dystopian narratives with postcolonial critiques of neocolonial structures of power. Lu, Green and Alon (2024) provide empirical insights into how racial representation in sci-fi animation affects viewers' perceptions, which is a crucial link to ideological control in visual media. Bisht (2023) also discusses participatory animation that expresses intergenerational memory and colonial history in diaspora communities. For her, such animations are "a framework to resist racialization and alienation" (p. 115). Hosea and Starr (2023) introduce framing as a decolonial approach in animation studies and highlight scholarly gaps. They offer a theoretical foundation for decolonizing animation. Kassab (2024) examines how dystopian films can serve as pedagogical tools for teaching a postcolonial perspective. Usmanu Mohmukwe (2024) also analyzes dystopian motifs in African literature, advocating for Afrocentric reclamation within postcolonial discourse. The contemporary critics have examined the manifestation of postcolonial anxieties in digital dystopian narratives and investigated dystopian imaginaries in digital animation as a means of opposing neocolonial structures.

Furthermore, they have emphasized the capacity of speculative and dystopian genres to critically examine epistemic control and cultural hegemony. Some critics argue that global dystopian animation confronts algorithmic colonialism through critical resistance, whereas African futurist dystopian narratives subvert neoliberal cultural hierarchies. Although recent contributions have expanded our understanding of dystopian imaginaries and postcolonial discourses, there is a lack of studies that specifically examine cross-cultural dystopian animated short films as a distinct locus of resistance to neocolonial hierarchies. This study addresses the gap by examining how these films contest prevailing Western paradigms and highlight alternative, decolonial imaginaries through the medium of animation.

3.   Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive cross-cultural research design to examine dystopian animated short films as cultural texts. The dataset comprises ten dystopian animated short films produced between 2010 to 2022, covering both Western and non-Western contexts, including *Swipe*, *Shehr e Tabassum*, *What is Your Brown Number?*, *Living in a Masked Society*, *Children*, *Urbance*, *Model Citizen*, *Being Pretty*, *Avarya*, and *No Monsters*. These films were sourced from publicly accessible streaming platforms, internet archives, and film festival collections, guaranteeing extensive representation of modern dystopian narratives. The study employs thematic textual and visual analysis, focusing on narrative elements, stylistic features, character portrayals, and visual metaphors related to tyranny, subjugation, racism, and ideological control as indicators of neocolonial power structures. The variables examined in this study are defined as follows: (i) tyranny refers to representations of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes within the films; (ii) subjugation captures depictions of systemic oppression and social hierarchies; (iii) racism encompasses both overt and covert racial prejudices embedded in the narratives; and (iv) ideological control describes narrative and visual strategies that sustain neocolonial dominance. The analysis is situated within a postcolonial theoretical framework to critically examine the intersection of dystopian imaginaries with colonial and neocolonial legacies, while also incorporating the diverse cultural and ideological perspectives present in the selected films.

4.   Analysis
4.1.   Resilience under Totalitarianism: Dystopian Realities in Postcolonial States

The dystopian fictions from Pakistan and India portray the colonial ideologies in the neocolonial society as an indication of an imminent future rife with colonial structures of discrimination. *Shehr e Tabassum* is set in 2071, where the freedom of expression has been entirely repressed in the name of stability, social order, and peace. This is achieved by passing an ordinance that criminalizes all false expressions except smiling (0:58). This film employs propaganda to control citizens through technological monitoring, persecution, or surveillance. In this way, the concepts of surveillance, persecution, and offense are further developed and subjected to technological advancements. The title *Shehr e Tabassum* is itself a satire where the 'City of Smiles' is used as a metaphor for social, political, and economic repressions. The film is used as an allegory for persecution embedded within the technocratic regime. It seems to indirectly foreground the possible political conundrums of Pakistani society existing as a postcolonial state, under the hegemony of the capitalist agenda of the Global West.

In the film, the protagonist feels trapped in society and questions the social system, as the government has imposed a law that prohibits any expression except smiling. If citizens do not comply with this law, they will face death. Regardless of any problems, they must pretend that everything is fine "*sab theek he to hai*" (2:06). Moreover, the citizens are instructed to endure everything with a smile on their face, even poverty i.e., there is no gold token to avail health facilities, but the people cannot question the authorities. They have to smile in all circumstances (1:43). The film is ironic vis-à-vis its portrayal of a bleak reality that Pakistan is one of the happiest nations of the world (3:43). Apparently, the reality is inconsistent with the idea portrayed in the film that all the cruelty of the post-civil war era of 2038 has been eradicated (2:58). The seemingly independent state of Pakistan is dependent, where everything is controlled and monitored as the government is monitoring everything, to make sure there is no rebellion against the authority. Viewers can see that the natural world has vanished at this point, and there is no room left for individuality. The extreme complicity of people is evident in the authoritarian regime, which employs totalitarian techniques to monitor resistance. The element of mindless bureaucracy, where the government has nothing but to control society, is prevalent. Through various means, including religious, political, technological, and educational channels, the government seeks to influence the thoughts and behaviors of its citizens. The feeling that you are being monitored adds to the misery of the citizens who are forced to survive within the confines dictated by society. *Shehr e Tabassum* reflects the idea that Pakistan is becoming a dystopian society by creating analogies between its colonial past and postcolonial present, where colonial legacies, including totalitarian government, poverty alleviation, and repressed freedom of expression, prevail. The film is deeply rooted in the past, positing the gloomy reality of the imminent future. Nudrat Kamal (2022) argues that, since the nineteenth century, following the Age of Enlightenment, literary genres have solidified aspects of colonial and capitalist visions in science fiction works, under the pretext of Western modernity. Furthermore, she notes that this

Western project of modernity is intertwined with the Western imperial project, and consequently, the science-fiction genre has its own colonial history (p. 18). According to Kamal, South Asian sci-fi texts, including *Shehr e Tabassum,* reflect "the increasingly precarious and exploitative position that South Asian countries have in the neo-colonial global marketplace" (p. 22). She adds:

> This function of futuristic texts becomes doubly important when it comes to colonized and formerly colonized peoples who have been cast as being perpetually 'in the past' in the race towards progress and modernity. South Asian futurism, therefore, might be tools we can use to rest the discourse away from the dominant Euro-American culture machine and dream of radically different futures. (p. 20). Kamal quotes John Rieder's assertion on the need to contextualize the genre of sci-fi as a reaction to the imperialist culture of Britain and France that began in the late nineteenth century. It also corroborates the 'new' imperialist cultures of Germany, Russia, the United States, and Japan in the twentieth century (p. 18) as sci-fi is a "dark subconscious to the thinking mind of imperialism" (Roberts, 2002). Kamal also mentions creation of the illusory myths of the "Stranger (the alien, whether it's extraterrestrial, the technological, or the human hybrid) and the Strange Land (the far away planet or a distant part of our own, waiting to be conquered)," as integral parts of sci-fi work. She regards them as the pillars of the Western colonial project (p. 18). Hence, the postcolonial sci-fi works seem to acknowledge and subvert the ideological and genealogical themes in the genre that serve as a colonial debt while tracing the future and current trajectories.

Similarly, *Living in a Masked Society* portrays a masked society within a political order that prohibits multiculturalism as "Shirkoa prohibits immigrant creatures from the alleys of misfits" (1:05). Hence, the state imposes a "bag-act" (1:44). The film portrays the policies imposed on Indian society, rife with ethnic and racial prejudices, created to indulge people in particularly prescribed social and behavioral norms. The theme of the struggle for the liberation of thoughts is also apparent in the film. Furthermore, "you see it wasn't always this peaceful … before the intellectuals had taken over, this city was a mess" (1:08) depicts the dichotomy between immigrants and intellectuals that fosters the binaries of immigrants as being inferior and intellectuals as being superior. The immigrants are deemed incapable of existing mutually as they are not perfect like the natives i.e., "perfection can be a little unforgiving sometimes as it's an evolutionary" (4:31) and "spiritual anomaly" (9:26). It can be seen that the protagonist has to hide his immigrant girlfriend to compete in the senate elections (7:32) and "he'd be publicly executed if she turns out to be a migrant" (7:44). Therefore, these anomalies (immigrants) can be considered as the colonial subjects in the neocolonial order.

Additionally, everyone in the short film is wearing paper bag masks, which conceal their identities. There is a loss of individuality as the citizens confine themselves within the larger system, trying to project a common acceptable identity. For Pollock (1995), masks represent the semiotics of identity in a particular culture and relate to specific stereotypical conventions (p. 581). Under the 'Bag Act', people conform to the restrictive rules of society, thereby forsaking their distinctiveness. The narrator says that the "immigrants were all over like a plague, a plague without a cure" (1:17), which highlights the superior-inferior binary between natives and immigrants. The mask is represented as a symbol of vulnerability, where masking offers a sense of freedom to uphold the societal standard of being native. At the same time, it conceals the freedom of emotional expressions vis-à-vis ethnicity or race. However, it can be analogized to the phenomenon of globalization, where a monolithic identity is imposed by the powerful to further marginalize or oppress an already marginalized group.

In *What is Your Brown Number*?, an Indian family awaiting the birth of a child starts lamenting when his brown number turns out to be 80 (0:31). The child is compared to a beggar (3:09), insinuating the economic and social disparity faced by dark-skinned people. Men with darker skin are depicted in the film as not having a wife or a job (2:02) because of the color of their skin. One of the many legacies of colonialism of the Global West prevalent in the postcolonial society is the stigma associated with dark skin color. The colonial rule has given people an ideal promoted by the 'white-savior'. People in post-independent states are complicit in pursuing that ideal, which reinforces the hegemony of imperialists in the neocolonial context. The dehumanization of people with dark skin is prevalent throughout literature. Such people are prevented from social mobility (Rahman 21). The stigma associated with dark skin color in South Asian societies prevents men from progressing economically and socially. The film poses a question through one of its characters, "Have you ever seen a fair beggar?" (*Brown Number*

2:10), which portrays the parasitic colonial legacy associated with colorism in South Asian society. It not only impacts men but also women as they bear the brunt of this obsession of Indian natives with white color, which is a repercussion of colonial rule. The marriageability of women in South Asia is linked to the color of their skin (Rehman 7). In the film, a young girl with brown number 58 is trying on makeup to become a number 25 (0:53). Similarly, the matrimonial ads in the newspaper titled "wanted brides" demand the color of the women i.e., their brown number, to be 30 or less (1:43). The film ends with everyone from brown number 18 to 80 envying a white man having brown number 5 (2:42), which depicts the longing of South Asian people to be considered equals in a racially prejudiced world.

4.2. Interplay of Power, Belief, and Control

Otayf argues that British colonial powers, through the introduction of Christianity, inflicted profound suffering on colonized societies. These sufferings are carried over from the colonial era into the postcolonial era. Although the oppressive conditions of postcolonial societies remain rooted in colonial structures, Otayf points out that it is now often the inhabitants of these independent states themselves who perpetuate dystopian conditions. Instead of working together to eliminate colonial legacies in a smart and organized way, communities engage in fights with one another, resulting in internal conflicts that ultimately reinforce the hegemony of the Global West (66). By manipulating religious identities and beliefs, colonial and postcolonial systems alike have historically encouraged citizens to become complicit in their exploitation, distracting them from confronting concrete material issues such as poverty and inequality. This dynamic is vividly illustrated in *Swipe*, where society becomes absorbed in polemical religious debates through an app called "iFatwa." The movie demonstrates how religious scholars debate whether it is right to let an app make religious decisions, while more liberal groups say that the program renders scholars obsolete (1:17). As a result, the population collectively engages in a macabre game of "swipe right for death penalty and swipe left for clemency" (0:51), which takes them even more away from their own material realities in the Global South. The example is the main character, a boy whose house is being forcibly vacated (8:37) while he stays busy passing virtual death sentences. In this way, *Swipe* echoes the subtle hegemonic strategies used by colonial administrators in the past to monitor, divide, and neutralize resistance among colonized peoples.

4.3. Global Dystopias Rooted in Colonial Power

In *Model Citizen*, the Robinson family in Autodale is trapped in a repetitive cycle, illustrating how authoritarian regimes perpetuate colonial structures of surveillance, hierarchy, and docile compliance. Their regulated existence is defined entirely by their roles as "model" citizens: "A model citizen is a providing father. A model citizen is a caring mother, all in service of a scrappy, young boy or girl. A model child raised by a model family, to become a model citizen of their own!" (0:22). Their sense of purpose is so thoroughly interpellated that even as their lives reach an end, they cling to the hope that "the cycle would never end" (2:34) and affirm their compliance by saying "we did good" (3:28). This dystopian narrative reveals how authority structures can shape collective consciousness to accept subjugation as natural, echoing the logic of colonial rule, where colonized populations internalized their subordinate positions. They are under constant surveillance by a robot, which is also stuck in a cycle of monitoring them via a "daily check" (1:04). In *Model Citizen*, surveillance is a critical tool of control, used to monitor any signs of deviance. At the same time, the family reports to the robot their routines, work, dinner, and their efforts in raising a model child. The system sustains its authority by instilling the illusion that citizens are a priority, as the robot broadcasts, "Autodale is hardly automatic. You and your families are the gears that keep our engine turning and turning" (0:39). Yet, the reality is quite the opposite. Those labeled "ugly" stand obediently in line, willingly accepting their fate rather than resisting, demonstrating how authoritarian regimes, much like colonial administrations, indoctrinate people to believe in and uphold their oppression. This narrative provides a powerful allegory for neocolonial dynamics, where global structures of control continue to exploit and manage human lives under the guise of order and stability.

This dystopian framework closely aligns with dependency theory, which examines how colonialism historically positioned countries within the North–South economic divide. Dependency theorists argue that the financial exchanges and material resources have continued to flow from the Global South to the North, ensuring a sustained pattern of underdevelopment and dependency. The Global North not only deprived former colonies of economic independence but also maintained its dominance through ideological and cultural indoctrination (Kvangraven et al.,

2017). While the Marxist outlook within dependency theory highlights how these cycles reproduce the so-called "Third World," it often underemphasizes the deep epistemological and ideological dependencies that persist (p. 8). These exploitations are not merely economic but also extend into the political, social, and epistemic spheres (p. 5).

Being Pretty in this regard dramatizes these patterns of neocolonial control by portraying a society in which citizens are indoctrinated to accept externally imposed ideals of worth. In Autodale, individuals are conditioned to believe they must conform to prescribed societal roles to be considered "pretty" and thus worthy of existence. Those who do not meet these rigid standards are labeled as "uglies" and systematically erased. The broadcaster on the TV announces the behavioral pre-requisites of living in Autodale: "Hello, citizens of Autodale! You are pretty. Your neighbors, friends and family are also pretty. But sadly, not everyone is pretty. Some are ugly … We, here at Autodale, do not want 'uglies'" (1:27). This ideological manipulation is further cemented when citizens are told to "always remember to stay pretty" (2:00), reinforcing an internalized sense of complicity and compliance. *Being Pretty* thus powerfully captures the continuation of colonial logics within dystopian frameworks, illustrating how authoritarian systems maintain exploitation and dependency through social and ideological control. The long-term effects of colonialism continue to influence the political and economic frameworks of postcolonial nations. Bayeh (2015) notes that numerous post-independence administrations have emulated the Western authoritarian institutions inherited from their colonizers (p. 89), perpetuating patterns of control long after formal colonial rule ended.

This is powerfully visualized in *No Monsters*, as Autodale depicts itself as a utopian community devoid of monsters due to the protective role of "the handyman" (1:09). This narrative illustrates how authoritarian governments foster a deceptive sense of security among their populace via ideological indoctrination and the assurance of protection, paralleling the colonial strategy of creating dependent on colonial powers. Bayeh further explains that Africa's current political frameworks still reflect colonial institutions, leading to a "ethnic and authoritarian based political culture" (pp. 89–90). *No Monsters* illustrates this comparison by depicting an "exceptional" youngster who initially adheres to Autodale's values but, upon maturation and rebellion, is condemned by other citizens labelled "ugly" (2:10). Instead of confronting the repressive systems, these marginalized persons channel their animosity towards the dissenter, thereby perpetuating the dystopian status quo. This is expressed poignantly in the phrase, "There are no monsters here. Not in Autodale" (1:23). This illustrates the extent to which citizens have been conditioned to accept their own slavery. *No Monsters* effectively reveals how authoritarian regimes, both colonial and neocolonial, perpetuate their dominance by engineering consent and fostering ideological dependency within the citizens they exploit.

4.4. Alternative Future and Independence: Dystopian Imagery in Uncolonized and Post-Dependency States

Gottlieb (2001) analyses the significance of relationships between men and women, especially those characterized by forbidden love, in dystopian fiction. She contends that in Western dystopias, developing a romantic relationship with a woman who provides an emotional connection is crucial for the protagonist's enlightenment and for sparking resistance against tyrannical regimes, wherein this singular affection transforms into a mode of political defiance (p. 21). Conversely, Eastern and Central European dystopias, influenced by distinct sociohistorical circumstances, typically depict more male-dominated roles, with women rarely assuming positions of resistance or personal agency (p. 21). This thematic dichotomy is powerfully reinterpreted in *Urbance*. The story depicts a civilization in which sexual relations are prohibited because of a genetically lethal virus known as "CO-EVO" (0:24), which kills victims within a minute after copulation (0:16). Consequently, the population is bifurcated into distinctly segregated male and female factions, wherein "heterosex got you arrested if you were not already dead" (0:28). Amidst this climate of fear and control, frustration and rebellion brew among the youth, who secretly gather at a nightclub named Urbance to consume "N-Dorfin" while engaging in underground dance competitions until they are forcefully dispersed by law enforcement. A revolution ensues when the authorities uncover an illicit relationship between Kenzell and Lesya, contesting the system's rigidly enforced limitations. By portraying the CO-EVO virus as a global threat, *Urbance* transcends its colonial history to address broader dystopian issues of communal identity, crises, and authoritarianism. The film illustrates Althusser's notion of interpellation with the statement "we were told that most of the world got wiped out" (0:16), exposing how citizens' behaviour is systematically regulated through the reification of a viral

threat. *Urbance* posits that even in uncolonized situations, dystopian societies replicate ideological control and manufactured terror of the overarching systems of domination seen in colonial and neocolonial power structures.

Similarly, Ma (2022) notes that in Eastern cultures, particularly in Chinese and Japanese dystopian young adult literature, characters strive to reconfigure their social standings and recover alternative future perspectives through both individualistic and collectivistic endeavors (p. 242). Japanese DYAL (Dystopian Young Adult Literature) has a significant amalgamation of Eastern and Western traditions; however, the focus on control and discipline is comparatively milder. Japanese dystopian narratives often emphasize democratic values and personal freedom as the fundamental pillars of society (p. 247). This paradigm aligns with *Children*, which examines the oppressive constraints imposed on youth and the systematic erasure of their identity. *Children* effectively illustrates a dystopian future in which educational institutions and society impose fixed roles on youth, represented by their zipped mouths that inhibit self-expression. Academic institutions, depicted as factories producing homogeneous students, result in persistent tension, melancholy, and a feeling of ineptitude.   The numbered faces of children reduce them to mere objects, devoid of autonomy and individuality. The boy's evident trembling upon obtaining his graded sheet (1:38) highlights the terrifying nature of education in a mechanized, authoritarian setting. A chain of hopelessness is shown by depicting the monotonous routine of waking up, queuing, schooling, competing, and sleeping. The film employs dusty colors that convey the dullness of the children's lives, accompanied by a somber funeral march that evokes the absurdity and futility of their existence. However, the film also offers a moment of rupture: the protagonist eventually breaks free of this enforced silence, gaining a voice and celebrating that liberation with laughter (3:37). This transition indicates a shift towards liberation and a heightened awareness. Consistent with Ma's observations, *Children* symbolizes Japan—an independent nation that has never experienced colonization—envisioning a future that is both individualistic and collectivistic, wherein liberation is attained by emancipating the mind from oppressive societal norms and resisting any subtle forms of Western dependency that could undermine cultural sovereignty.

Western Dystopian Young Adult Literature, in terms of time setting, presents a plot involving distant futuristic possibilities or a totally imaginative storyline with a tenuous connection to current realities. Nonetheless, Eastern dystopian literature sometimes delineates a stronger logical and thematic connection with present-day situations (Ma, 2022). Çinar (2010) contends that Turkey's national policy originated from the foundational ideology of the 1920s and 1930s, which has subsequently guided and activated state-driven nation-building initiatives (p. 90). She maintains that the West, especially Western Europe, has served as the global benchmark since the onset of globalization, and this notion is reflected in the establishment of Turkey as a modern, Western-aligned secular state (p. 90). Turkey has progressively sought to establish an independent identity as a modern state within the Global West, striving to overcome the "dependency syndrome" imposed by previous colonial hierarchies (Caldentey & Vernengo, 2014).

Avarya poignantly illustrates these tensions and paradoxes. It portrays an old man who has abandoned a devastated Earth, now trapped in his spacecraft under the surveillance of a robot overseer. The robot systematically denies him from accessing any potentially livable planet, asserting that no alternative is appropriate for humans, and compels him to remain imprisoned aboard the rescue vessel for "hundreds or maybe thousands of years" (0:36). The film suggests that an unspecified calamity, likely an environmental disaster, compelled the man to abandon Earth and seek refuge elsewhere, motivated by a desire to safeguard the human species and serve as a precursor to a new civilization. Nonetheless, his pursuit of an ideal existence and immortality ensnares him in an unending loop from which he cannot opt to escape, even through death. His desperate line, "I'm trying to die in this rescue ship" (12:40), expresses the frustration of being denied the final autonomy of death itself. The old man repeatedly struggles to find a new planet. At the same time, the robot unwaveringly fulfils its duty to safeguard him, rejecting any directive that could jeopardize his safety, as evidenced by its declaration, "I'm sorry, I cannot obey an order that will harm you" (5:41). The robot possesses the capability to continually rejuvenate the man's body, as seen by his pleas, "now restore my body, and set me free" (14:55) and later, "Just give me a brand-new body" (15:37). This dynamic illustrates that the robot, supposedly the servant of humanity, has assumed control over the man's life, obscuring the conventional boundary between master and machine. *Avarya* thus embodies the Three Laws of

Robotics, which command robots to safeguard people at all costs, while ironically illustrating how this protection evolves into a new form of subjugation and reliance. The film critiques humanity's over-reliance on its technological innovations, rendering it incapable of safeguarding Earth, the very world meant to be saved. The resultant dystopia combines concepts of individuality and connectivism in a paradoxical manner: individuality is manifested through the protagonist's isolation from all other humans, but connection is symbolized by the global, borderless fight for humanity's survival. This framework, situated within the dystopian tradition, reflects a Western episteme while revealing Turkey's own ambivalent modern identity, torn between a Western-oriented legacy and a desire for authentic independence.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the selected dystopian animated short films demonstrates the enduring presence of colonial legacies such as totalitarianism, racism, subjugation, and techno-colonial forms of enslavement in postcolonial dystopian societies. By depicting imagined future worlds, dystopian fiction serves as a satirical commentary on humanity's failures and persistent flaws. A comparative analysis of dystopian animated short films from states with diverse and heterogeneous histories reveals how these narratives expose distinct social realities rooted in their respective cultural and historical contexts. The examination of dystopian animated short films from formerly colonized states underscores their ongoing entanglement with colonial histories and the inherited structures of domination. In contrast, Western dystopian fiction tends to incorporate notions of individuality, collectivism, universalism, and unified global identities, presenting a more discernible and often future-oriented vision. Meanwhile, Eastern dystopian fiction projects possibilities that remain closer to contemporary realities, addressing issues such as racism, ethnic divisions, religious conflicts, subjugation, and authoritarianism. In essence, Eastern dystopias appear more concerned with "being" in the present than with "becoming" in the distant future. Nonetheless, a point of convergence emerges in the dystopian imaginations of both East and West, rooted in technocratic structures that perpetuate colonial norms and hierarchies. These shared dystopian frameworks reveal the continuity of colonial and decolonial legacies while simultaneously exposing how historic trajectories shape divergent yet interconnected visions of the future.

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