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Narrating Selves: Articulations of Self in Digital Life Narratives of Sri Lankan Women Survivors of War

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Abstract

Life narratives enrich the historical accounts of a nation by incorporating individual histories into the socio-political fabric of a nation, especially in post-war contexts. The present research focuses on digital life narratives of Sri Lankan women who have survived the thirty-year civil war and ethnic conflicts, because being marginalized in a patriarchal, heteronormative culture, women's narratives risk remaining unrecorded. The narratives studied here are selected from the digital archives I Am *(2010-2012) by Kannan Arunasalam and* Herstories *(2012-2013) by Radhika Hettiarachchi. The study aimed to examine the nexus between experiencing war and life narration in order to shed light on the manner in which the digital life narratives of Sri Lankan women who have experienced war and violence are a constructed perspective with particular focus on the articulations of self in the narratives. The selected narratives from the two projects were subjected to close reading and textual analysis to investigate the concept of self. The analysis revealed that the construction and representation of self in the life narratives of Sri Lankan women survivors of war is influenced by multiple parties and contexts such as war, the socio-cultural milieu, curatorial influence and mediation.*

Keywords: digital life narratives, war, Sri Lankan women, I Am, Herstories

1. Introduction

Life narrative is a comparatively uncharted territory in Sri Lanka, even though life narratives have always been woven into the socio-political fabric of the nation. The present study focuses particularly on digital life narratives of Sri Lankan women who have survived the

thirty-year civil war. Although war affects all citizens, it is placed on record by the United Nations that "women and girls…experience conflict and displacement in different ways from men because of the gender division of roles and responsibilities" (UNICEF), and Sri Lanka is no exception as women are marginalized in war-related contexts and in socio-political and economic contexts within Sri Lanka's heteronormative patriarchal structures.

Though different studies have looked into the life narratives of Sri Lankan women of different ethnicities who have experienced war, this is often done with a view to exploring areas such as reconciliation, war crimes and justice, roles played by women during war, empowerment, socio-economic impacts, etc. (Hernandez-Reyna, 2014; Hyndman and De Alwis, 2004; Chawade, 2016; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001; Witting, Lambert, Wickrama, Thanigaseelan, & Merten, 2016).

How archiving the life narratives of women survivors of war has become a dynamic means of recording women's war experiences at grassroots level is an area that is yet to be explored, particularly in a life writing trajectory. This also enables us to understand the varied ways in which experiencing war informs the everyday life choices, future hopes and claims of women survivors of war and ethnic violence. The present study therefore intends to examine the life stories of women who have been affected by the thirty-year war in Sri Lanka, in a life narrative perspective with particular focus on articulations of *self* in the narratives. The concept of *self* is integral to the act of life narration, as it is one element which connects the narrator, narrated content (matter), and manner of narration (see Figure 1.1); accordingly, this paper explores how *self* is constructed in the selected life narratives, and whether exposure to war and violence has influenced the constructions of *self*.

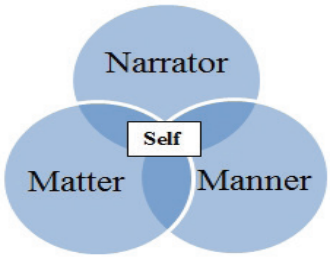

Figure 1.1: *Self* vis-à-vis narrator, manner, and matter of life narration (Willarachchi 40)

The narratives studied here are selected from two digital archives; *I Am* (2010-2012) by Kannan Arunasalam and *Herstories* (2012-2013) by Radhika Hettiarachchi. Both archives were compiled in the immediate post-war context, and generated much discussion on how women were affected by war and how private narratives of war become significant in understanding war experiences and promoting reconciliation. In terms of life writing studies, the archives offer insights into constructions of self in narratives, and thus the selected archives enable us to explore the intersection of women's war experiences, selves and the act of life narration.

These narratives display both autobiographical and biographical elements, and make use of diverse media in order to construct self-representations. This aligns with the con-

cept of life narratives. According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "life narrative... (is) a general term for acts of self-representation of all kinds and in diverse media that take the producer's life as their subject" (4). For this reason, the term life narrative is utilized here instead of online autobiography or biography.

1.1 *I Am*

The selected life narratives from *I Am* are presented as audio clips with a photograph of the narrator, and photo montages, i.e. brief clips (3-4 minutes) of narratives which comprise a series of images and a voiceover. One narrator has one or more photo montages which appear as a series of clips on the interface. However, there is hardly any linearity or narrative sequence in them. Each clip focuses on a particular memory or episode in the narrator's life which gives the audience an insight into the theme of identity: "I'm looking at this question of identity and so I'm looking at their stories through that lens" (Arunasalam, 2017). The *self* in the stories is therefore seen through Arunasalam's (2017) perspective, which indicates that the construction of *self* in the narratives is significantly influenced by the curator.

I Am is a collection of narratives by both male and female Sri Lankans from the older generation, and six women's narratives fit the scope of the present study. All six narratives from *I Am* studied here (namely, "The Nun", "The Independent", "The Fisherman's Wife", "The Bridge Player", "The Nice Burgher Girl", and "The Sister") have women narrators from different walks of life, ethnicities, religions, and geographical locations, with war as a shared experience. The life narratives reveal their identities, past, livelihoods, experiences of war, and how different communities interacted with each other before and during the war.

1.2 *Herstories*

Herstories is an archive curated by Radhika Hettiarachchi, and she claims that it arose from the necessity of giving space to women's voices in the post-war context where women's voices were not included in the historical records:

> The construction of history is intensely political and interventionist, and in Sri Lanka, the post-war nation building process remains largely masculine and State-centric. Within this context, the politics of participation determines who may claim a space at the 'peace table with implications for representation, access and the capability – to negotiate justice and security. Shutting out or marginalizing certain voices or identities- ethnic, gender based, social for example – could reignite the root causes of conflict. The Herstories project and its successor – the Community Memorialisation project – sit within this space, as a possible antidote to the loss of narrative and the incomplete construction of history. (*Practice Note* 2)

The narratives have been extracted from women who volunteered to share their stories. Initially, the project conducted a series of exhibitions, and the web archive is the second phase of the project. These narrators come from six districts in Sri Lanka – Kilinochchi,

Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, Kurunegala, Ampara and Moneragala – and the life narratives are produced under five pre-determined formats – namely letters, trees of life, timelines, videos and photo-essays. All narratives in *Herstories* fit the scope of the present study, and the life narratives analyzed here are chosen to illustrate the varied articulations of *self* found amidst them.

2. Narrated Self

2.1 Self in *I Am*

Narratives in *I Am* reveal how Sri Lankan women from different communities maneuver the construction of their identity and selves within the socio-political and cultural settings they inhabit. The narratives project the women as versatile and resilient selves that manage to survive under different and difficult circumstances.

The tale of Mary Joana Vaas, "The Fisherman's Wife", which consists of one audio and two photo montages, is a fine example of how the themes of identity, ethnicity, and conflict are woven into the narrative of an individual's life. Although she is narrating her life from Negombo, she has had to move from place to place (Potuvil to Ali Oluwa, Seruwavila) as a result of LTTE attacks on civilians. Upon scrutiny it is seen that these experiences are part of her life and identity. It can be derived from her narrative that war imposed mobility as well as immobility on civilians. She states that they were forced to flee from the places where they had been settled as a result of war, and simultaneously they were restricted to the villages and were not able to travel due to the prevailing violence. She is presented as a civilian who focused on survival rather than any outward resistance when confronted by war. When listening to her description of war incidents, one feels that she considers war as something inevitable that *happened*, and rather than pondering over its political implications or protesting, their practical option had been to ensure their own survival. War, for them, was something that did not leave them much choice other than to flee for their lives. As a result of this, her *self* is presented as rather submissive, yet adaptive. Submissive, as they accepted their plight as affected civilians during the war, and adaptive, as they dealt with the shifting conditions for survival and safety of their children in whichever manner was possible.

In the narratives, the viewers may recognize multiple identities and constructions of the *self* of a single narrator, though the curator has highlighted only one facet of her identity by the tag "The Fisherman's Wife" assigned to her.

Commenting on the non-linear, non-unified nature of *self*, Smith and Watson write:

> Readers often conceive of autobiographical narrators as telling unified stories of their lives, as creating or discovering coherent selves. But both the unified story and the coherent self are myths of identity. For there is no coherent "self" that predates stories about identity, about "who" one is. (47)

According to this view, a coherent *self* cannot be constructed via life narratives about a person's identity. In Vaas' story, her role as an obedient daughter ("we don't do it by choice – we did it [getting married] with our parents' consent"), a mother, and a dedicated worker ("We need to put the fish out in the sun, and turn them over. Then put them in baskets")

(2012) are intermingled. This leads to the question: why has the curator labelled her as "The Fisherman's Wife"? It is a simplified representation of a complex *self*. The motive of the curator in assigning such tags reflects, I would argue, a desire to highlight variety and add exotic flavour to the archive. Rather than doing justice to varied projections of *self*, this caters to global consumerism that relishes the exotic. It can be argued that the representations of these women narrators have been affected by the curator's intention of making the digital archive appealing to a global audience. Thus, while there is no harm in presenting the narratives in an interesting manner, from a life writing perspective, this simplification of a complex *self* in order to present it as a 'unified story and a coherent self' can be questioned. The curator too faces a dilemma in such a situation, as the digital sphere and global consumerism expect everything in 'bite-size pieces' due to the low attention span of an average viewer (Microsoft). Thus it is evident that the digital context has an impact on how the narrators' selves are represented.

The portraits in the archive are also significant because they make the audience identify the image on screen with the voice in the background. This seems to add more credibility to the narrative, by subtly indicating that these are 'real' narratives of 'real' people. The understanding that a portrait represents a flesh-and-blood individual, and therefore is authentic, is behind this assumption. As Roberts puts it, "the notion that a photographic image provides a straight reflection of the "reality" of people, a scene, a landscape, etc. assumes that by "simply looking", we "know" the image as reality" (13). The audio narration alone could carry a degree of authenticity as it is evidence of a 'real' person speaking, but taken alone, the voice clip creates a sense of anonymity. However, the inclusion of a portrait photograph helps to create an identity for viewers' consumption. A narrative coupled with a photograph somehow adds more credibility to the narrative as well as the narrated *self* – a notion not unfamiliar to the inhabitants of a world where identity cards prove one's identity. But this notion can be critiqued, as modern editing techniques are capable of altering the images to suit a desired projection. Especially in a curated project like *I Am*, the capturing, selecting and editing of images are done as is seen fit by the curator. The *self* thus assembled and represented online as an individual is a re-representation colored by the curator's understanding and motives. Therefore, the 'reality' presented in the digital sphere debunks the notion that "a photographic image provides a straight reflection of the 'reality' of people" (13).

As opposed to the portrait photographs, the photo montages add further depth to this discussion as they not only compliment the narrative, but also trigger certain nuances and layers of meaning. This is useful in showing the multifaceted nature of *self* or its discontents. *Self* and identity are fragmented, multiple and fluid (Smith and Watson; Page and Thomas) – characteristics that are reflected by the very form of a photo montage. If one focuses on the sequence of images without focusing on the voiceover, the images themselves build a narrative, albeit incomplete and solely constructed by the curator and interpreted by the audience. It is to this end that Roberts argues that "A finished photograph is subject, however composed, to interpretation and re-interpretation—and it may well be placed alongside others in a digital slideshow, print book or album, which introduces a particular interpretive positioning (e.g. as part of a chronology or alongside contemporaneous images)" (22). When images appear as primary text, it draws responses and interpretations from the audience. Yet at the same time, those interpretations and the identity of the narra-

tor (as re-constructed by the audience) are limited by the tag given to the narrator and the images on the screen, which takes us back to the argument on curatorial involvement and platform influence on the construction of the *self*.

What first strikes one as important is the way these montages begin. The first few photographs literally 'place' the narrative and the narrator in a particular setting, and this setting reinforces the tag given to each narrator. For instance, the montage "The Bridge Player" starts off with images of a bridge party – a hand of cards, players, and a domestic serving tea etc., and the montage "The Fisherman's Wife" starts with images of the Negombo Fish Market, a statue of a saint, and the national flag captured against a vivid blue sky.

Though the images enable the audience to get a general (albeit heavily exoticized) idea about the narrated life and *self*, images alone cannot construct the *self* or narrative in full. It is said that "…the portrait and the narrative, the picture and words, can be regarded as having a comparable distinctiveness: in the sense that, just as pictures cannot be fully described in words, so words cannot be fully translated into pictures" (Roberts 19). Hence the importance of the voiceover which accompanies these images.

The voiceovers directly relate to the tag attached to each narrator, and they begin with a narrative which justifies the tag given to them. Sarojini Kadirgamar ("The Bridge Player") from Colombo, for instance, describes how she became interested in the game and pursued it throughout her life despite changing circumstances. She states that even during the curfew in the 1970s she found solace in playing bridge, but a rupture occurred in her routine parallel to the ruptures in civil society. She claims that in 1983,[1] violence came too close to them (*I Am* 2012). The communal riots of 1983 thus disrupted her regular life routine; an event signified by the rupture in her life as a bridge player. Here is another instance of how exposure to violence affects one's *self*. The narrator was a possible victim of communal violence at that point because of her ethnic identity as a Tamil, but her resilience is shown by certain decisions she made – for instance, the decision not to desert her home and run away, and the decision to put up a fight against rioters should they try to harm her family. However, she is not the focal point in this part of the narrative, as she is shown in the shadow of her husband. Rather than taking the initiative on her own, she plays the role of a supportive wife. Her husband's reply when she asked to be taught how to handle a gun – "No you just hand me the cartridges, otherwise you will end up shooting me" (Arunasalam, *I Am*) – reveals gendered power dynamics at work. The resilience developed by her *self* is largely influenced by her husband. Also, compared to the narrative of Mary Joana Vaas, Kadirgamar's *self* emerges as stronger and less passive in the face of violence. This results from the socio-economic status of the Kadirgamars, who represent the upper-class, educated sector. *Self* here is represented as selves that have recourse to fight rather than flight. This shows that the way in which one faces war and violence is also determined by one's socio-economic and political status.

In addition to the video clips and photo montages, the web page also contains a brief description of the narrator and the content of the narrative under the tag given to each narrator. It also contains some comments made by the audience, and some narratives contain a brief write-up on the encounter by Arunasalam. These modes of sharing information supplement the information shared in the narrative and contribute to articulating the selves narrated.

The description of meeting Jean Arasanayagam begins with "Everyone in the house-

hold came out to meet us on the veranda of their home on the Peredeniya Road in Kandy" (Arunasalam, 2010). The description at once captures the welcome extended and the domestic setting of the Arasanayagams, and it creates images in the mind of the viewer of an ordinary Sri Lankan home.

The entire write-up traces the welcoming, introduction, the establishment of contacts through mutual contacts, hospitality, a tête-à-tête and getting to know about the narrators' lives, up to the key question: "Even after threats of violence close up during 1983, the couple refused to leave their hometown. I wanted to know why" (Arunasalam, 2010). It offers a more or less cinematic depiction of paying visits in Sri Lanka, especially establishing connections:

> I hadn't met Jean before, but we later discovered that we were both at the same funeral in Jaffna in 1979. I was just 6 years old and that would have been my last month in Sri Lanka. My father had come from England to attend his sister's funeral and then take my brother and I back to England with him. Jean knew my aunt and uncle well from their days at Peredeniya University. Kandy had been a big influence on my "Kandy mama" and mami. (Arunasalam, 2010)

By establishing mutual connections, the curator too becomes part of the life narrative. He co-constructs the narrative, and as Arunasalam explicitly mentions, the project is part of his own quest for identity. He is talking to people who never left the country, unlike his family who chose to leave. He is driven by the desire to know what made his interviewees stay (Arunasalam, 2010), and hence the personal element and involvement which adds a further layer of meaning to the lives narrated.

The digital platform thus allows multiple parties to become involved in the construction of the narrator's *self*. One also observes that how a woman narrator's *self* is affected by war is largely determined by her *self* formed in the socio-economic, political and cultural context/s prior to war and violence. This provides a partial answer to Arunasalam's question: "Why did *we* leave, and they stayed?" (*I Am*). Everybody seems to have dealt with war and violence within their socio-political and financial limits. Those who did not exercise their ability to leave probably possessed resilience stemming from their socio-cultural and economic roots, while others who were unable to leave may have faced limitations in terms of the same conditions.

The narrative of Sr. Pushpam Gnanapragasam ("The Nun"), on the other hand, is based on the concept of 'our'. She explains how her community views itself as a unified group – in other words, a community consisting of individuals with a strong sense of belonging: "Jaffna people always say… our people. You don't mean to say, you don't mean to distinguish, but you say our people. Invariably you say our nuns, our priests, our people…*our*. I don't know why. It's just built in" (2012). She further adds that this sense of community and belonging predates ethnic discrimination, conflicts and war in Sri Lanka.

It is noteworthy that she glosses over the class and caste issues that continue to have a strong hold over the Jaffna community, indicating that though it was prevalent in the past, now it is not as strong as before. However, Dominic Jeeva's narrative in *I Am* establishes the fact that class- and caste-based discrimination still prevails within the Jaffna community, which contradicts her narrative (2012). This shows how narratives are subjective, and

that narrators' perspectives rather align with how they perceive themselves. Jeeva, who comes from a low-caste family and projects himself as a fighter for equality, sees caste divisions as prominent, while Sr. Gnanapragasm, a member of the clergy, focuses more on unity than divisions. Because of her religious role and duties, she considers herself more as part of a mass of people than an individual:

> Our people are simple. Our hospitality, our people are open and ready to share…They are religious people also, either Christian or Hindus…I won't generalize and say that we are perfect, there is a lot of violence here too…there is a lot of jealousy and competition amongst our people too…But deep down we feel that we are brothers and sisters with the sense of belonging to Jaffna acting as a bonding factor. (Arunasalam, *I Am*)

Her narrative is marked by 'we/ us/ our', and very few instances of 'I/me/my' are found in her discourse. She sees herself as part of a larger community, which is known as 'we-referral' (Demuth, Abels and Keller 324). Her work is communal work, and her *self* is influenced and shaped by the socio-cultural and religious context in which she lives. This could possibly be because she is a nun and it is her "duty" at a political level to use rhetoric in a manner that promotes harmony. As a result, we hardly learn anything about the narrator's *self*, other than the fact that it has been heavily conditioned by her religious role in society.

In another segment she narrates the displacement, devastation and death caused by war by narrating the war experiences of other nuns, and this brings in a striking contrast to the harmonious existence portrayed earlier.

Such narratives complicate the construction of *self* as well as the construction of the narrative, as the audience questions whether this life narrative is a holistic account of a woman's life affected by war, or whether it is instead a construct which aims to juxtapose a rose-tinted past with the horrors of war, in order to reinforce the curator's aim of promoting reconciliation. Being made a third-party witness to these situations, are the viewers gently nudged into believing in a division-free utopian society? Is harmonious existence possible if the existing divisions are glossed over?

Addressing another aspect of self construction, I would like to differentiate between two processes of self construction within the relational life narrative. According to Roberts, "Life connections, or how we associate one memory (of a person, event, feeling, piece of music, conversation, place, etc.) with another, are intricate and varied, and are used to 'compose' our 'life' and sense of self" (18). In other words, it is by linking our memories together that a sense of *self* is made. One can string together personal memories and create a *self*, which I term *intra-relational*. Since people have many shared memories, the process could also become *inter-relational*. *Inter-relational*, as I define the term, is the process in which *self* is constructed by relating our memories and experiences to other people's memories and experiences.

Relational narratives present narratives within narratives, and even selves within one *self*. This reveals that it is near-impossible to extricate a single *self* (or even a single narrative) woven into a rich mass of selves and narratives. Sr. Gnanapragasam's process of self construction is both *intra-relational* and *inter-relational.* Through her narrative, we

not only see her *self* and identity, but also the selves and resilient spirit of others who are part of her life narrative. Thus, a largely interdependent self would be a rich composite of selves, experiences and narratives brought together via *intra-relational* or *inter-relational* means.

However, the critique also takes into consideration the fact that her narrative is subjective and political. As has been discussed above, her narrative has absences, and she glosses over prevalent caste issues. Her narrative coaxes the audience to envision a society of ethnic and racial harmony. It can be argued that it is war that has defined her present *self*, especially in terms of the political role she is expected to play as a religious figure.

The story of Subramaniyan, on the other hand, rather aligns with the model of independence. She decidedly places herself at the center of all action, and her actions, reactions, achievements, opinions etc. are strongly voiced: "I was selected as the House Captain. I had to handle my House/ Daily I'm busy… I'm looked upon to look after everything (at *Uthayan*[2] where she works)" (Arunasalam, *I Am*).

Her *self* is positioned at the center of her narrative, while other parties are placed on the periphery; this shows that she perceives herself as the nucleus. In turn, the audience too views her as the central figure in her life narrative. In contrast to the traditional, albeit much critiqued, view that women take a secondary position in the Sri Lankan culture (Jayawardena), *I Am* depicts women who play key roles and wield agency in the face of war and violence as well as in daily life. This aligns with the envisioning of the project as an optimistic endeavor by the curator, and imparts a sense of strength and hope to the viewers as well. The sense of autonomy, however, predates the war (resulting from socio-economic and educational status), but it has become stronger with the confidence and resilience she has gained by surviving during the thirty-year conflict.

However, one absence that is noted in the *I Am* project when compared to *Herstories* is the absence of any narrative voice of despair or pessimism. This striking absence limits the realistic depiction of a cross-section of women's war experiences and construction of selves, for it is impossible that *all* those victimized by war are devoid of feelings of despair and confusion; this is a clear indication of censorship. Hence my argument is that the represented sense of hope and strength in the project is carefully engineered by the curator to suit his aims of promoting reconciliation.

In another clip, Subramaniyan talks of her decision to remain in Sri Lanka despite invitations by her sisters and adopted daughter to emigrate. She stresses simplicity, the "most unique personal attribute" (Wang 3) she upholds:

> Their pattern of life is different from mine. I always believed in simplicity…I never wanted to be stylish or uppish or anything…If I go there (London), for two days they will say OK we'll allow you to be simple…but third day they will say 'No, you must also fall in line with us.' Then what will happen to *me*? Where do *I* stand? [my emphasis]. (Arunasalam, *I Am*)

What is projected here is a *self* with a strong sense of independence and awareness. Subramaniyan distinctly sees herself as an individual 'I/me' as opposed to 'they/them'. She does not exist solely for the smooth operation of the social unit, and is therefore an independent, individual self. But when the situation demands it, the fluidity of *self* enables

her to integrate herself into the larger structure and play the expected role. The construction of her *self* through the narrative is rather positive, highlighting character traits such as independence, resilience and intelligence. Such positive articulations of *self*, I would argue, are included to create a particular, desired image of Sri Lankan women in the curator's proclaimed mission of promoting reconciliation. The most prominent common characteristic of all six women narrators (as established earlier), i.e. resilient, strong and hopeful selves devoid of crippling despair resulting from war, promotes a particular *brand* of Sri Lankan women in the post-war reconciliation agenda. Thus it is evident that the selves are re-molded and projected to fit a political requirement – and are hence not a holistic representation of the women narrators.

The elimination of selves yet to recover from the damage of war is a form of exclusion and marginalization. If a platform that claims to record the diverse histories of the common people of Sri Lanka is selectively censoring the less desirable aspects and the lasting, devastating marks of the ravages left by the war on women, how effective can the project's contribution to the process of reconciliation be? Reconciliation should not mean glossing over the lasting negative impacts of war on selves. If the women narrators are to exercise the full potential of leaving their mark on the historical fabric of the nation, diverse selves and narratives need to be accommodated.

Hence, one striking limitation is how the project's attempt at highlighting diversity borders on exoticism, while diversity in terms of how war has affected selves is censored to create the above-discussed *brand* of Sri Lankan women in the context of post-war reconciliation.

2.2 Self in *Herstories*

Differing from *I Am*, narratives in *Herstories* have multiple, predetermined modes of self-expression; trees of life, timelines, letters, photo-essays and videos. Trees of life, timelines and letters contain written narratives, whereas photo-essays and videos contain audio-visual narratives. It is therefore pertinent to see how *self* is constructed across such a range of modes.

Trees of life and timelines weave together women's narratives that are simultaneously similar and different from each other. For instance, observe the following extracts from the timeline narratives of three women from a Ranaviru village[3] in Kurunegala, and women from Mullaitivu (Figures 1.2 and 1.3).

1st Participant I now live in Ranavirugama. We Live a busy life. But we have financial problems. My house is not built yet. I hope to build it one day. We have to spend a lot for our children's education. I run a shop and am self-employed. My elder daughter sat for the O/L exam. My only hope is to give a good education to my children. We had no problems with the people in this village. We were living in harmony with our neighbours.
2nd Participant I now live in Ranavirugama. We live a busy life, facing lot of financial problems. My children study. They face lot of hardships due to financial problems. Sometimes I cannot pay for their tuition classes. My house is just half built. Since we don't have enough money even to spend for children's education, the house is left half built. I came to this village 6 years ago. We had no problems with the villagers. Everybody in the village lives in unity.
3rd Participant I currently live in Ranavirugama. I am 43 years old. I am Sinhala Buddhist. We live a very busy life today. We have lot of financial constraints. But I live happily. The house is not completed yet. We have to spend a lot for the education of our children. My husband is a disabled war hero. Therefore he cannot do hard work. I grow ornamental flowers as a means of self-employment. Sometimes I face problems, due to the fluctuations in the market.

Figure 1.2: Timeline – Kurunegala (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*)

The women talk about living in the village and their most pressing concerns. They share similar concerns in terms of financial difficulties and the need to educate their children well, and they are satisfied with the place they live in.

Woman 1	Our native place is Kokkuthoduwai. We were displaced in 1984 and we were living in Thanneer Ootru Murippu. We lived there happily for 23 years. Then in 2007 I went to work because of the difficult situation in the family. On the way to work there was aerial bombing attack by Kiffir and I saw people and children running helter-skelter. I was also running to escape and one of my feet got twisted. Our family situation was bad and we were in dire poverty.	Our family was a large one and there were 10 members in our family including my parents. My brothers and sisters whether they were married or not, they were all working and we were living happily. In 2009 the war raged and shells landed around our house. The shelling and explosions continued and we could not sleep, eat or go to work. We were displaced again and went to Thevipuram. There also we experienced artillery shelling. We were so afraid of being pierced by bullets and for safety we were living in a bunker. We ate, sleep inside the bunker.
Woman 2	The war started with the displacements in July 1984. From then onwards we were in Alampil, 6th Mile post. We cleared the jungle at 6th Mile post and were living there. When the Indian Army came in 1989, we left the place and came to Kollupity. In 1990 we were sent to Kokkuthuduwai by the Government. Then in 1991 the communal riots started and the notices were thrown off from aircrafts asking us to leave the place. We again came back to 6th Mile post and were living there.	My daughter was pregnant at the time. Again we left the place in 1992 and went to Poothanvayal. When we were doing cultivation and during the time we were about to reap the benefits, the owners of the land will come and claim their lands. This is our sorrowful story. Once we had dug a well and planted coconut seedlings the owners came and evicted us and we went to Neeravippitty. Then in 1999 in Murippu, my son was killed by Kiffir and my sister and her daughter also died. We returned back to Neeravippity.
Woman 3	We were displaced in 1984 and following this we had been to 10 places. We also had to run to Puthukudiyiruppu during the Jayasikuru army operation. The fighter planes and aircraft will come and bomb. The bomb looked like a tube and when it falls on the ground it will explode. Some people took that metal tube and made handles for their knives. In 2008 only we ran seriously. We went to Thevipuram and there too shell attacks continued. We built a bunker and lived there.	One day a shell landed on the bunker inside the tent which was opposite to ours and all the inmates died. When we were in Kombavil aerial bombing by Kiffir was taking place. When many people converge at a spot or moving around shell attacks and Kiffir attacks will continue. Then we ran to Maththalan. The place was sandy and we could not construct bunkers. We put up the tent and lived there.

Figure 1.3: Timeline – Mullaitivu (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*)

This extract focuses on experiences of war. Though each woman has suffered due to the same war and was displaced at the same time, their experiences are uniquely individual.

The *Herstories* letters also contain content similar to other four genres, but they more or less inform someone (a friend, family member, project agent etc.) about the traumatic experiences of war, stories of survival and loss, the difficulties faced by them, and occasionally contain a request for aid. According to Radhika Hettiarachchi, the letter format is also significant as it "gives you an addressable other" (Hettiarachchi, 2017). Unlike in the other four modes of expression, the letters contain hardly any positive take on the future, except in the letters written by women from Ranaviru villages. The selves that are found here lack confidence, though their survival alone bears witness to their perseverance. The *self* constructed in letters by women who have had direct experiences of war, more often than not, is overshadowed by exhaustion, trauma and misery.

Letter 54 from Mullaitivu, for instance, begins as follows: "I write this letter to inform you about our plight I have undergone. My husband died in Maththalan on account of a shell attack. This happened when we were going to Maththalan from Puthukudiyiruppu as we couldn't stay there due to shell attacks and aerial bomb attacks. My two sons were grievously hurt and they cannot walk properly…" and ends with "If we are resettled then that is enough for us. Thieves also harass us. As I am a widow and we have no employment we have to face many challenges. I wrote this letter to inform you the situation we are facing" (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*).

What is seen here is an outpouring of the suffering and hardships which could be the result of having an opportunity to unburden herself. Simultaneously, the letters provide an insight into the impact of war on selves, which has resulted in making the narrator rather despondent. Especially, recurring themes of loss, suffering, injury, poverty etc. – often narrated in tones of despair – reveal how war has affected self-confidence and esteem in these women.

Moreover, some letters end with an apology. Letter 223 concludes with the following apologetic request to forget what was narrated: "Ok my dear friend, I told you of all our sad experiences. If I made you cry, please forgive me and forget it. I am awaiting your reply" (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*).

Requesting the addressee to forget what was narrated can be juxtaposed with the quintessence of archiving. Why narrate and archive if it is meant to be forgotten? The *self* here seems to be torn between two needs; the need to recall and share, and the need to forget. Expressions of this nature show the audience the complications of expressing traumatic experiences, and consequently reveal how the narrator's *self* has become even more complex as a result of being exposed to war and violence.

Commenting on how stories integrate lives, Dan McAdams states that "Stories often bring together disparate ideas, characters, happenings and other elements of life that were previously set apart" (244), and the nature of video recording further facilitates this. When narrating, the women weave together separate incidents, characters, emotions etc. into a single (yet multifaceted) entity.

Similar to the narratives in *I Am*, in most of the narratives in *Herstories* too an evolution of the *self* is visible, which results in a single *self* enacting multiple identities as demanded by the changing circumstances due to war. War is seen as an external force that has a direct influence in bringing about internal changes in the narrators' *self*.

On the *Herstories* website, the photo-essays are described as follows: "Photo-journals and objects of memory: Based on some of the letters and conversations had in groups, a smaller number of women were selected based on their willingness to be photographed. These showcase people, places and objects of memory as they share their stories in their own homes" (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*). Photo-essays thus attempt to construct an autotopographic life narrative.

According to Smith and Watson, autotopography shows how a person's integral objects become, over time, so imprinted with the "psychic body" that they serve as autobiographical objects. The personal objects may be serviceable, such as clothing or furniture; but they may also be physical extensions of the mind – photographs, heirlooms, souvenirs, icons, and so forth: "These personal objects can be seen to form a syntagmatic array of physical signs in a spatial representation of identity" (133). Organized into collections, such material memory landscapes might be as elaborate as a home altar or as informal as a display of memorabilia. Autotopographies are invested with multiple and shifting associative meanings; they are idiosyncratic and flexible, although their materiality prevents free-floating signification (Smith and Watson 189).

The photo-essays are a combination of portrait photographs of the narrators and people, places and objects of memory that are significant for them (see Figure 1.4). Objects of memory include photographs, homes, religious objects such as Buddha statues, statues of gods, offerings, garlands etc., and objects related to everyday life such as sewing machines

and trishaws, household items and so on. At times, the images correspond with the text

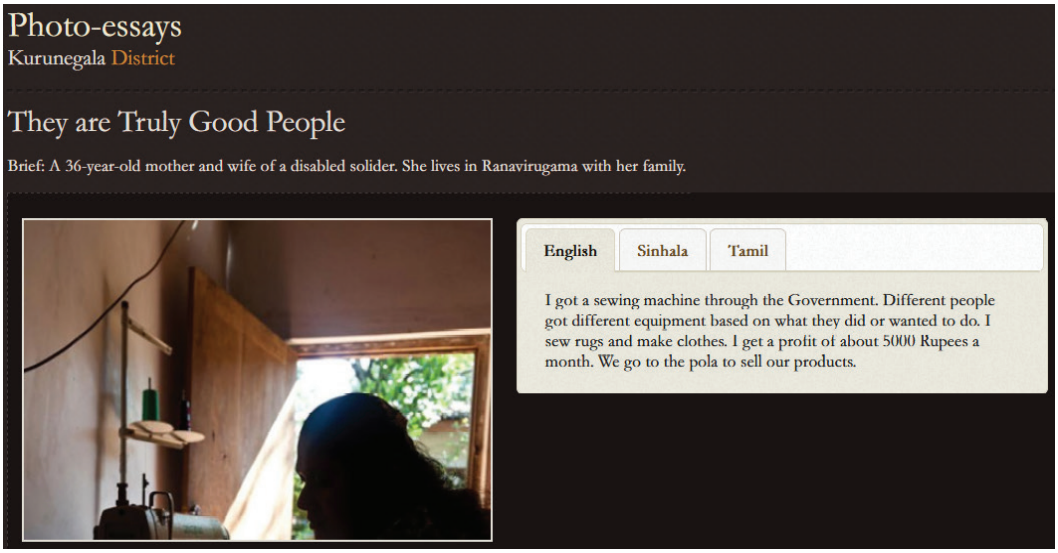

Figure 1.4: Photo-essay – Kurunegala (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*)

In the above image, the photo of the sewing machine and its significance in the narrator's life are clearly depicted. The narrative captures how she is able to earn a living through sewing, and also the fact that many people in the Ranaviru village received similar opportunities to start a small-scale business. However, there are instances where the image does not necessarily correspond with the text:

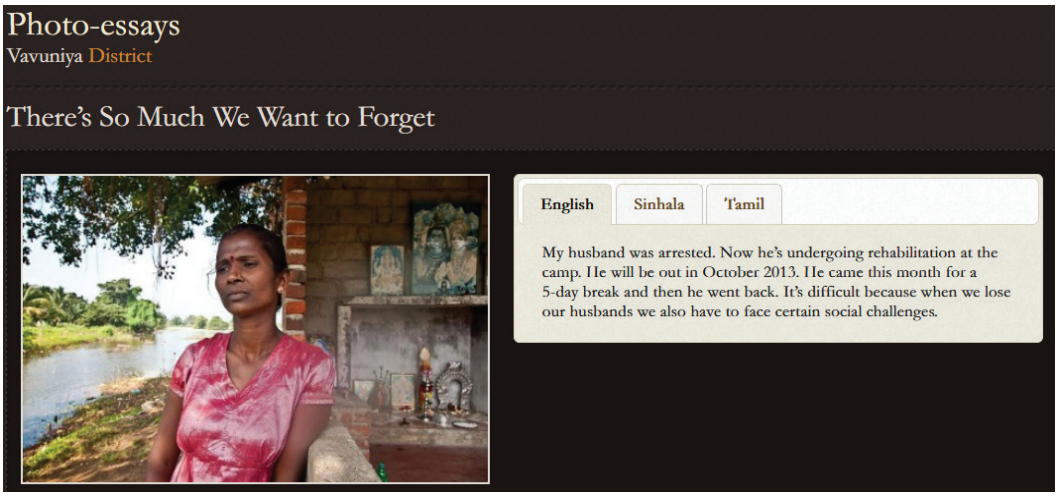

Figure 1.5: Photo-essay – Vavuniya (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*)

The above image shows the narrator beside some sort of a shrine, but the narrative is about her husband and the challenges she faces in society. In such instances, the narrative deviates from the autotopographical, and it becomes simply a pictorial narrative with content similar to that which is found in trees of life or timelines, but with rather exotic pictures.

Thus it can be argued that though photo-essays contain photographs and other objects of memory, they are not strictly autotopographical narratives.

It is believed that

> both the text or image can "describe" or "illustrate" the other, or the text can be part of an image—intentionally included or added later within the image, or as title or caption. Images can be placed within, before or after bodies of text …Finally, more "abstractly", photographic portraits may be taken as both "material" and "artistic or representational" objects, both "showing" and also seeming to "stand in" for the individual portrayed. (West, qtd. in Roberts, 8)

As explained above, there are instances where images and texts illustrate each other, and cases in which there is a less direct relationship between the image and text in photo-essays. Where the image does not complement the text, the image still serves a representational purpose, i.e. it represents the narrator or the setting where she lives, which adds to the truth effect, boosting authenticity and enabling readers to get a 'feel' for the narrated life.

> As pointed out by Roberts the process of "looking", therefore, includes an interpretation of the seen elements of the photograph but also engages the other senses (touch, sounds, etc.) as it engenders memories of the scene portrayed. The influences of contemporary personal experience—the immediate context, our broader personal circumstance and outlook—feed into this process of "looking"; and even the "feel" of the photograph, its frame or folder, and the effect of reading any written caption or dedication, can affect our response to the image. (18)

This stresses another characteristic of the digital sphere. The photo-essays allow viewers to gain an immersive experience by providing glimpses into the 'real-life' contexts in which the narratives are produced, i.e. the viewers are transported to the narrative location. The power of the image in its appeal to the viewers is manipulated here. Not only is there a narrative, but also there are photographs that bear witness to what is being narrated, and the fact that these photo-essays are done in the narrators' personal space seems to add more credibility to the lives narrated. This notion of credibility veils the *constructedness* of the digital narrative and *self*.

The photo-essays effectively capture different aspects of the *self* that is narrated, and therefore the *self* is presented as multi-faceted. After viewing each frame, however, the viewers are able to access a coherent life narrative. It is observed that

> as individuals, we are a "fragmented" collection of experiences and emotions, etc., but, "autobiographical narrative" seems to aim towards producing a "unified self" [and that] …although a written autobiography is "constrained" by what the authors

> select about their life to relate, "a work of art" is even more curtailed by "technical limitations" since (unlike video, etc.) it can merely give "a series of frozen moments. (West qtd. in Roberts 19)

Still, it can be argued that even a series of 'frozen moments' have the capacity to construct a particular *self* and its life narrative. Although a life narrative usually attempts to create a unified *self*, the multiplicity and fluidity of *self* makes that a near impossible task. Forms like photo-essays further facilitate the projection of *self* as multiple and fragmented, which is why the same narrative may project a woman in multiple roles and capacities.
When examining the way in which *self* is positioned within the narrative, it becomes clear that similarly to *I Am*, *the* narratives in *Herstories* too generally tend to encompass characteristics of both autonomous and relational constructions of *self*, and hence employ both independent and interdependent modes. Demuth, Abels and Keller have singled out the positioning of the *self* as a crucial aspect of the self-concept in life narratives:

> The way the narrator positions him- or herself within the social space of interaction has been described in the literature as a fundamental form of constructing and negotiating identities. Positioning within a social interaction may comprise personal, role or moral attributes of a narrator (Langenhove & Harré, 1999). It is our understanding that a positioning of the self, e.g. in terms of personal attributes or motives, prototypically accounts for an independent self-concept, whereas the positioning of the other prototypically accounts for an interdependent self-concept. A missing positioning, i.e. the narrator him- or herself does not appear in the remembered account at all, may be linked to the emotional distance the narrator holds to the memory due to the traumatic nature of the experience. (322)

Analysis of the narratives reveals that selves tend to be positioned in terms of 'personal attributes or motives' when talking about overcoming challenges and future aspirations, whereas 'positioning of the other' within the narratives generally occurs when describing traumatic experiences, suffering, early memories, family etc.

The following excerpt from the life narrative in the tree of life (Kilinochchi) exemplifies the positioning of the other:

> On the 20th of August 2010 my daughter and I returned to Kilinochchi. UNHCR provided relief items. We got mats for sleeping, lanterns and some money. Our land looked like a jungle. We paid money and cleared our land. Later our wells were cleaned by an organization. We made temporary sheds out of tarpaulin and lived there. They gave relief food items. We got help for my daughter's education. (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*)

The narrator has positioned her *self* along with many others ranging from family to welfare organizations, and their presence is significant to the events that take place in her life. The *self* constructed here is interdependent; both sharing hardships and efforts for the betterment of her life are linked to others, and these people and organizations play a key role in her narrative. In the same narrative, however, there are instances where the independent self comes to the fore: "When my husband died, I learned many lessons. I learned to stand

on my own two feet. Because I didn't have employment, I suffered. But I am grateful that my friend taught me a trade" (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*). Here the *self* is positioned in terms of personal attributes and self-growth in the face of challenges. The narrator had to 'learn many lessons' following the demise of her spouse due to war, and she was compelled to become independent and to learn a trade in order to become self-sufficient. The first part of the excerpt shows the emergence of an independent self that is responsible for her own well-being, while the second part ('…my friend taught me a trade'), shows how even self-growth and self-sufficiency may be linked to others. As a result of war, she had to re-imagine and re-conceptualize her *self* to suit the context. The narrative thus reveals how changing circumstances during the war required women to be increasingly adaptive.

Some other narratives, for instance the following excerpt from the Kurunegala tree of life, show a keener sense of agency and independence:

> I run a small grocery. I started this business, after taking a bank loan… I appreciate my own courage. So, I am strength to myself. I am not scared of anybody. I have courage. I will not give up. If somebody hits me, I hit back. We have a loan to settle. But I am not worried. I live like a man. (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*)

The narrator here takes complete responsibility for making financial decisions and running a business. Her attitude at times may seem somewhat aggressive, but the challenging experience of living in 'an artificially created village' (a Ranaviru village) where drunken riots, using influence to cause trouble for others and spreading of rumors have become everyday occurrences, has toughened her *self*. She says that though her husband is very supportive and understanding, he is usually away from home because of work. She has to manage everything on her own and play a dual role; hence the comment 'I live like a man'. This can be interpreted either as a dual role or the need to subscribe to heteronormative ideals and assume another persona for the purpose of survival within this patriarchal context. One could argue that her *self* has become androgynous, as her narrative reflects a *self* that is confident in fulfilling the duties traditionally expected from both men and women. Yet her narrative is not solely independent, as it is war and other related circumstances that have influenced the molding of her *self* in this particular manner, including an assumption of dual identities by being a woman who works like a man.

Narratives from all five districts display this characteristic to differing degrees, i.e. the *self* constructed in the narratives is a combination of independent and interdependent models. Most of the narrated selves display independence in the personal sphere where they talk about overcoming challenges and personal aspirations, but significantly, there are also selves that assume responsibility and agency on behalf of the community. The second and fourth narrators in the Vavuniya timeline are examples of this; the second narrator talks of the need for her village to be independent, "Our village Puthukkudiyiruppu was known popularly as a prosperous village. But now it looks like a cremation ground. Our village should regain its prosperity and stand on its own without anyone's help" (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*), and the fourth narrator talks of becoming an agentive *self* that would shoulder the responsibility of bringing about development for her community, "I swear that I would make use of the educated people to assess the needs and try to improve the living conditions of all the people" (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*).

While being part of the community, the *self* is capable of accepting responsibilities for communal benefit. War has made the narrators suffer losses and has left lasting scars in their life, but their selves offer a contrast to others in extending plans for recovery from the ravages of war to an entire community.

The second narrator's story, for example, shows that she had been the "pet child" of the family (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*), and she had had a sheltered and relatively carefree life at the beginning. But during the war she was exposed to violence, loss, and poverty. The transition of her *self* from a "pet child" into a resilient *self* willing to speak up for the whole community can be traced in her narrative. In this instance, war experiences have influenced her to re-construct her *self* as a resilient representative of her community.

The fourth narrator, however, claims to have been an independent individual since childhood: "When I was 12 years old, I left my parents and was living separately" (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*). However, the sections that deal with her war experiences show how her self-confidence was affected. She claims to have been "forced into poverty" following the killing of her husband by an armed group, and states "I am a widow and I am helpless. I fully depend on the mercy of God" (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*). The same person, however, plans the re-building the community via mutual help: "I will help the children for their education…and make them scholars in the future. These scholars in turn would improve the village (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*).

Her narrative contains such contrasting aspects of *self* due to her exposure to war. What is witnessed here is a tension between a strong, independent *self* and the effects of war. The narrative thus brings forth an interesting dimension where diverse facets of *self* are in conflict with war, and in the post-war context the narrator seems to be reverting to her former *self*. The fluidity in their selves allows them to change and play multiple roles and to assume different identities depending on the changing circumstances.

Unlike *I Am*, the *Herstories* project contains stories that reflect diverse selves, and the audience perceives that no matter whether war has affected these women in similar or different ways, the ways in which their selves have been affected vary widely. Some women record a sense of defeat and hopelessness, and others show resilience, strength and hope for better personal lives in the selves that emerged after the war, while women like the two narrators cited above extend their aspirations for the future to the communal level.

3. Self and War

The narratives analyzed here are strongly marked by the narrators' exposure to war and the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Demuth, Abels and Keller state that "If both autobiographical memory and self-concept contribute to a culture's continuity and transformation, and if autobiographical memory is fundamentally affected by traumatic events such as war, then we need to consider the impact of such events on the interplay between memory, *self* and culture" (321). As many narrators state, the exposure to war and conflict has been a turning point in their lives.

The first narrator in the Kilinochchi timeline is a case in point. Born in 1958 to a middle-class Hindu family in Peradeniya, her life up to 1990 had been quite normal. During this time she played the roles of an obedient daughter who married a man proposed by her parents, a dutiful wife, and a mother. One important factor that keeps emerging in her nar-

rative is her financial status and its impact on her *self*. She claims that "My father had a car and my mother ran a shop… They gave a land as dowry", and that "Ever since my child was three years old I have lived under the shadow of the war" (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*). Following the loss of the property in Peradeniya (reasons not given), they moved to Udaya Nagar, Jaffna where her husband ran a fancy goods store: "We lived from his income. When my daughter was 11 years old we were displaced [due to war] to Thiruvaiyaaru losing all our belongings again" (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*). Her identity shift can be traced via these changes in economic status and impacts of war. The continuous disruptions to a normal, financially stable family life have resulted in a broken marriage, as a consequence of which she has been forced to shift her identity from an ordinary housewife to a war victim and single mother – totally unforeseen identities. The narrator was compelled to live in refugee camps and assume dependent status. Though earlier in her life she was dependent on her parents and husband, she had some financial independence through the possession of land and jewels. The loss of these due to war has brought her to a dependent status.

War has inflicted physical injury on her, which further affects her financial status: "I could not sew and earn as before. When I stand for a long time my legs begin to ache because of the injury I had sustained in the war. So I could not go for daily wage labour" (2013). Her identity has further changed as a result of injury, and handicaps her even in the post-war context, which juxtaposes with her pre-war *self* and identities. The sense of dissatisfaction and prevailing hardships have had a lasting negative impact on her life: "we live in fear and suffering" (ibid). Her identity has thus shifted from that of an ordinary civilian to a war victim who is at the mercy of governmental and non-governmental organizations.

War experience has thus pushed the narrators to assume certain roles and take on new identities, which has had a drastic impact on their selves. Commenting on this issue, Mark Raper says that

> War and flight are obviously not liberating events, but in such situations women take on new roles as the sole bread winners, as leaders of families, as the preservers of culture and historic memory. The men are either still fighting, and so absent, or held prisoner, or already killed, or perhaps despair has led them to alcohol. Ironically, the trauma of displacement offers opportunities for women, since it fractures former, strictly defined, social roles. (6)

An experience narrated by a single mother of five from Mullaitivu district (video) shows how changing circumstances compel individuals to assume deferent roles. Following the death of her husband, she was forced to assume the role of the sole breadwinner of the family:

> In 1996, my husband got hit by a shell and died. I was six months pregnant with my youngest son. We were struggling to survive. So I took on jobs as a day labourer [breaks down and narrates while crying] I raised my children with such difficulty. And yet, one son died in a Kafir attack on the village. My daughter was forcibly taken by the LTTE after she completed her O levels. (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*)

The emotional outburst at the plight of having to become a 'coolie' (a laborer) indicates on the one hand her sorrow over having to become what is traditionally considered a menial laborer, and her sorrow of being unable to save her children from becoming victims of war on the other. In contrast to Raper's statement above, this absence of a male figure does not result in empowerment in this instance. Her transition from housewife to single mother and laborer have rather oppressed her. Despite her survival, a sense of defeat prevails in her narrative.

This is a phenomenon shared by the narratives of war widows and wives of disabled soldiers' wives. A widow who is also a mother and an entrepreneur living in a Ranaviru village in Kurunegala, for instance, shows how the death of her husband revealed the seamier aspects of society, even though there is "a sense of respect and service that is unparalleled by the government" towards war widows (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*). She says:

> After he died, what impacted me most was how society treated me. It's much harder to live in a place like this as a single woman. It is not like living in your hometown. There are many challenges: as a woman, as a mother, as a widow. Only after I lost my husband did I realize what society really is…When people realize I have no husband they will try to take advantage of me…I have faced these challenges so much so that now I am immune and stronger for it. I can overcome anything now. (Hettiarachchi, *Herstories*)

The death of her husband has made her a war victim as well as a potential victim of society. Living away from the safety-net of relatives and family, her identity as a widow in a Ranaviru village has imposed limitations and challenges on her. Consequently, she has to be constantly vigilant, and becoming stronger and more confident, I would argue, is more of a compulsion brought on by the war experience than a choice made by the narrator. Hence her present *self* is a construct of war and the adverse social conditions affecting war widows.

Another woman from Ampara whose husband is a disabled soldier talks of how traditional gender roles in her family have changed because of the war.

> We have to act as the man in the family…As a woman the first place is the kitchen, you know, but here it is not so…Because of the love I have for my child and my husband, I try to be more courageous than a man. I make bricks; tread the clay…all of it I do alone (*Herstories*, 2013).

This reversal of roles has affected the manner in which the family unit functions. Yet, to problematize the notion of gender identities, it is evident that rather than perceiving her *self* as a strong woman surviving in adverse circumstances, she sees herself as having assimilated a male identity. She still believes that the first place of a woman is the kitchen, and she attempts to give rhetorical legitimacy to her changed role by saying she has to 'act as the man in the family'. The prevalent patriarchal framework prevents her from realizing that becoming the head of the family or the one in charge does not mean assuming a male identity; rather, it is discovering another aspect of her own *self*. The narrative thus reveals that women's notions of *self* are highly influenced by gender identities as defined by the

patriarchal culture in Sri Lanka. Hence I would argue that though war has compelled these women to assume different identities which are beyond the traditional limits, their perceptions of gender identities have remained static.

While it is a positive development when traditional gender roles are modified, it raises issues too, as the women (and perhaps the society at large as well) are still not comfortable in these new identities. Most women see it as a burden if they have to be a man in a woman's body, since the identity shift has resulted from war experiences and compulsion, not from a deeper understanding of gender identities and *self*.

These collected narratives that reflect war and post-war contexts project a society largely governed by fear on the one hand, and resilience on the other. Jean Arasanayagam states in her narrative:

> I didn't think of myself as anything special. I was one with everybody else. But 83 was the watershed…For the first time in my life I knew what *fear was*, what alienation was, and what it meant to be considered an outsider. That was the change. That was the shift in my life. It has changed my whole mindset. I was always fearless… but 83 was a *horror*. (Arunasalam, *I Am*)

Referring to Pillemer Demuth, Abels and Keller characterize "traumatic events as having a "big bang" quality, in which "[...] the survivor's life is abruptly and violently altered" (321); this is well-expressed in Arasanayagam's narrative.

After describing how they had to face and keep the angry mobs at bay, and their experiences at the refugee camp along with descriptions of protectors who helped them, Arasanayagam asks, "wouldn't you call that a sort of an experience that would change your life forever? It has" (Arunasalam, *I Am*). The incident showed her how your very identity, which makes you unique, can be the reason for being penalized, and it instantly changed her identity as a Burgher and a teacher to an 'other' and a refugee. Her former *self*, which she had perceived as 'fearless', has suffered transition to fearful as a result of exposure to violence, and the sense of displacement in her homeland has affected her identity.

She talks of how certain unfair deductions are made, and certain labels are forced upon individuals:

> My God, I remember at the staff meeting when I was lecturing, that was the time when Tamils stripped at Heathrow…and I remember the principal telling me at the staff meeting in front of everybody "and she's one of them". I was branded as a terrorist. I was married to a Tamil, so I was also a Tamil terrorist. So that kind of divisiveness left rather negative feelings within me. Feelings that were inhospitable and unacceptable to me. (Arunasalam, *I Am*)

Because of her marriage to a Tamil, she was assumed to be a Tamil sympathizer and therefore 'one of them', i.e. a terrorist. This kind of story reveals a culture where everyone who was a Tamil or related to Tamils was considered a terrorist. Her inability to take sides because she had taught many of the 'Ilamists and Subversives' did not matter for many people. Her personal opinion did not count in that context, and even her writing, she claims, was seen as Tamil-sympathizing works, while her works on other issues were

overlooked. A society where every non-Sinhalese was seen as an enemy was the result of certain political agendas – and that agenda's power to wipe out all other identities harbored by these individuals is a key concern raised here. It takes more than one person to make a refugee camp, and inhabitants of 'the burning townhood of Kandy' (Arunasalam, *I Am*) have probably had similar experiences to Arasanayagam (or worse).

Her *self* was forced to become an *other* against her will. Though the experience left its mark on her, her present *self* is depicted as strong, and she takes pride in being Sri Lankan. Once again, this could be a result of her social and educational status. Having expressed herself via literature, her present self seems to have come to terms with the horrors of 1983.

Hence it can be argued that the interplay between experiencing war and violence, *self* and culture is highly dynamic and intense. War and violence have had an impact on the women's '*self*', enabling the *self* to be aware of and changed by the prevailing socio-political culture, and memory being the link between pre- and post-conflict selves, the *self* thus affected bears witness to the horrors and challenges of that particular context. Since these experiences of war have an impact on the individual self, and that affects the culture at large, it can be concluded that what is potent to the individual self is also significant for the cultural context.

4. Conclusion

War has been a decisive factor in determining the selves of these women. It has forced the narrators' selves to become versatile and to assume multiple identities – and these are reflected in the narratives shared in both projects discussed above. In becoming versatile, the women's selves have become resilient.

The narratives provide glimpses of the women's former selves, how war affected them, and what their present selves are like. Tracing the process of transition and *becoming* has revealed that war is a catalyst that has resulted in changes of selves and identities. Though war has pushed the women to step out of traditional roles, it is evident that most women are uncomfortable about these new-formed identities, mainly because they still subscribe to patriarchal definitions of male and female roles in society.

The analysis also explored the women's selves projected in the two archives, and concluded that in *I Am*, a particular image of women, i.e. strong and hopeful women without a trace of defeat or embitterment, is projected as being representative of Sri Lankan women in the post-war and reconciliation context. These are identified as re-representations of selves which are made to align with the curator's aims and perceptions. *Herstories*, however, reflect diverse selves via the narratives, and the audience perceives that irrespective of how war has affected these women, the ways in which their individual selves have been affected are different.

Moreover, the depicted selves in both projects bear traces of exoticism (especially in photomontages and videos) which contribute to a picturesque representation that appeals to global consumerism. Thus the digitalized life narratives have a considerable amount of *glamor* imposed on them, and hence the articulations of *self* have become more complex.

Notes

[1] This refers to the communal violence which occurred in July, 1983 (commonly known as Black July) as a result of the ethnic tension between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities of Sri Lanka.

[2] A Tamil newspaper.

[3] Villages created by the Government for the families of soldiers of the Sri Lanka armed forces.

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Commodification of Contemporary Indian Fiction in English

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Abstract

Following the tenets of New Historicism, this paper discusses how consumerism, Neo-Colonialism and a subtle capitalism with an exploitative mindset have commodified contemporary Indian fiction. Many Indian authors, located both within and outside India, draw raw material from their homeland for their fiction, only to showcase selected facts to malign India and its religion. They exemplify what Macaulay described as natives who are Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste. In their hands, literature – instead of conveying the truth through literariness – has been rendered into a form of propaganda. The paper also contemplates why middle-class readers feel connected with such literary products.

Keywords: Aravind Adiga, Arundhati Roy, capitalist, commodification, Diaspora, globalization, Kiran Desai, Mahatma Gandhi, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth

In consumer markets, advertisements play an important role; "beautiful" people are needed to lure "ugly" people to become like them so that some strain can be put on their time and money. One can easily understand why the advent of new economic policies in India in the nineties was accompanied by a sudden spurt of activities in finding hidden beauty queens and labelling them as "Miss India", "Miss Asia Pacific", "Miss World", "Miss Universe", "Miss Galaxy", etc. Even those feminists who advocate the use of the title "Ms" in place of "Miss/Mrs" enthusiastically participate in such events, legitimising the organisers and the participants; participation is justified as being the choice of the women concerned, while those who oppose them are branded as "reactionary forces". Thus, the larger issue of maintaining human dignity by keeping (fe)male bodies away from the lustful (fe)male gaze is

sidelined in favour of engaging the (fe)male body to further capitalist intentions/profits by increasing "lust and greed" in society, thereby also promoting violence. This analogy has been advanced as a way of understanding the phenomenon of the rise of authors such as Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and Aravinda Adiga. This list is not exhaustive; these authors are discussed here in order to understand the matrix of the authors and capitalism. Some readers of this article may not appreciate my analogy between authors and models. To the attention of such readers I would bring the following passage by Sandra Ponzanesi:

> As the earlier transition from industrialization (focus on production) to advanced capitalism and globalization (focus on worldwide spreading of consumption based on the outsourcing of development countries [sic]), the literary industry now – with a different intensity and of course with different modalities – has shifted its focus from supplying potential audiences to planning them. Rather than merely reading submitted manuscripts and discovering new talent, they now proceed as if on a hunting campaign aiming to locate authors even before they have attempted to write, and commissioning subjects, topics, and areas to reach one major goal: to create a demand for the product, a real thirst for consumption prior to production. (116)

Besides the above-mentioned authors, many others have also abandoned their native land (remember Scott's "My Native Land") at some point of time, and have relocated themselves on their own in foreign lands, not in order to become global, but rather to seek greener pastures in a "better place" – not the third world but the first world, the capitalist world (mainly the USA, though in some cases also Canada, the UK or elsewhere). Their selection of a country also speaks a great deal about their commitment, priorities, perceptions and personal agenda. It is no wonder that their location and the location of multinational companies are one and the same – the capitalist world. Both of them know that there are new types of readers/audiences/buyers in these new-found wonderlands, in the form of the "intellectual/middle class Diaspora" (in contrast with the Girmitia Diaspora) and the burgeoning middle class in a highly populated yet "resurgent India". The Diaspora needs the image of India in the form of Indian fiction in English for three main reasons: a) to assert their identity in a foreign land; b) to familiarize their children with India and Indian traditions; and c) to assert and to vindicate their actions in migrating to a distant land. On the other hand, the neo-rich and aspirational Indian middle class have plenty of free time to indulge in gossip (= light reading) and to brag of their sophisticated tastes (= highbrow mannerisms). They have the purchasing capacity to buy costlier books in English (= the bourgeois wish to look more fashionable and modern) and to keep themselves more up-to-date about books (= not to gain knowledge). They detest buying books in regional languages[1] (= cheap, substandard and ghettoised writing in India); they like to drop names in order to appear more cultured (= remember Eliot's "... the women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo") and they consider culture and religion a matter of ridicule under the influence of Marx/Modernism/Post-Modernism (= intellectualism). These members of this middle class in India, despite the great cost and often misery associated with the practice, like to send their children to English-medium schools where the English language and English mannerisms are taught in imitation of British/American models, making their children

more useful for a job market dominated mainly by multinational companies. Moreover, in India there is a tradition of giving more respect to people with higher education. Keeping all this in mind, plans are made to exploit this class, and commissioned books are churned out to cater to the tastes of this new class of reading public.

It has been pointed out earlier that a beauty queen/model is needed to market all kinds of products, and this work can only be carried out by a native model. One can also note that a desi model is needed to do the marketing of not only global products (e.g. "Loreal Hair Products" are marketed by Aishwarya Rai) but also glocalized products (e.g. "Kaun Banega Carorepati" is advertised by Amitabh Bachchan) or even local products (e.g. "Pataka Tea" is endorsed by Urmila Matondkar); a Naomi Campbell or a Caroline Winnberg or a Mayo Okawa or a Ngoli Onyeka Okafor is not needed for marketing in India. Similarly, an L.H. Myers or a John Masters or an E.M. Forster or a Rudyard Kipling or a M.M. Kaye or a Paul Scott will not be a proper choice to target the burgeoning Indian middle-class market; rather the product must be marketed by somebody who is "Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Macaulay); somebody who is " 'a learned native' ... familiar with the poetry of Milton, the metaphysics of Locke, and the physics of Newton [read Einstein or Hawkins for a more contemporary version]" (Macaulay); somebody who believes that he is "to educate a people who cannot ... be educated by means of their mother-tongue" (Macaulay); somebody who believes "the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of ... India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude" (Macaulay); somebody who believes "[English] stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest ... with models of every species of eloquence, -- with historical composition, which, considered merely as narratives, have seldom been surpassed, and which, considered as vehicles of ethical and political instruction, have never been equalled – with just and lively representations of human life and human nature, -- with the most profound speculations on metaphysics, morals, government, jurisprudence, trade, -- with full and correct information respecting every experimental science which tends to preserve the health, to increase the comfort, or to expand the intellect of man" (Macaulay). Macaulay's account of his language is characterized by pride verging on belligerence – not only because of the pride he has in his nativity, but also because he came from the class of colonial masters who were determined to denigrate those they ruled. This belligerence was also a part of the essential strategy of the East India Company, one of the most powerful global enterprises at the time. The products of English education gain this belligerence in inheritance. This is the reason why these postcolonial authors "elected as spokespersons for their nation are at times disliked in their home countries" (Ponzanesi 119).

Authors who, like Macaulay, believe in the superiority of the English language and the white, Anglo-Saxon and perhaps Christian race are very useful to publishers; together they form a good union and enter into a contract to fulfil each other's aspirations. Large advance royalties are given to such authors, and are publicised in the form of news reports (Roy). A book churned out by such an author is a sort of made-to-order product prepared for a particular market; the book/product is given publicity through various types of advertisements to attract different target groups. The pre-publication and post-publication reviews of this book are arranged to target scholars and the general reading public; the book is released with great fanfare in the presence of "cultural connoisseurs"; meet-the-

author programmes are arranged to attract "academicians and other intellectuals"; media interviews with the author are held, which are unlike Karan Thapar's hard-hitting 'Devil's Advocate'; book-reading sessions are organised in the same way that film trailers are released to rouse the curiosity of prospective viewers (the general public/ prospective buyers). This commissioned book may therefore be equated to propaganda material – another form of advertisement material aimed at a new target market in the form of the highly educated, professional, moneyed Indian middle class both at home and abroad (the Indian middle-class Diaspora which has recently come into existence, in contrast to the Diaspora originating from Girmitia labourers). To cater to the needs of such a market, an author needs to understand the socio-cultural psyche of the middle class and also the nuances of the culture of the Diaspora.

This author is useful to publishers; (s)he has already abandoned his/her land; (s)he has learnt the English language and culture, and (s)he thinks and feels like a white person, as well as being culturally sensitive to his/her former master. No one can understand the needs of the Indian middle class better than such an author. Citing Bourdieu, Ponzanesi states: "… our choices and tastes are determined by social affinities" (113). Therefore, the question 'who writes for whom and why' needs to be probed deeper before evaluating such literature. However, the gullible young men and women from various parts of the country, mainly from the lower middle class, looking for a career in English Literature (with the aspiration to make quick money, and perhaps sick of their helplessness), are made to think that Indian writing in English has come a long way and Indian talent is ultimately being recognised by the West (= the colonial aspiration of wishing for a few words of appreciation from their former masters = the servility syndrome). They not only buy these books, but also conduct research to identify "Indian sensibility" in such authors, and do not stop till they have found it. After all, they want their (Indian) affinity with these "fellow-native" authors to be proved/strengthened. Since the subtle point being made here requires some elaboration, an actual incident needs to be narrated in order to clarify the issue: person 'B' approached person 'A' and enquired of him if he knew Pranabda[2]. 'A' readily admitted that he knew him, and in order to prove his assertion, he gave out all the information that was expected from a well-read and up-to-date person with a good general knowledge. 'B' was quite impressed and said: "I am convinced that you are quite close to Pranabda; kindly help me; I want my lieutenant son to be transferred from J&K to Odisha; Pranabda, being the supreme commander of the forces, can easily do this; a recommendation from you will help me and my son." 'A' politely replied: "I know Pranabda but he does not know me." The point that is being made here is that it is not necessary for Pranabda to know either 'A' or 'B', but this is not the case for 'A' and 'B'. Similarly, it is not necessary for an author to personally know a scholar back home, but the scholar must know the author. However, there is an additional dimension in the author/researcher relationship. 'B' is looking for greener pastures elsewhere, and therefore takes inspiration from this "successful Indian author-cum-cousin" and glorifies him/her for mutual gratification.

Some Indian scholars, mainly from the muffasil towns, try to contact some of these authors to seek personal interviews for academic purposes. When no reply is received by them, they seek some time for a written interview and propose to send a written questionnaire. When even that is not answered, they presume that either their letter has not reached "the great author", or (s)he is on some international assignment, or (s)he is busy reading

and thinking for a new book. The author is imagined to be too busy even to acknowledge receipt of the communication. Little do these scholars realise that their efforts are being spurned, and they are being slighted by a person whom they revere as "great". Not only are they snubbed, but the entire nation is affronted by them, considered a worthless country. That is why they abandoned their native land, i.e. India, and looked for greener pastures in more prosperous lands. In such a situation, the theme and purpose of the commissioned book, imagined to be a literary piece about India or the Indian Diaspora, can very easily be guessed. Thus, to consider the commissioned book may in fact be a grave mistake, as the book may be a part of the larger conspiracy to denigrate India, a former colony; to achieve the desired sales, a product should have all the necessary ingredients needed for its marketing. Such things are not new, as is evident from the following observation by Gandhi: "We have become used to understanding from pre-British days, that the art (perfected by the British) of government includes the harnessing of the secret services of men learned, and reported to be honest and honourable for shadowing suspects and for writing up the virtues of the government of the day as if the certificate had come from disinterested quarters" (Gandhi, "Drain"). In today's context one may read "government" as "multinational companies".

Again, a person with a middle-class aspiration and the colonial mindset wants to have some relationship with his/her countrypeople who are successful in the first world. This explains why a "success story" like that of Piyush Bobby Jindal being elected to the post of Governor of Louisiana in the USA made headline news in the Indian media. Bobby has Indian roots, but being an American, he is obliged to look and to be American to the core. He is trying his best to adapt to his (new-found) identity; he professes the Roman Catholic faith and not Hinduism in order to be more acceptable to the society he wants to be associated with. If there is a conflict between India and the USA, as an American, he is obliged to consider India – the country which his parents abandoned, perhaps with contempt – a hostile nation. Yet his success was glamorised by the Indian electronic media; for the entire day of his victory his relatives were faced with questions like: "How do you feel to know that one of your relatives has become a Governor? Did he telephone you? When did you last receive a call from him?". The poor relatives had to admit: "There has been no contact with him for several years." Our young researchers and their innocent supervisors unknowingly behave like an over-enthusiastic reporter who is trying to find love in a place where it does not exist.

No model/advertiser, however great (s)he may be, can afford to go against the diktats of the manufacturer of the product that is being advertised and sold. For example, can Amitabh Bachchan, generally described as the superhero of this millennium, having received his fee (his share in the market profits), dare to say that he has never used Navratan Tel (a brand of hair oil which he advertises)? Is he hoodwinking his fans, or is he advising them in all sincerity in the advertisement for this product? Like a model, an author has only a limited role to play in the glo(b/c)alized market economy. Only a novice will believe that an author who has taken a huge advance works for his own interests, presents his true feelings and remains oblivious of the publishers' interests. Publishers are there in the market not for the service of literature, but to do business. "The thumping economic advance [was] conferred on Roy … [for] a new star on the occasion of India's fiftieth anniversary of independence … had to be created … [to stay in business] in terms of modalities of mul-

tinationals" (Ponzanesi 116). Hector Tobar reports how Jonathan Cape, Doris Lessing's own publisher, rejected one of her novels, saying it was "not commercially viable", and how another publisher declined to publish a book by her, considering it "too depressing" to be successful – though these works became famous once they were published (Tobar). Therefore, the publisher is well within its rights to expect to get not a realistic book, but rather material to cater to market needs by having all the required ingredients that are necessary to sell a book. In such a situation, there is no question of the will of the author. No author can be given a huge advance if his/her book does not sell well. Thus, it is very clear that books by such authors become important "products" (artefacts) not because of their intrinsic value, but because of extraneous considerations – sometimes because of the advances paid out to the authors, and sometimes because of "suspect awards". Let me quote the words of two Nobel laureates to prove my point: "The world of literature is very political. He once told me, 'The key to winning a Nobel is to keep your lips in constant motion. There are a great many asses to kiss'" (Churcher); "The Nobel Prize is run by a self-perpetuated committee. They vote for themselves and get the world's publishing industry to jump to their tune. I know several people who have won, and you don't do anything else for a year but Nobel. They are always coming out with new torments for me. Downstairs there are 500 things I have to sign for them" (Ulin). Further, on receiving the news of the award of Nobel Prize, Doris Lessing is said to have remarked: "Who are these people? They're a bunch of bloody Swedes" (Farandale).

Both India and the (present-day) USA were once British colonies; America won its independence in 1776, and India in 1947. Webster could dare to pronounce proudly that his language was not English but "the American Language". Unfortunately, India is still looking for her Webster. None of the Indian authors (with the exception of Raja Rao) claim(s/ed) to use Indian English, though Braj B. Kachru has been making a case for this form of the language. Rather, among Indian authors there is a tendency to be an appendage of British literature and to gain approval from the former colonial masters. The Indian writer has come a long way since the frank and bold admittance of Raja Rao: "We cannot write like the English. We should not" (v). Salman Rushdie, in his Introduction to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, crossed all limits when he bragged: "… the prose writing – both fiction and non-fiction – created in this period by Indian writers working in English, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 'official languages' of India, the so-called vernacular languages', during the same time; and, indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, 'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books" (Rushdie x). Times have changed, and the ethos has changed with them; historical reality has yielded to economic reality; gone are the days to shout "British, Quit India" (*angrezo bharat chhodo*); we now send official delegations in hordes to invite foreign capital and companies.

Against this background, now let me focus my attention one by one on some of the "major Indian writers in English" mentioned above. Many of the "so-called Indian" authors feel more at home in foreign lands than in India; many of them stay in the first world; they visit India on short trips simply to collect their material for the books they are working on. India-baiting comes naturally to them because they neither try to understand India from an Indian perspective, nor are they worried about her problems. For them India is a saleable commodity, so they use it/its tag to achieve their goals. Therefore, it is no sur-

prise that their fiction has been branded the fiction of India-baiters. For example, Stephen Schiff writes about Naipaul, and his books such as *India: A Million Mutinies*, *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Wounded Civilization*: "... Naipaul didn't mind baiting his enemies, sometimes outrageously. ... why a culture like mine or like the one in India, from which I come ancestrally ..." (Schiff). About Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Mujeebuddin Syed writes: "... after the India baiting of V. S. Naipaul and Nirad C. Chaudhuri, [*Midnight's Children*] seemed to present, despite a certain cynicism about its own method, a newer and fresher picture of India and Indianness" (Syed). "A newer and fresher picture of India and Indianness" in *Midnight's Children* enraged Mrs. Indira Gandhi so much that she sued Rushdie and his publisher and they had to tender an unconditional apology to her (Siddiqui). Mrs. Gandhi was not alone in being irked by Rushdie; he has also offended the Muslim community by misrepresenting Islam in his writings (Patel). He has perhaps been doing this in order to prove his secular credentials to the Western world and to become more acceptable to a largely Christian society.

Though Vikram Seth does not exactly fall into the category of India-baiters, his concerns are certainly not Indian. I would like to quote from my own review of *The Golden Gate*: "By giving its award for 1988 to The Golden Gate, the Sahitya Akademi has promoted a book which is totally alien to Indian culture in its theme and ethos, which has neither Indian characters nor Indian psyche nor even Indian locale. Can the experimentation or the mark of bestseller be the only criterions for the much coveted award? What kind of values does Sahitya Akademi want us to cherish by promoting such a book?" (Sharma).

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* "became a literary sensation even before it actually came out in print. It is said that it had been read by all of fifteen people when it was pronounced a bestseller" (Marwah 13). Geeta Doctor has raised doubts about the greatness of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: "Is it great literature? ... We do not ask for greatness of literature these days. We are quite relived with entertainment or better still seduction" (4). In a similar vein, A.N. Dwivedi writes: "Arundhati Roy has written her novel with the Western readership in mind… [the book] does not promote the cause of Indian aesthetics … it is a little painful and disquieting to see an Indian writer making the work of literature a mere saleable commodity. … [she should have desisted] from … unnecessary incestuous, immoral scenes … in keeping with Indian spirit and culture" (2). Charges of obscenity against the book were raised, and a court case lasted for almost a decade. The book is an interesting portrayal of class segregation in Marxist Kerala – a theme combining two subjects that are dear to the capitalist class. It is not out of place to quote Arundhati Roy on India: "I don't even feel comfortable with this need to define our country. Because it's bigger than that! How can one define India? There is no one language, there is no one culture. There is no one religion, there is no one way of life. There is absolutely no way one could draw a line around it and say, 'This is India' or, 'This is what it means to be Indian'" (Jana). By implication, Roy suggests that India is not a nation because it does not profess one religion, one culture and one language. In questioning the idea of India, Arundhati is echoing the colonial debate about this nation – and also echoing the European idea of a nation. Arundhati Roy does not seem to accept either Gandhi's or Nehru's notion of India; rather she seems to accept the European notion of a nation.

Arundhati Roy readily accepted the Booker Prize, but she refused to accept a much-coveted national award from India's Academy of Letters (Sahitya Akademi) "in protest

against the Indian Government toeing the US line by 'violently and ruthlessly pursuing policies of brutalisation of industrial workers, increasing militarisation and economic neo-liberalisation'" (Deccan). I do not know if Ms. Roy is familiar with Jeanette Winterson (the author of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*), who maintains: "This country [The UK] is so in thrall to America. We're such lapdogs to them and that will skew things with the judges" (Silverman).

The Man Booker prize is run by a business house; only a novice believes that its economic/political interests are not kept in view when giving an award. It is something like a social welfare project of a multinational company, which uses the opportunity to create a market for its products. The question is if Roy has ever raised doubts about the credentials and business interests of the group that sponsors/backs the Man Booker Prize which she so proudly flaunts; it is also questionable if she is familiar with John Pilger, who dismisses the Booker as "only one award that represents the views of a clutch of mostly elite, London-centric, conservative-liberal judges" (Saxena). I would like to know her take on this prize or on Pilger. If Arundhati Roy's intentions and acts are dubbed "anti-Indian", then against the backdrop of the double standards she maintains, this should not come as a surprise.

Kiran Desai came to the limelight because of the Betty Trask Prize from the British Society of Authors 1998 for her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. "[It] is an ironical novel satirizing Indian mentality. It openly makes fun of our sense of propriety and logic. The major satire of the novel is the Indian sense of religiosity" (Tiwari). When describing the book, the reviewers in *India Today* use all those ingredients that I have talked above to lure a prospective buyer: "... Hullabaloo could be a case of hype and hope rather than soul, but the phenomenal advances that Kiran has got (an estimated Rs. 50 lakh), an initial print run of 50,000 each in the US and UK, early excerpts in the *New Yorker* and in the Salman Rushdie-edited anthology, *Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, is a pointer that another little Indian girl is on the threshold of big things" (Binoo).

All these authors have been living in the USA/UK and have seen those societies from close quarters, but they generally do not write about it, unlike their British counterparts – though they can very well do that as well. Vikram Seth, for example, has written about American yuppies in a meticulous manner in *The Golden Gate*. The novel deals with Californian psychology and awareness, and "suggests intimate knowledge of Californian mores, from its bill boards and bumper stickers to personal ads and pet psychiatrists. *The Golden Gate* is filled with details about California that natives sometimes overlook because of excessive familiarity" (Sharma). The book was certainly successful. However, most Indian expatriates in fact save not only their energy but also their ink to deride the native culture(s). In these days of the "Clash of Civilizations", who will be a better author-agent than Salman Rushdie or Khaled Hosseini to deride the Muslims and present an authentic picture of a Muslim society from a Western perspective? The result, in the form of *Satanic Verses* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, is clear for everyone to see. Both these authors present Muslims not only as intolerant villains, but also as uncultured people – because a large number of the prospective readers, at whom the book is aimed, want them to be portrayed in such a way.

Mahatma Gandhi described Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (Mayo) as a "Drain Inspector's Report". It will not be out of place to quote from Gandhi's review of the book:

> This book is cleverly and powerfully written. The carefully chosen quotations give it the false appearance of a truthful book. But the impression it leaves on my mind is that it is the report of a drain inspector sent out with the one purpose of opening and examining the drains of the country to be reported upon, or to give a graphic description of the stench exuded by the opened drains. If Miss Mayo had confessed that she had come to India merely to open out and examine the drains of India, there would perhaps be little to complain about her compilation. But she declared her abominable and patently wrong conclusion with a certain amount of triumph: 'the drains are India'. (Gandhi, "Drain")

What Gandhi said about Mayo's book is also applicable to Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* This novel won the coveted Man Booker Prize "... perhaps [because] the most drastic and bitter facts ... have impressed the judges, who have got a revealing inside into India. ... the book, as a whole, presents the crude, dark and naked facts about India, and that has added all the merits for the award ..." (Khan 1). Similarly, Sudhir K. Arora charges Adiga with presenting an incomplete truth, and calls the awarded prize "A Freakish Booker". "Even the head of the jury, Michael Portillo, [calls] it a work that shows the 'dark side of India – a new territory' ... for many of us, our worst fears have come true – the West is once again using our poverty to humiliate us" (Saxena). No wonder such books become instant bestsellers (to recollect, Mayo's *Mother India* was reprinted twelve times between May and December in 1927, the year of its first publication, and thirty-three times between 1927 and 1931) and are also nominated for one prize or another.

The claim by the likes of Jug Suraiya that Indians are far too thin-skinned about accepting any form of criticism is not tenable (Suraiya). On the contrary, Indians are by and large not averse to the criticism of their beliefs, faiths, thinking and practices. Indians discuss their problems or realities freely, they take criticism sportingly, they wish to improve their situation, and they are not status quo-ists. As a matter of fact, authors in Indian languages have very severely criticised various Indian ways. Who could be a greater critic of Indian religious and social practices than Kabir? Swami Dayananda was a bitter critic of Sanatan Hindu practices. Gandhi did not agree with many practices of Hindus, and suggested reform. Can a more bitter picture of Indian reality be presented than that portrayed by Prem Chand? Does Phanishwar Nath Renu not present a very grim and harsh picture of poverty in the Indian countryside? Does Qurratulain Haider not describe the sufferings of Muslim women in a belligerently male-dominated and poverty-stricken society? Who could satirise autocratic tendencies in Indian politics and bureaucracy in more acerbic terms than Shrilal Shukl? What is Dalit Literature if not a stringent criticism of caste/social hierarchies? Because of my limitations, I have referred to the authors in Hindi only. The list of such authors from Indian literature in other languages is even longer. These authors have not been considered offensive, nor have they been accused of being guided by pecuniary considerations or working at the behest of some business house. This is so because of the different treatment and handling of the same subject matter at the hands of two different people: while one shows how to counter the reality of poverty, the other showcases poverty to make it a saleable item. It is their motives and mindset against which critics raise their protests. Poverty for Indians is not just an economic parameter; it is also a way of life.[3] "Willing acceptance of penury" and "penury in the midst of plenty" are piv-

otal issues in the Indian lifestyle and mindset; they are also the key concepts in Gandhian economics, which incorporates his ideas of Non-violence, Trusteeship, *Aparigraha* (Non-possession), *Swadeshi* (using locally made goods), and similar notions. Indians voluntarily accept multiple pluralities in every walk of life. So it is an issue of contentment on the basis of acceptance, not coercion. Rushdie does not seem to like the Indian delineation of the subject matter. It is partly because of this that he dismisses writings in languages other than English. To cast further light on the issue, let me turn to Gandhi again. Gandhi equates Western education to false education. He does not like education to be given just for the sake of literacy. Gandhi asks: "Will you add an inch to his happiness [by giving this type of education]? Do you wish to make him discontented with his cottage or his lot? ... [This education] does not make men of us. It does not enable us to do our duty. ... [On the contrary] [c]haracter-building has the first place in [the ancient Indian school system]. A building erected on that foundation [of the Indian system] will last" (*Hind Swaraj* 82-84) We can replace "education" in the Gandhian discourse above by "the writings of these authors". None of the books by the authors mentioned above withstand a test on the Gandhian parameters.

To conclude, readers have to be on their guard while reading Anglophone Indian fiction, as many of the novels are churned out in order to cater to the needs of the market and showcase India in a poor light – a perspective that is highly favoured in the West due to several reasons. For those who see English as a necessity in the age of computerization and globalization, and who therefore would like to prescribe these authors for the sake of their English (their style), I would again like to quote Gandhi: "To give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them. The foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us. ... It is worth noting that, by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation. Hypocrisy, tyranny, etc. have increased. English-knowing Indians have not hesitated to cheat and strike terror into the people" (*Hind Swaraj* 84-85). If the parameters laid down by Leo Tolstoy (who judged books on the basis of their purpose) are employed, most Anglophone Indian fiction does not fall into the category of the best literary works, and it may not withstand the test of time. All these authors should realise what they have been doing to India at the behest of the capitalist world; becoming their agents/stooges (knowingly or unknowingly) kills the authenticity of their work and impairs their work with temporality. The market may cater to the needs of certain expectations and may reward the producer with ample money, but the creation of the best literature – literature that people will not let willingly die – requires something else. The purpose of literature must be to promote the best values and good sense, so that feelings of brotherhood are spread. The true value of literature in reflecting Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam (the entire world is a family) will find cogitation in their writings only when they rise above the binary of I/Other. If they stop playing to the gallery of the globalised agenda, their work could be more authentic.

Notes

[1] India is a multi-lingual nation. The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India (Scheduled Languages) mentions 22 languages. In the 2011 census people named 19,569 languages as their mother tongues. After thorough linguistic scrutiny, revision and rationalization, the census arrived at 1369 rationalized mother tongues and 1474 names which are treated as 'unclassified' and rel-

egated to the 'other' mother tongue category. (*Census of India 2011*, Paper 1 of 2018, Language: India, States And Union Territories (Table C-16), New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General, India, p. 4, PDF.)

[2] Mr Pranab Mukherjee was the 13th President of India from 2012 to 2017. In order to show familial ties in Bengali, "da" (meaning elder brother) is used as a suffix to the first name.

[3] One of the collections of Gandhi's writings is titled *Willing Acceptance of Penury* (*Swechha se sweekar ki hui garibi*, Hindi; Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1961, Print).

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The Concept of Afterlife: Transforming Mythology into Fantasy in Yangsze Choo's *The Ghost Bride*

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Abstract

This article analyses the function of mythology in the fantasy genre in Yangsze Choo's novel The Ghost Bride. *Since mythology is frequently a source of inspiration for fantasy authors, it is subjected to redefinition and reinterpretation. This article focuses on the main concepts of the Chinese afterlife mythology, namely the underworld, fantastical characters, practices relating to the dead, and the concept of a ghost marriage. The aim is to identify these myths in the novel and relate them to the traditional perception in order to investigate if and how are they reinterpreted and to determine their role in a fantasy novel.*

Keywords: Chinese, mythology, afterlife, The Ghost Bride

Introduction

In 1939, J. R. R. Tolkien said that "fantasy remains a human right" (9). Ever since then, his words have been proven relevant by the continuing popularity of the fantasy genre all over the world, spanning subgenres of high fantasy, military fantasy, urban fantasy and dozens of others. Although difficult to define, "the major theorists in the field – Tzvetan Todorov, Rosemary Jackson, Kathryn Hume, W. R. Irwin and Colin Manlove – all agree that fantasy is about the construction of the impossible" (James and Mendlesohn 1). The impossible, as contrasted with the scientific possibility of science fiction, is one of the major characteristics of fantasy literature. And yet, even the impossible must have solid grounds in reality and reasoning: the existence of magic, non-human beings or different universes must be rationally explained so the reader finds them acceptable. The narrative must therefore pos-

sess logic and become "a story of impossible things and improbable happenings depicted in a realistic narrative by a master craftsman creating verisimilitude, awe and wonder in the reader" (Haider and Vijayan 421).

However, fantasy universes and their stories are not based only on the physical laws of the real world. This genre frequently makes use of cultural phenomena typical of a particular nation, drawn from religion, history, folklore, myths, legends or traditions, and "the structure of fantasy universes includes in particular many references to mythical systems, both those familiar from tradition and those reinvented" (Trzcińska 145). The "real-world fantastical" in the understanding of myths, religion and legends can function as a link between the real, ordinary world and the made-up, fantasy universe. While Greek or Celtic gods are an important part of Western mythology, they become truly real on the pages of fantastic fiction, where they no longer function as imaginary belief systems, but as acting and self-aware beings that directly influence the narrative with their own actions and motives.

Myths as important constituents of the fantasy genre are found in works by Tolkien, Lewis, Paolini and other authors, whether twentieth-century writers or contemporary authors. In order to deal with myths in fantasy literature, we first have to specify the understanding of the concept, which in the simplest definition is "used to designate any collective story that encapsulates a world view and authorizes belief" (Attebery 2). Any system of world views and beliefs is a helpful addition to the fictional world, which needs a certain order and rules. In fiction, "the mythology belonging to pop-cultural narratives also remains a borderline system, expressing content generally regarded as irrational which becomes, however, an important, though largely unconscious, element of the transformation of the life beliefs and attitudes of its recipients" (Trzcińska 152–153). It is the genre of fantasy that rationalizes the irrational concepts and beliefs for the reader.

The relation of mythology to fantasy is the focus of Brian Attebery's *Stories about Stories* (2014), in which he argues that "fantasy, as a literary form, is a way of reconnecting to traditional myths and the worlds they generate" (9). This reconnection is achieved by innovating the old, not denying it: "the problem for literalists is not that fantasy denies Christian myths but that it rearranges, reframes, and reinterprets them" (Attebery 2). Reinterpretation concerns not only Christian myths, but also myths from various cultures, in some cases linked to specific belief systems, since myths are "the embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual" (Bascom 9).

Linking mythology and the real world is also a prominent feature in the fantasy novel *The Ghost Bride* by Yangsze Choo, chosen for the analysis here due to its numerous references to Chinese mythology. The author, as a "fourth generation Malaysian of Chinese descent" ("Yschoo" 1), draws ideas primarily from the mythology related to the Chinese belief in the afterlife. Consequently, the reader encounters spirits or ghosts, witnesses rituals such as offerings for the dead, and is shown places which the living cannot visit, such as the courts of hell. The *Kirkus* praised the richness of the Chinese folklore, mores and the supernatural world, and *Publishers Weekly* agreed that the novel depicts the complex world of the Chinese afterlife, which contains ghost cities and servants, and even has its own bureaucracy. With the novel falling into the genre of historical fantasy, the link between reality and fantasy is established with the help of mythology transforming the

impossible to the possible:

> Li Lan, the last daughter of a fading businessman in colonial Malaysia pined quietly for Tian Bai, scion to the Lim family's trading empire. That is, until she is offered to the family's dead son, Lim Tian Ching, as a "ghost bride," a woman married to a dead man, a tradition thought to appease vengeful spirits. After a terrifying visitation from her suitor's apparition, she drinks a medium's potion, and her spirit escapes her body, beginning a long, strange journey through the netherworld for this now quite literal ghost bride. (Brantley 1)

These aspects make the novel suitable material for the analysis of myths in the fantasy genre. My aims are therefore to identify myths relating to the afterlife in the storyline and to examine if and how they are reinterpreted in the context of the fantasy genre. This is achieved in three steps: identification of the original myth, comparison of the original myth and the myth as presented in the novel, and finally discussion of the relevance of these myths in the context of the fantasy genre. Consequently, the paper is structured in four parts, each focusing on a specific myth:

- the existence of the underworld,
- the existence of fantastical characters,
- practices relating to the dead,
- ghost marriage.

It is not my aim to present the historical context for any of these or to search for their original occurrence, since there are several prominent works in the field which examine this topic in detail (Birrell). It is also not my aim to prove that the novel is rooted *exclusively* in Chinese culture; quite the contrary, my focus is Chinese mythology only, as well as its reinterpretation. The identified myths are described in a non-fantastical environment outside popular culture, and are then analysed in the context of fantasy, highlighting the changes, appropriations and reconstructions of the myths. As Attebery agrees,

> instead of spending much time simply identifying a particular Celtic myth in a work of modern fantasy, we should look at how the fantasist appropriates from, engages with, travesties, and reconstitutes the myth. The modern reuse will never be the same as the original performance. Most myths come down to us stripped of context. The voices, gestures, rituals, and social interactions that once guided interpretation are gone. Fantasy provides new contexts, and thus inevitably new meanings, for myth. Fantasy spins stories about the stories. (3)

The Existence of the Underworld

Chinese mythology is vast, complicated and contains numerous motifs explaining the origin of the world, deities or the afterlife. Beliefs in what happened in the afterlife varied from one historical era to another, yet in general, "the Chinese seem to have seen the afterlife as very similar to the earthly life they lived" (Roberts 2). The religions influencing the concept of the Chinese afterlife are mainly Buddhism, which "brought the concept of

a hell or underworld where all souls must work off their sins before being reentered into life as a reincarnated being" (Roberts 3), Daoism, which "took this idea and modified it so that the afterlife had 10 courts" (Roberts 3), and even Confucianism, although "drawing a line between 'Confucianism' and 'Daoism' as distinct schools of thought is problematic" (Shusan 107).

As mentioned, a popular belief was that the afterlife was very similar to the 'earthly life', so that the social status of the deceased would remain the same, and the social structure and hierarchy would be maintained as in the previous life. This concept of hell, which is closer to the concept of purgatory in Western mythology, served in order to cleanse the souls and prepare them for reincarnation. It was influenced by Buddhism, since in the pre-Buddhist era the afterlife was seen as a simple continuation of earthly life, with non-punitive aspects. In other words, "there is no difference [between death and life], except that the dead are immaterial and the living material" (Nguyen 1). In the later perception, hell or purgatory became a place "ruled by a host of bureaucrats" (Gale 170), where the dead resided and expected their rebirth, passing through the 'courts of hell' according to their sins.

It is common for the fantasy genre to introduce a new world or a universe with sets of rules other than those of the original or the real world. In terms of frame/setting, we often encounter "detailed settings [depicting] another world, often earth, but out-of-time or invisible to most people" (Saricks 267). Alternative universes are commonly used as settings in the works of many fantasy authors, such as Rowling, Gaiman, or Lewis. In case of *The Ghost Bride*, the setting is the world of the dead – the underworld, invisible to the living, perceivable as an alternative universe overlapping with the real world, presented as a vast and unwelcoming place: "The sky was evenly lit, which gave it an artificial air. Yet the overall effect was overpowering. With no landmarks, I had no way of knowing how many miles the grassland stretched out for, but it seemed like a great distance" (Choo 186). The underworld is not altered from the descriptions in Chinese mythology, and it contains the courts of hell/the courts of judgement, the Plains of the Dead: "Ghosts are always leaving when they're called to the Courts of Hell" (Choo 193). The notions of hell and the underworld are very similar to the descriptions provided by scholars, since "in the Chinese traditions, souls entering hell are purged of their sins and then continue on" (Roberts 2). Similarly, in *The Ghost Bride* hell is closer to the Christian purgatory, and numerous references to the 'courts of hell' appear: "But the dwellings come and go as the ghosts move on to the Courts of Judgment" (Choo 186), making hell a temporary place before reincarnation.

Since the main protagonist of the novel enters the underworld unwillingly, there is a recurring theme of disbelief linked to the mythology through the entire novel. The reality of the physical world becomes unachievable, as the character is denied the right to touch physical objects and communicate with the living world. This also corresponds to the traditional perception of ghosts, who can influence the physical world very little. Becoming invisible, immaterial and inaudible in the world of the living, the "the disaster of [my] disembodiment had overshadowed all else" (Choo 106). It is therefore possible to talk about switched realities – the original, real world becomes unachievable, while the alternative world, the underworld, is a temporary reality.

The final acceptance of the switched realities – the physical world for the spiritual world – is preceded by denial, attempts to return to the previous (living) condition, and

attempts to communicate with the physical world. After failing to take control of her dormant body, Li Lan is confronted with the 'realities' of Chinese mythology. The realities are no longer only a belief system, but a set of direct influences that affect the narrative. Consequently, the reader encounters a fantasy universe that "includes in particular many references to mythical systems, both those familiar from tradition and those reinvented" (Trzcińska 145).

The boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead is erased. The main character has ties to both – being neither dead nor alive, she simultaneously belongs and does not belong to either. The "illusion of a seamless reality" (Berry 1) is maintained, and the author manages "to completely erase the border between the real world and the fantasy one, so that readers cannot tell when the characters have stepped across the boundary" (Berry 1).

The Existence of Fantastical Characters

Characterization is a crucial part of fantasy novels, and as is often acknowledged, the characters "are not always human" (Saricks 273). A new, fantastical setting calls for unordinary characters, since it is usually not inhabited by humans. In fantasy, unordinary commonly means magical or inhuman characters, frequently elves, dragons or wizards. In *The Ghost Bride*, ghosts and spirits play an important role as characters with their own motives and desires, as well as the inhuman characters drawn from mythology, such as demons and dragons.

Since the Chinese hell was believed to be a continuation of mortal life, the deceased in the underworld were also believed to be "just the continuation of the living; for example, they needed food and possessed various desires" (Nguyen 1). For this reason, the ancestors play a significant role in the afterlife: "the living has the duty to offer and sacrifice to the dead, and they will get the blessing from their ancestor […] the ancestors enjoy the living's offerings, and their functions are to reward and to protect the living" (Nguyen 1).

Spirits and ghosts are a significant part of the Chinese mythology. While the ancestors have to be honoured and brought offerings in order to protect the descendants, contrary to protective spirits and guardian spirits, the notion of hateful or vengeful ghosts also appears in the folklore, varying from vicious water ghosts and zombie ghosts to succubae. Roberts defines ghosts as "usually spirits who for some reason did not make it to Heaven" (50), and introduces the term 'hungry ghosts', which have to be brought offerings in exchange for peace for the living. The "people's concern that souls for whom no one cared would become ghosts intent on causing mischief" (Jochim 1) influenced the fear of ghosts and inspired various activities that were supposed to keep the spirit world at bay. Stories about hauntings are common in Chinese folklore, whether "stories of ghosts haunting a house where they once lived, haunting relatives, or appearing to strangers for help" (Mark 1). The ghosts retain the character of the living person, and consequently they carry personal memories and vendettas. Only after resolving its unfinished business on Earth can the ghost move on to the afterlife.

In Choo's universe, spirits and ghosts remain and live in the underworld until they are allowed to move on. The belief that they have a life similar to (or the same as) mortals is maintained, e.g. by having the same social status or possessing the same dwellings: "Did

you say that the family mansions correspond to the same areas as they did in life?" (Choo 196) inquires the main character, struggling to understand the principles of the afterlife. Several types of ghosts encounter and influence the main character – mostly in a negative way, since a "warning not to trust ghosts" (Choo 155) is stressed thorough the novel. The ghosts are usually depicted as evil hungry entities seeking to harm the living by draining their energy. The reason for the ghosts tormenting the living is also maintained as believed – by the spirit being restless and having unsettled affairs with the living, e.g. "…if her daughter was not allowed to marry her lover, she would come back to haunt the family" (Choo 69).

In relation to spirits, it is important to mention the possibility of possession appearing in "stories about spiritual possession, ghosts appearing as though they were still living, or ghosts taking revenge on the living" (Mark 1). Spiritual possession can happen to either a living person, or a ghost can take over a dead body, both in order to communicate with the living, execute revenge, etc. In order not to offend or anger the ghosts during the 'ghost month' dedicated to them, the beliefs vary from avoiding staying out late, hanging clothes to dry at night or going swimming (Xiaobian 1). Such possession also takes place in the novel, where a vengeful spirit takes over a living body, dislocating the spirit of the rightful owner. Although factors causing offence (such as those listed above) do not play a role, it is again the doing of an evil spirit eager to harm the living, resulting in a theft of a body: "Someone else took my body" (Choo 349).

It is not only the spirits and ghosts who belong to the group of non-human characters. The reader also encounters other traditional mythical Chinese beings, such as demons or dragons. Demons belong to the group of the negative characters, believed to be "servants of the gods, including the ruler of the underworld and its judges, which employed demons to carry out their hellish punishments" (Roberts 29). In the novel, ox-headed demons are depicted as the servants of the bureaucratic and corrupted hell officials, and they are feared for their terrible appearance and evil intentions.

On the other hand, dragons are portrayed in a positive light, which does not necessarily correspond with the traditional view, since dragons "at first, all were helpful and beloved water gods. In later centuries, there were two kinds of dragons, the old friendly dragons and a new breed of terrifying winged serpents of the mountains" (Roberts 32). Roberts also mentions the influence of Buddhism, which caused dragons to be portrayed as negative beings in association with harmful powers. However, Choo rather leans to the earlier perception of dragons, depicting one as "a great dragon, a *loong*, lord of the water and air" (Choo 292). The dragon has virtues, such as wisdom, experience and wit, and stands opposed to the evil ghosts and demons.

Practices Relating to the Dead

With an alternative setting for the narrative, a new set of rules governs the universe. These rules are not necessarily the same as the rules of the physical or real world. Frequently it is magic that governs the fantastic world, or laws taken from a belief system. In this case, it is the practices, traditions and customs relating to the dead which function as the natural laws in the underworld.

Since the concept of the Chinese afterlife is highly complex, there are many rituals to

be observed. Perhaps the most common is ancestor worship, since it "has been practiced in China from ancient times" (Lakos 16). Ancestor worship "is not only practiced at the homes of Chinese families, but also outside their houses, particularly at Chinese temples and tombs" (Tanggok 3). Practices relating to ancestors include burning offerings in the form of food, 'hell money', or paper effigies structured as buildings, animals and items, and "there are even small figures representing servants available to go with the paper houses" (Bryant 82-83). The burning serves as a method which "dispatched [offerings] to the other world by flame" (Topley 103).

The rules of the underworld are again drawn from mythology – items can be transferred to the underworld by burning, and 'hell money' functions as a currency for the dead. For instance, the main character is advised to burn money for herself so she can use it in the afterlife: "Burn cash for yourself, she [old nurse] had told me" (Choo 78), and consequently Li Lan is able to use the money offering in the afterlife, providing herself with some wealth to help her return to the world of the living. Similarly, offerings play a significant role as they do in the mythology, becoming crucial for the main character to survive since she requires food/shelter/transport, e.g. "this pig must have been a paper funeral effigy" (Choo 222).

Paper effigies in the form of food, dwellings, animals or even humans can be burned and transferred to the world of the dead. However, there are frequent complaints by the characters about the unnaturalness and tastelessness of the offerings, since they are made of paper.

The lack of ancestor worship and offerings to the ancestors may result in the already mentioned 'hungry ghosts', since "…without such offerings, the dead were mere paupers in the afterworld, and without descendants or proper burial, they wandered unceasingly as hungry ghosts and were unable to be reborn" (Choo 19).

Funeral rites are also important, as the lack or improper execution of a funeral rite may result in the return of the deceased as a ghost. These rites may be held for a week, and they include a formal invitation to the funeral, a procession, colour symbolism such as a preference for black and white and an avoidance of red, a funeral wake, burning of offerings, and prayer (Taylor). Although funeral rites do not cause spirits to remain among the living in the novel, they have a significance in the following analysed concept of the ghost marriage, where the wedding ceremony is constituted by a combination of wedding and funeral rites.

Ghost Marriage

A very specific belief relating to the spirit world and resulting in an unusual practice is called 'ghost marriage'. A key theme in Choo's novel, ghost marriage "takes place at a ceremony or group of ceremonies at which two deceased persons, or more rarely, one living and one deceased person are married" (Topley 97). The reasons for such marriages vary: "matching the deceased, in the hope that the deceased live a happy married life in the netherworld [or] the marriages are arranged so that the deceased bachelors can be buried at their family cemetery" (Xu, Xiao 1), and "a custom that required the marriage of an older brother prior to the marriage of a younger brother also provided impetus for the practice of ghost marriage" (Schwartze 92-93). The satisfaction of the deceased was important, since

the Chinese believed that life continues after death and that this life is very similar to the life the deceased has been living prior to their death. Providing them with a husband/wife was perceived as keeping the ghost happy and avoiding being haunted. Although most commonly conducted between two deceased people, Topley mentions that "occasionally a live girl is taken as wife for the dead man, but I am told that this is rare and the family must be suitably rich to tempt the girl or her family to accept" (98). In such case, the girl would join the groom's family and take up a vow of celibacy.

Ghost marriage serves as a primary premise of the novel. The main protagonist is offered a proposal for a prominent family's dead son. The concept of such a marriage is regarded as very unusual: "This practice of arranging the marriage of a dead person was uncommon, usually held in order to placate a spirit. A deceased concubine who had produced a son might be officially married to elevate her status to a wife. Or two lovers who died tragically might be united after death" (Choo 3).

The depiction of the custom does not differ from its description in scholarly texts dealing with the concept of ghost marriage, although the author expresses disdain for the practice, saying that "to marry the living to the dead was a rare and, indeed, dreadful occurrence" (Choo 3). There is also the aspect of the bride's unwillingness to marry a deceased person, so we cannot speak of reuniting two lovers in marriage even if one of them is deceased.

Ghost marriage serves as a driving force of the novel. The main protagonist struggles to avoid it – successfully – although the attempt becomes a quest that persists throughout the entire narrative. In terms of the storyline, fantasy novels often "involve a quest of some sort" (Saricks 269), and here this quest is prompted by the desire to avoid the dead and return to the world of the living.

Conclusion

This article has analysed the elements of Chinese mythology in the fantasy novel *The Ghost Bride* by Yangsze Choo and interpreted them in the context of the fantasy genre. As stated in the introduction, mythology is a frequent and widely-used source for many authors when creating a fantasy world, and the genre of "fantasy frequently takes a familiar story, legend, or myth and adds a twist, a new way of looking at things that brings it to life again" (Saricks 265). While typically Western mythology is more common than the mythologies of other nations, the vast and complicated system of Chinese beliefs represents a suitable basis for a fictional world as well.

Since the aim of this article is to identify and analyse the reinterpretation of Chinese mythology in the selected novel, I have focused on four major points, addressed in the respective sections:

- the existence of the underworld,
- the existence of fantastical characters,
- practices relating to the dead,
- ghost marriage.

The existence of the underworld serves as a fantastical setting of the narrative. As is often the case in the fantasy genre, this world is parallel and/or invisible, commonly unreach-

able by ordinary humans. Based on the Chinese concept of hell, the underworld functions by a different set of rules than the real world, and yet struggles to copy the real world, even including the social structure of its inhabitants. The reinterpretation happens on a very low level – the underworld is depicted as a place very similar to the traditional belief about it found in literature. However, the detailed description adds to rather than reinterprets the concept, making it deep and developed, providing a fantastical setting for the story.

A fantastical world is generally inhabited by specific, frequently inhuman beings. These, in Choo's universe, are spirits, ghosts, demons and dragons. While with spirits, ghosts and demons the author leans towards a negative portrayal, a dragon is depicted (according to earlier beliefs) as a positive godlike character. Again, the reinterpretation is mild and does not happen by completely reinventing the myths, but rather by in-depth characterization. Consequently, mythological evil creatures such as hungry ghosts remain evil on the pages of the book and become alive by having a personality, history, motives, etc. Similarly, the dragon maintains the generally positive virtues ascribed to him, but is given a fictional personality. Again, in fantasy texts the characters typically lean either to the good or the evil side, and are "clearly defined as good or bad" (Saricks 267), since the genre is a "genre of contrasts—good and bad, light and dark" (Saricks 269).

The practices related to the dead function as a set of rules in a fantasy universe. Similarly to a system of magical rules, or rules in a different, non-human world, they are unique to the world and do not function outside of it. The notion of currency for the dead, the method of burning effigies and the continuation of the mortal life in the afterlife are introduced; all these aspects are taken from Chinese mythology unchanged. They give the fantastical world new limits and possibilities which are unattainable in reality. They are derived from the fictional setting, the underworld, and they shape it together with the characters.

The concluding section of this paper introduces the concept of ghost marriage as a main focus of the novel. Ghost marriage has been documented as a rare practice which occurs more commonly between two deceased persons. However, Choo opted for the rarer occurrence of marrying the dead to the living, giving the plot a driving force and creating an ultimate quest for the protagonist – to avoid becoming a ghost bride and to return to the world of the living. The reinterpretation is more significant: while sources claim that ghost marriage is often practiced to reunite lovers, or for other reasons such as material benefits, Choo adds a negative aspect. Such wedlock is perceived as unnatural and undesirable by the bride, prompting her to refuse it despite the material benefits offered by the groom's family.

Since "modern fantasy draws on a number of traditional narrative genres – sacred and secular [including] Asian religious traditions" (Attebery 2), the aim of this paper was to show how the selected novel draws from Chinese afterlife mythology. Four major points were addressed, which were drawn from traditional Chinese beliefs in the afterlife. The reinterpretation, however, remains subtle. There is no changing bad into good, and as has been mentioned before, the typically negative characters remain negative while the positive characters remain positive. Reinterpretation remains on the level of in-depth description and detailed characterization. Choo does not reinterpret specific legends or narratives, so we cannot speak of a retelling (which is frequently a topic of the fantasy genre).

Nevertheless, mythology plays a crucial role in the novel, since fantasy's "popular theme involves retellings of myths or fairy tales" (Saricks 270). Mythology creates a fan-

tastical universe together with its own set of rules, practices and specific characters. The universe might be unknown and intriguing to readers who are unfamiliar with the topic, introducing them to the mythological realia of a less well-known culture. Consequently, I agree that "introducing legends from unconventional sources broadens the fantasy field in one direction" (Berry 1) and "incorporating elements of the fantastic borrowed from non-Western mythic traditions [may] challenge readers to find new patterns, new motivations, and new outcomes in the master narratives" (Attebery 173). It would be interesting to investigate whether this trend of using Chinese mythological elements in the fantasy genre reoccurs in other novels too, and whether the fictionalization of myths leans towards the original portrayal of a given myth, or whether authors take more liberty in reinterpretation.

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Irish-language modernism in Czech translations' paratexts

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Abstract

The paper surveys the paratexts of four Irish-language modernist novels and, additionally, three Irish short story collections published in Czech translation. It seeks to analyse the strategies used to introduce the texts to the target readers, concentrating in particular on the ways in which the authors of the paratexts use references to Czech culture and Irish literature written in English. It also studies their approach to modernism as a productive critical label and their manner of projecting Irish modernism to Czech readers.

Keywords: Irish modernism, Irish language, translations from the Irish language, translation paratexts

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In the afterword to his 2013 translation of Pádraic Ó Conaire's short story collection *Biskupova duše*, Radvan Markus notes that Ó Conaire was a pioneer of modernist writing in the Irish language and that other Irish-language modernists, of whom he names Flann O'Brien, Máirtín Ó Cadhain, and Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, only emerged during and after World War II. With the publication of Markus's translation of *Cré na Cille* in 2017, Máirtín Ó

Cadhain became the last of those four authors to have a novel translated into Czech.

This paper surveys the paratexts[1] of the four Irish-language modernist novels translated into Czech, in order to reveal the strategies used to present Irish-language literature to the target texts' readers. It seeks to identify the ways in which the authors of the paratexts try to engage and inform the reader and the field of literary references they use in that process. Within that scope, two research questions will be at the forefront of attention. The first concerns the selection of the authors or literary phenomena referred to in the paratexts. What is of interest here is the authors' willingness to reach for elements of the target culture (i.e. Czech authors or texts), the source culture (Irish literature in Irish and English), and world literature. It is assumed that those choices can be seen as strategies that somewhat correspond to the two main strategies in translation, i.e. domesticating and foreignizing the translated text (Baker 241–244). All the translated novels are considered by the authors of various papers, monographs, and reference works – as well as by the authors of some of the Czech paratexts analysed – to represent modernist modes of writing. As it is modernist literature where the notions of Irish literature (as source literature) and world literature are likely to overlap in references to James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, the second question concerns the relevance of modernism in the paratexts. Is 'modernist' an important critical label in the case of the four authors/novels, and if so, how is (Irish) modernism projected in the paratexts? The paper takes a descriptive approach and predominantly concentrates on what is found (or what is significantly lacking) in the paratexts given the scope of the analysis. It does not presuppose a model against which the presentations offered by the paratexts' authors could be evaluated. The four novels studied are: Flann O'Brien's *Řeči pro pláč* (*An Béal Bocht*), Pádraic Ó Conaire's *Vyhnanství* (*Deoraíocht*), Eoghan Ó Tuairisc's *L´Attaque*, and Máirtín Ó Cadhain's *Hřbitovní hlína* (*Cré na Cille*). Additionally, three short story collections were considered in order to provide more context: Pádraic Ó Conaire's *Biskupova duše*; the collection *Muž, který vybouchl* – which features various Irish-language authors including Ó Conaire, O'Brien, and Ó Cadhain; and *Ni králi, ni císaři*, which presents mainly English-language writing but also contains some stories originally written in Irish. The analysis largely draws from the study of afterwords/postfaces and the information provided on the dustcover, cover, and slips. Reviews and other forms of presenting the books in the media proved to be heavily dependent on the information provided in this manner (which arguably serves as a marker of the importance of the afterwords and blurbs in question), and thus only selected reviews will feature in the paper.

The dustcover of Radvan Markus's translation of Máirtín Ó Cadhain's *Cré na Cille* advertises the book as "the funniest work of Irish modernism". As Joe Cleary notes in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism*, "the term 'Irish modernism' provokes knotty questions of definition", as, among other reasons, much of it happened outside of Ireland (4). In the context of Czech culture, one problem with the term is that it may fail to signify anything to the reader. The publishing house Argo, which produced the aforementioned dustcover, has a tradition of publishing translations of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett and presenting them as Irish writers; this tradition dates back to the first post-1989 Czech edition of *Ulysses*, published in 1993. However, these two and Irish writers (and others) have often been taken for English writers by readers.[2] The editors and translators of *Vzdálené tóny naděje*, a collection of Irish poetry, point out this problem in the very first paragraph of their introduction to the book (7). Moreover, Martin Hilský,

who in his monographic study *Modernisté* discusses Joyce within the scope of Anglo-American modernism alongside Eliot, Woolf, and Lawrence, argues that attributing national affiliations to versions of modernisms has limited validity, as one of modernist art's key features was its transnational, cosmopolitan character (32). This view appears to be shared by the authors of *Dějiny nové moderny*, a survey of Czech modernism presented in an international context. In most cases they omit the nationality altogether when discussing internationally recognised figures (such as Joyce) or present it somewhat casually. For example, a list of "English intellectuals" on page 88 opens with Joyce – who is described as Irish, while G. B. Shaw, who follows him, is not (Papoušek 88). If we reverse the logic of ascribing Englishness to authors writing and works written in English, and thus read Irish modernism as denoting modernist works in the Irish language, such a reading would potentially make sense for *Cré na Cille* in a Czech context (as some Irish-language modernist writing has been made available to Czech readers), but overall it would probably not be very likely to occur to anyone. From the source culture's perspective, the problem would primarily lie in the associations that the Irish language evokes. Joe Cleary notes that "the Irish language was so intrinsically associated with 'tradition' that an Irish-language modernism may have seemed a logical improbability" (13). While this could be true for a part of the Czech audience as well, there may be an even bigger problem in the target culture, as it cannot be confidently expected that Czech readers would even be aware of the Irish language's existence – a fact that prompts the authors of the translated texts' paratexts to address the linguistic situation in Ireland as well as the country's literary traditions.

In the 2000s, there was already enough awareness of the Irish language in Czechia to breed translators who were capable of translating literary texts directly from Irish, but *Řeči pro pláč* was based on the 1973 English translation of *An Béal Bocht* by Patrick C. Power. The novel was eventually published in 1997, having been announced as being prepared for publication in the journal *Souvislosti* in 1993. It was the first text by Brian O'Nolan to be published in full and in book form in Czech, and it was attributed to Flann O'Brien – one of many, but also the most prominent of O'Nolan's pseudonymous literary selves. The original Irish text of *An Béal Bocht* was published in 1941 under a different pseudonym – Myles na gCopaleen.

The sleeve introduces the author as a pioneer of postmodernism in Irish literature and the book as "written in Gaelic". The 1990s were a time of a heightened interest in Celtic culture in the Czech Republic, most often referred to as Celtomania. Josef Chuchma's review of the book, published in the newspaper *Mladá fronta Dnes*, specifically notes the popularity of anything Celtic at the time (19). In fact, the review itself is published on the same page as a review of Anna Bauerová's *Srdce v kamenném kruhu*, a Czech novel which fictionalises Celtic history in the Czech lands. This was also a time when, after the fall of communism with its restrictive publishing policies, postmodernism became somewhat belatedly popular. The extraordinary combination of Celtic elements and postmodern writing certainly was certainly able to attract readers' attention.

There is an afterword in *Řeči pro pláč* written by Ondřej Pilný, who later translated Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* and became a prominent figure among researchers interested in the author. In the first two paragraphs, he introduces the author and among his most notable works he mentions *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green*, O'Brien's adaptation of the Čapek brothers' play *Ze života hmyzu*. O'Brien's version of the play was first made avail-

able in print in 1994 after it was found in O'Brien's papers, so it was a relatively new addition to O'Brien's published work at the time when the afterword was written. However, it seems that the fact that the original play was by Czech authors was as much of a reason for including it in *Řeči pro pláč*'s presentation to Czech readers. Later in the afterword, when Pilný briefly discusses the Irish-language sources O'Brien parodies in his novel, he likens them to Božena Němcová's *Babička*. This 19th-century Czech classic deals with the old ways of rural life, as do the Gaeltacht biographies[3] O'Brien's satire targets. This is a very pragmatic move. The afterword is not very long, and this allows Pilný to effectively provide Czech readers with some kind of idea about the content of those biographies. He appeals to Czech readers' knowledge of the rural themes presented in *Babička* as well as its status as somewhat unpopular compulsory reading in schools. Although O'Brien's 1940s parody is targeted at authors who were nearly his contemporaries, by the 1990s in Ireland some of them had already achieved the hated school reading status that *Babička* has in the target culture. Also, their content – that is, descriptions of old rural ways of life – is nearly as far removed from the average Irish readers' experience in the 1990s as Němcová's novel is for their Czech counterparts. Rather than providing the target text's readers with a fact-packed academic lecture on how *An Béal Bocht* came to be, Pilný offers a much more relatable text, which helps the readers to experience the novel similarly to how a modern-day Irish reader would experience it. The afterword also contains some more general information on the status of the Irish language and the efforts to revive it, which are also satirised in the novel in parodic representations of Gaelic revivalists. An important point to note on the latter is that because the Czech language was also once on the verge of extinction, the Czechs too have their own revivalist tradition – including vocabulary to describe it. This allows Pilný and the author of the text on the slip to evoke certain images in the target reader's mind by simply using the term 'buditel' (revivalist), without having to provide much explanation of what the Gaelic revival was about.

Individual chapters of the novel were published earlier in the journal *Souvislosti* in 1993 and 1997, with postfaces by the translator Jan Čáp. They provide information on the work, its relevant contexts, and the author. The first postface, from 1993, is quite brief, and yet it provides more detailed information on the Gaelic revival than Ondřej Pilný's text featured in the book edition, including references to W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, notable figures in the source culture but also internationally recognizable. Unlike Pilný, Čáp does not make references to the target culture in this text. Čáp's 1997 essay is longer and more detailed than Pilný's text featured in the book. It provides more background information on O'Brien and his novel, and more detailed information on the status of the Irish language including a historic overview and some statistics. In both of Čáp's texts, references are made to James Joyce. This is a fairly common practice in introducing O'Brien's work, as he has been compared to Joyce ever since his debut novel *At Swim-Two-Birds* was published in 1939. Quite surprisingly, however, these references appear neither in the afterword in the book, nor in the blurb on the book's sleeve. In the longer 1997 text, other notable Irish figures are recalled, such as Samuel Beckett and Sean O'Casey in the first two paragraphs, and Oscar Wilde and Jonathan Swift later in the text. It also likens O'Brien to a prominent target culture figure – Jaroslav Hašek. It specifically speaks of a Hašekian ability to soil one's own nest (Čáp, "O'Brienovy Řeči" 302). This ability is again mentioned in the text on the book sleeve, however the attribute 'Hašekian' is removed from it. The

Hašekian character of O'Brien's writing is also noted in Josef Chuchma's review, which introduces Bohumil Hrabal as a target culture figure that may help the readers to imagine what kind of a writer Flann O'Brien is.

The novel, or O'Brien's writing in general, is not explicitly described as modernist in the *Souvislosti* postfaces, nor is it described as postmodernist (as it is on the sleeve in the book edition). However, through references to Joyce and Beckett it is implied that O'Brien belongs to the same category of writers.

2004 saw the first novel ever to be translated into Czech directly from Irish – and it was advertised as such on the back of the cover. It is Daniela Furthnerová's translation of Pádraic Ó Conaire's *Deoraíocht*, which *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* introduces as the first modernist work in Irish. The book has a short note on the back of the cover, an afterword, and the translator's note at the end.

It takes a different approach in introducing the work and its author to Czech readers. The afterword discusses Russian influences and names Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Turgenev, while the back of the cover links Ó Conaire to Samuel Beckett and the film director David Lynch. No parallels with Czech writers are made, either in the afterword or on the cover. Of Irish writers, the afterword introduces Pádraig Pearse (with an Irish spelling of Pádraig) in some detail, and also mentions Peadar Ó Laoghaire and the Gaeltacht biographies. It makes no reference to Flann O'Brien and his parody of the Gaeltacht biographies that the Czech reader might already know. A translation of Pearse's short story appeared in a 1965 Irish short story collection *Ni králi, ni císaři* edited by Aloys Skoumal, which takes the Irish struggle for independence as the collection's main theme, but the Czech readers in the 21st century are not particularly likely to be well acquainted with him, and they are even less likely to be aware of Ó Laoghaire.

The afterword opens with a sentence which lists Ó Conaire's possessions at the time of his death. The rest of his biography is presented in the last paragraphs, with the list of his possessions appearing once more in the very last sentence. In the middle of this explicitly stylised frame, the text mostly offers a summary and an analysis of the novel. While *The Oxford Companion* is rather sceptical about the quality of the work, describing it as modernist "despite a certain simplicity and, indeed, on occasion, laziness of style" (Welch 412), the afterword in the Czech translation deals with intentional errors that are consciously employed by the author as an artistic method, and hails the novel as one of the most original works in Irish literature in either of the island's languages.

Czech readers are not specifically addressed at any point in the afterword. As the text lacks an explicit authorial attribution[4], it is not immediately clear whether it was written specifically for the Czech readership or taken out of some Irish or English edition of the novel. The blurb on the back cover is similarly un-localized, except for the last sentence about the book being the first direct translation from Irish to Czech. Even the translator's note (a part where one usually expects a target culture-oriented commentary) is mostly concerned with the fact that both Irish editions and the 1994 English translation do not contain certain fragments that are found in the manuscript and are now to be found in the Czech translation. The Czech readers are thus reportedly the first ones to read the novel in its entirety. To help them navigate through it, they are equipped with paratexts focusing on Irish culture and world literature. The novel is referred to as the first "modern" novel in Irish in the afterword, and an implied reference to modernism is made on the cover

by the suggestion that the readers may find in it similarities to Samuel Beckett's works. However, Beckett is not described in any way on the cover – either as a modernist or as an Irishman. Positioning him next to David Lynch evokes a broader range of experimental artistic strategies that are not so easily reduced to modernism. Overall, the presentation of the book in the paratexts seems to presume a more demanding reader with more exclusive tastes than the more ordinary readership implied by the paratexts of Flann O'Brien's book and journal chapters.

In 2007 Radvan Markus published his translation of Eoghan Ó Tuairisc's historical novel *L'Attaque*. Markus also wrote the afterword, in which he provides background historical information instrumental to understanding the novel's plot, some information on the portrayal of the 1798 rebellion in Irish literature (on which he wrote his dissertation and published a monograph titled *Echoes of the Rebellion: The Year 1798 in Twentieth-Century Irish Fiction and Drama*), and the reception of *L'Attaque* in Ireland.

The biographical information on the author is fairly concise, and ends with a mention of Ó Tuairisc translating Máirtín Ó Cadhain's short stories into Irish. Ó Cadhain is also mentioned on the dust cover, where Ó Tuairisc is introduced as being his follower, but at no point does the reader find out who Máirtín Ó Cadhain was. While a decade later, thanks to Markus's brilliant translation of *Cré na Cille*, Ó Cadhain may be the most widely recognised Irish-language author among Czech readers, this was hardly so at the time when Ó Tuairisc's *L'Attaque* was published. International writers listed as other influences are easily recognisable names such as Leo Tolstoy and Walter Scott. Tolstoy is also mentioned on the dust cover.

The humorous passages of the novel are likened to *The Good Soldier Švejk* without naming its author – the implication being that every Czech person who has enough interest in literature to reach for Ó Tuairisc's work would probably know it anyway. Thus, despite the way in which Markus leaves Ó Cadhain uncommented, he essentially returns to addressing the specific needs of Czech readers. This is explicitly stated when the section of the afterword which discusses old Irish inspirations behind the novel opens with a comment that unlike the European tradition of historical prose, these would be hard for the Czech reader to recognize in the work itself.

Modernism as such does not really feature in the paratexts in this case, despite the fact that Ó Tuairisc is seen by critics as one of the continuators of the modernist experiment in Irish-language fiction (de Paor 169). Retrospectively, when read from the 2018 perspective, references to Máirtín Ó Cadhain may provide the link to Irish-language modernism.

The book's Irishness, on the other hand, is (quite literally) brought to the forefront. An idiomatically Celtic/Irish image of Celtic crosses in the twilight is featured on the book's cover (both the dustcover and the cover proper), which immediately attracts the attention of the Celtic-oriented part of the Czech readership. A similar strategy of employing visual paratexts is seen in the 2014 re-edition of *Ni králi, ni císaři*, a collection of short stories by various Irish writers edited by Aloys Skoumal in 1965. The original 1960s artwork was replaced by an intensely green cover with Celtic imagery (images from a 7th-century Irish evangeliary), and a stylized font was used for the title. This seems to suggest that while the peak of Celtomania was reached the 1990s, an interest in what is traditional and Celtic within Irish culture still persists, and it can still be employed to attract Czech readers.

In 2013, a collection of short stories by Pádraic Ó Conaire, *Biskupova duše*, was pub-

lished in Radvan Markus's translation, with an afterword also written by him. It offers more detailed information on Ó Conaire's life than the 2004 translation of *Deoraíocht*, and it employs a more playful way of introducing it. It starts with information that is immediately disclosed as being false, and it ends with a reference to an Ó Conaire-inspired internet hoax to entertain the reader. It provides information on the author's works and some general information on literature in Irish. This includes introducing the notion (which was held by some traditionalists) that Irish-language literature should be set in Irish-speaking areas; Markus uses this opportunity to refer to O'Brien's *An Béal Bocht* and its Czech translation. Furthnerová's translation of *Deoraíocht* is also mentioned (both translations are described in superlatives), which may encourage the reader to seek out these books as well.

International influences listed again include the Russian writers Gogol and Turgenev, just like in *Deoraíocht*'s translation, but in this case Tolstoy replaces Dostoyevsky. Scandinavian and French influences are mentioned as well, though no specific authors are named. The dustcover also refers readers to three Irish authors – James Joyce, Liam O'Flaherty, and Frank O'Connor – who wrote solely (or in the case of O'Flaherty, primarily) in English. While Joyce is immediately recognisable, Frank O'Connor and Liam O'Flaherty have had much less visibility as individual authors. O'Connor had a short story collection translated into Czech in 2007, and O'Flaherty's novels were popular in the inter-war period but have not been published in Czech since the 1930s, though his short stories continued to appear in periodicals and collections by various authors (as did O'Connor's). Just as in the case of Ó Tuairisc's book and the references to Ó Cadhain made there, the reader is expected to have a broader knowledge of Irish culture than is offered by existing major translations in order to make sense of the references. However, in the Internet era this arguably hardly presents a challenge to an interested reader, who may be prompted by such references to research the information that is missing from the book itself.

Ó Conaire's affiliation to modernism is discussed in the afterword. Markus notes that while Ó Conaire can be classified as a modernist writer, his version of modernism has little to do with the modernism of James Joyce, which is referred to as Anglo-American (rather than Irish) modernism by Markus. An affinity with Kafka is observed, and Kafka is referred to as 'pražský rodák', meaning 'a native of Prague'. That piece of information is likely to be as well-known to the Czech reader as the missing name of the author of *The Good Soldier Švejk* in the afterword to *L'Attaque*, and is thus potentially redundant. The intention then seems not so much to merely inform readers, but also to introduce a certain link between Ó Conaire and the target culture – if not on the level of national literatures, then at least through literary geography.

It is argued in the afterword that while the modernist label is valid for *Deoraíocht*, it is not appropriate for the short stories presented in the collection. The author is identified as the precursor of modernism in Irish literature, but the authors that are named here as Irish-language modernist novelists proper are Flann O'Brien, Máirtín Ó Cadhain, and Ó Tuairisc. As has already been mentioned earlier, this list contains all the authors who have currently been translated into Czech – and once we take Ó Cadhain out, all that were available at the time of writing the afterword.

In 2016, a short story collection edited by Radvan Markus was published with a subtitle that reads "a collection of short stories translated from Irish" (*Muž, který vybouchl:*

výbor povídek přeložených z irštiny). The very act of translating from Irish is extensively thematised in the paratexts. The text on the dustcover's sleeve begins with the information that there were eight translators involved in the project, and ends with their names. It also provides a short overview of the history of Irish language courses taught at Charles University in Prague. We learn that they began in 1990, and that Brian Ó hEithir was the first teacher. From there it goes on to inform the reader that Breandán Ó hEithir, Brian's father, adapted *The Good Soldier Švejk* for Irish-language radio, information that has little to do with Irish courses in Prague but plenty to do with searching for affinities and connections between Irish-language and Czech writing.

These affinities and connections are very prominently presented in the afterword and the individual biographical notes on the authors featured in the collection whenever they can be found. From the general afterword we find out that Patrick Pearse, who argued that Irish writers should seek inspiration in European writing, had Czech writers on his list of desirable influences, and that Liam O'Flaherty's short story included in the collection will give a different meaning to the word 'svíčková', the name of a traditional Czech beef dish (the joke here is that the word 'svíčka', meaning 'candle', is in the root of the Czech name of the dish, and in the story one of the characters dies after consuming candle wax).

The individual biographical section then informs the readers that one of Máirtín Ó Cadhain's short stories was inspired by Karel Čapek and that Milan Kundera is one of Pádraig Ó Cíobháin's favourite writers.

Even though some of the authors included in the collection are modernist writers, the label does not appear anywhere in the paratexts, and neither is modernism discussed there. However, Flann O'Brien is labelled as a postmodernist or a (post)modernist. The spelling with parentheses signals, however faintly, the shift in O'Brien's position within the literary spectrum. After a period of being recognised primarily as a (pre)postmodernist author (as in the case of the first Czech translation), with the current critical interest in modernism on the rise (and in postmodernism in decline) he is now often identified as a modernist writer (McDonald and Murphet).

The latest Irish-language novel to be published in Czech is Máirtín Ó Cadhain's *Cré na Cille*, again in Radvan Markus's translation. It was published in late 2017 by Argo, a major publishing house (all of the books previously discussed were by much smaller-scale publishers) and it has been receiving a fair share of critical and media attention, especially after it won in the translated book category of the most prestigious literary prize in Czechia – Magnesia Litera.

It is supplemented with a fairly extensive essay by Markus. It begins and ends with Breandán Ó hEithir, the Irish writer, who reportedly was a great fan of the book and who also happens to be the father of Brian Ó hEithir, the Irish teacher mentioned on the dustcover of *Muž, který vybouchl*. Breandán Ó hEithir's adaptation of *The Good Soldier Švejk* is brought up again, and Markus, reading the two novels through Bakhtinian concepts, discusses the affinities between the two works. On a more general note, he reports on the inadequacies of Hašek's English translations. Breandán Ó hEithir's Irish adaptation is reported to be the better version – not least because, as Markus argues with the aid of references to Ó hEithir, Irish and Czech share a fondness for the type of vulgarity and insults that the English language cannot render (Ó Cadhain 352–353).

The information that one of Máirtín Ó Cadhain's short stories was inspired by Karel

Čapek, already presented in the 2016 short story collection *Muž, který vybouchl*, is repeated here (Ó Cadhain 340).

The afterword also presents an extensive biography of Ó Cadhain, a formal analysis and interpretation of *Cré na Cille*, quite extensive information about the author's sources, and a section about the novel's reception – in which James Joyce figures quite prominently, as *Cré na Cille* was originally rejected by the publishers for being too Joycean.

Even though the book is advertised on the dustcover as the funniest work of Irish modernism, Irish modernism in any of its versions is hardly a key topic in Markus's essay. However, an interview with Markus conducted by Anna Stejskalová for the journal A2 after he won the Magnesia Litera prize very much revolves around Irish modernism, mainly Joyce and Beckett (Stejskalová 20–21), which seems to suggest that Irish modernism as a marketing slogan on the dustcover helps to steer the discussion on Ó Cadhain's novel in that direction – the other probable reason being that the Joycean-Beckettian Irish modernism is still the most idiomatic form of Irish modernism for any well-informed Czech reader. An interview by Markéta Musilová for iLiteratura.cz, although it has a broader scope of topics than Stejskalová's interview, also begins by asking Markus about Joyce. Unlike Stejskalová, however, Musilová moves on to discuss primarily the Irish language and Irish-language literature, referring to already existing Czech translations and asking Markus about his further translation plans and dreams for the future (Musilová).

While the body of Czech translations of Irish-language literature may seem small in terms of the absolute number of published books, it is in fact very impressive considering how rare fluency in Irish is not only abroad, but even in Ireland itself. Much effort has been put into introducing Czech readers to Irish-language works. With the exception of the paratexts of Pádraic Ó Conaire's *Deoraíocht*, there is a tendency to make Irish-language modernist works accessible and relatable to the Czech reader through strategies similar to the strategy of domestication, by seeking all kinds of connections to various elements of the target culture. Radvan Markus's paratexts, which at this point are found in the majority of books translated from Irish to Czech, tend to include highly relatable types of information such as extensive biographies and anecdotes, often humorous. Humour is also an obvious association triggered by the figure of Jaroslav Hašek, the Czech author most often referred to in the paratexts. Čáp, Chuchma, and Markus are not the only ones to observe affinities between his work and Irish writing. Similarities between James Joyce and Hašek have also been discussed by Tomáš Kubíček (Kubíček 31). This may suggest the potential for more general parallels between Czech and Irish modernist cultures to be observed, thus opening up the field to studying the two cultures' relations within the broader scopes of European modernist networks. Recurring references to Karel Čapek, although less detailed than those made to Hašek, could also serve that purpose. However, modernism as a defining label is used sparingly, even though the postmodernist label is still considered productive in introducing Flann O'Brien. Discussions of the source culture revolve mainly around the situation of Irish-language literature and the Irish language in general, while references to English-language Irish writers, including the easily recognizable moguls such as Joyce and Beckett, are relatively scarce. Effectively, then, the implied Czech readers may fail to recognize Irish-language modernist writing as modernist, but counterintuitively they are likely to accept the works as relatable and familiar despite the fairly exotic and obscure source language they were translated from. The vision offered

by the Czech paratexts is largely based on accessibility to a wider audience, much unlike the stereotype of exclusive, elitist art traditionally associated with high modernism, and on concentrating on the local elements of the source and target cultures and the affinities between them rather than seeking for universal, cosmopolitan traits.

Notes

[1] Gérard Genette, who coined the term, defines paratextuality as the "relationship that binds the text properly speaking, taken within the totality of the literary work, to what can be called its paratext: a title, a subtitle, intertitles, prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic. These provide the text with a (variable) setting and sometimes a commentary, official or not" (3).

[2] This is not a specifically Irish problem; it is a part of a larger issue of conflating all English-language writers from the British Isles into the category of "English writers". For example, Michal Peprník, in his introduction to *Metamorfóza jako kulturní metafora*, admits his surprise at finding out that R. L. Stevenson was a Scotsman, not an Englishman (7).

[3] The Gaeltacht biographies were a genre of mainly autobiographical writing that described archaic rural life in Irish-speaking areas (i.e. the Gaeltacht). They became widely popular in the 1930s in Ireland, and their popularity was largely fuelled by the Irish state's cultural policies of promoting the image of rural Gaelic-speaking regions as the ideal and true Ireland. Much of the production was formulaic and of little artistic value, however *An t-Oileánach* by Tomás Ó Criomhthain, which was the main source parodied in *An Béal Bocht*, was actually much admired by O'Brien. For more on the genre and O'Brien's use of it in *An Béal Bocht* see Farnon and Taaffe (101–114).

[4] The copyright section attributes the "Epilogue" to the translator Daniela Furthnerová. As in the book the afterword is followed by the translator's note, also not explicitly signed with Furthnerová's name but with her authorship suggested by the title of that text, the impression may arise that the two texts were written by two different authors. The impression is further strengthened by the fact that there is some overlapping in terms of the topics addressed by the two texts (e.g. the Irish language in general), so it is not clear why there are two texts, not one.

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Linguistics and Translation Studies

Communicative strategies in online video tutorials

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Abstract

This paper attempts to describe the emerging genre of online video tutorials as a type of social media genre, exploring the communicative strategies used by tutors. In order to establish to what extent the asynchronicity of speaker-audience interaction influences the means of interaction used, a comparative analysis was performed focusing on recorded lectures on differential and integral calculus (delivered to a present audience) and video tutorials on the same subject (intended for a mediated audience). The corpus consists of two subcorpora: one comprises full-length video tutorials available on YouTube, and the other contains excerpts of recorded lectures given at MIT. Having taken into consideration the importance of personal pronouns for the interactivity of a communicative act, the analysis examines personal perspectives both quantitatively and qualitatively. A modified version of Round's (1987) discourse-defined semantic mappings of we is employed; in order to organize the semantic categories, a person marking system used in cross-linguistic studies is applied. The actual referents behind personal pronouns are identified, and questionable examples are shown and discussed.

Keywords: video tutorial, social media, communicative strategy, personal perspective, actual referents, remote tutoring

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1. Introduction

In recent years, remote tutoring has spread thanks to the availability of varied means of computer technology; a large number of educational videos can be found on video-sharing

websites. Since this relatively new educational tool is gaining popularity because of its convenience, it could be beneficial to analyse its success from the viewpoint of language.

English is being used as a lingua franca in the field of education; online tutorials are used globally, therefore their producers should expect a mixed audience, i.e. an audience including a considerable number of non-native speakers. In order to propose the features which might facilitate comprehensibility in video tutorials, two related genres will be compared: recorded lectures presented online and online video tutorials. Unlike video tutorials, college lectures are primarily conducted offline, and thus should show local features, which makes them a suitable referential group.

2. Video tutorials as a type of social media genre

As stated by McFarland and Ployhart (2015), social media are digital Web 2.0 platforms that facilitate information sharing, user-created content, and collaboration among people (p.1654). The information posted to social media platforms may include anything that can be represented digitally – such as written texts, pictures, photographs, videos, memes, etc. A platform based on Web 2.0 technology is typical of all types of social media; this internet structure allows large numbers of users to share in the creation, manipulation, and distribution of content (ibid.). This particular feature distinguishes Web 2.0 platforms from Web 1.0 platforms and makes Web 2.0 more open and interactive; examples of Web 2.0 applications are YouTube, Facebook, Wikipedia or LinkedIn.

Video tutorials are available on YouTube, which is one of the largest user-generated content video sharing sites on the internet. YouTube allows users to upload videos and to create channels where viewers can choose from a playlist of the uploaded videos; then viewers can like or dislike the videos and they can also comment on them (as most videos enable this kind of response). As Saurabh and Sairam (2013) suggest, allowing individuals to interact through subscribing, posting comments and video responses, and sharing videos have made YouTube a very famous portal for user-generated content (p.3).

2.1 Social media context

McFarland and Ployhart (2015) point out that "social media have radically changed the way people interact and communicate"; they further elaborate on this statement by arguing that "social media are not simply a technology but actually represent a context that differs in important ways from traditional (e.g. face-to-face) and other digital (e.g. email) ways of interacting and communicating" (p. 1653). Having conducted an extensive review of scholarly research on social media, McFarland and Ployhart focus on developing a theoretical understanding of social media features; they propose "a contextual framework that identifies the discrete and ambient stimuli that distinguish social media contexts from digital communication media (e.g. email) and physical (e.g. face-to-face) contexts" (ibid.). They describe a contextual continuum that ranges from physical to digital. While the digital end of the contextual continuum is occupied by social media that are human-constructed and immaterial, the non-digital end of the context continuum exists in the material world, a typical example being face-to-face interaction. Between these two poles are digital communication media, i.e. platforms based on Web 1.0 technology; examples

include email, text messaging or Skype. These are closer to social media, as they are human-constructed and digital. Because they are based on Web 1.0 technology, they do not enable members to manipulate content easily, and therefore they are considered to be more linear than social media. Figure 1 provides an overview of the contextual framework as set out by McFarland and Ployhart.

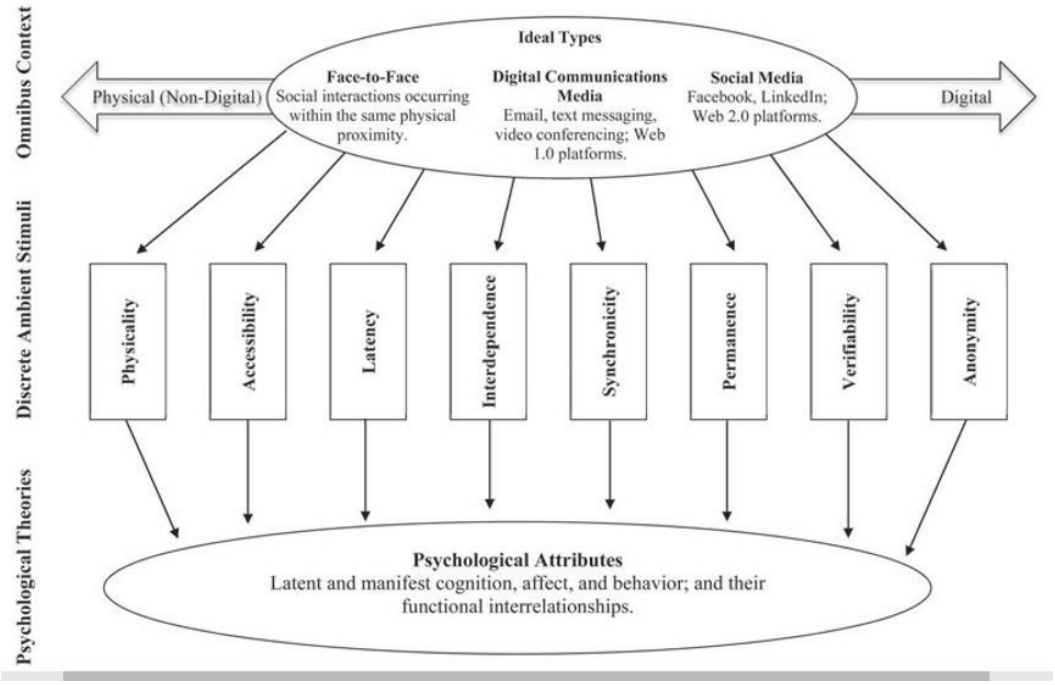


Figure 1: Theoretical framework of social media context (McFarland and Ployhart, 2015, p.1656)

2.2 Video tutorials described by the McFarland-Ployhart contextual framework

McFarland and Ployhart identify "eight discrete ambient stimuli that distinguish social media contexts from non-digital contexts and, to varying degrees, other digital media communication contexts: physicality, accessibility, latency, interdependence, synchronicity, permanence, verifiability, and anonymity". In the following paragraphs, their classification will be briefly introduced and applied to the genre of video tutorials.

2.2.1 Physicality

The first stimulus distinguishing social media from physical contexts is *physicality*; McFarland and Ployhart note that geographic location and distance are irrelevant in social media contexts, as "the barriers of time and space are minimized, possibly even eliminated". Physicality ranges on the contextual continuum from "tangible to all of the senses" to "digital". As regards this stimulus, video tutorials can be considered to be digital "in

the sense that information is captured and presented in terms of bits or types of information that can be assembled into complex strings of information" (McFarland and Ployhart, 2015, p.1656). While face-to-face communication is potentially tangible to all of the senses, video tutorials provide only aural and visual perceptions to the receiver, so the genre is certainly closer to the digital end of the contextual continuum. Although the impression of the "realness" of the event is quite convincing, the digital nature of video tutorials is obvious when one realizes that the object is immaterial, i.e. it exists only within an artificial environment that is totally dependent on a source of energy.

2.2.2 Accessibility

Regarding *accessibility*, McFarland and Ployhart claim that "there is more open access to social media than other relationship or communication platforms" (1658, Table 1). In the case of video tutorials, the access is open to anybody (moreover, both for receivers and for producers of video tutorials), as the opportunity to join the network is not limited by any restrictions (provided there are no technical constraints). However, in some cases censorship has occurred, and YouTube has been banned in several countries.

2.2.3 Latency

Another factor specified while discussing the discrete context of social media is *latency*. This term refers to how long it takes to share content on a network; while in non-digital contexts the process might be rather slow, content shared by using social media platforms is available immediately. As regards video tutorials, sharing of content is nearly instant, as after being posted the video is immediately accessible to anyone using the platform.

2.2.4 Interdependence

Interdependence concerns the extent of sharing information; in social media, there are more opportunities to share information across a wider range of people than in physical contexts. This certainly applies to video tutorials, since the possibility of sharing content is virtually limitless. Interdependence, described by McFarland and Ployhart as "the manner in which member interactions are interrelated with each other" (1658), may range from *autonomous* to *intensive*, passing through stages of *sequential* and *reciprocal*. From this point of view, video tutorials consist of two parts, which despite influencing each other are very different. The major part of a video tutorial, i.e. the video itself, is *autonomous*, as its content can be changed only by the author. Nevertheless, most authors are interested in the comments of the receivers, and if they are informed about a mistake they can (and they often do) react by placing a correction notice in the video.
Regarding member interdependence, comments posted below the video part of a video tutorial might be placed somewhere close to the *reciprocal* point of the scale, as "a person's output can be sent back to the prior individual for revision" (1658). However, since any interaction is visible and hence available to any other participant, its interdependence may be nearing the *intensive* degree. The interaction is two-way, and can be established between any members at any time; despite having this potential, video tutorials do not fulfil

it, as this feature of the video tutorial concept is not of primary importance to the genre.

2.2.5 Synchronicity

When it comes to *synchronicity*, it is obvious that video tutorials are asynchronous: all participants enter the interaction independently of one another as they are not temporally synchronized. This feature contributes to the convenience and consequent popularity of video tutorials as a learning tool.

2.2.6 Permanence

Permanence refers to how long the content posted on the social media system exists (McFarland and Ployhart, 2015, p. 1659). Video tutorials might be classified as permanent; theoretically, they should be able to exist indefinitely or even forever. Nevertheless, this feature is dependent on technical circumstances, as the data is stored on backup servers which might be damaged or destroyed.

2.2.7 Verifiability

The term *verifiability* is used by the authors to mean "the extent to which content or information can be checked or reviewed". It does not mean evaluating the accuracy or truthfulness of the posted data; it only refers to the possibility "to determine what content was posted, by whom, when, and where" (McFarland and Ployhart, 2015, p. 1659). On the scale from "harder to verify" to "easier to verify", video tutorials might be placed next to the latter end of the continuum as all the above mentioned questions can be easily answered (in the case of "who" at least, as a set of tutorials can be matched with a particular person).

2.2.8 Anonymity

The question "by whom was it posted?" leads to another concept, which is *anonymity*. When it comes to this factor, tutors either give their name or they choose to be semi-anonymous by using nicknames. However, even those using nicknames are easily traceable, and consequently identifiable, as they often use different networking services providing other clues regarding their identity – or the more popular of them give interviews and reveal further information regarding their personal life. By contrast, the receivers are mostly anonymous; those who choose to respond by adding a post can do so under their name or a nickname. Generally, there is greater anonymity than in physical contexts.

It seems that the notion of *synchronicity* deserves particular attention, as it may be the key factor influencing the communicative strategies employed in video tutorials. Therefore, the next section proposes two ways of approaching this issue; both are linked to the usage of personal pronouns, since the importance of personal pronouns as indicators of speaker-audience interaction has been emphasized by many scholars, e.g. Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990) and Fortanet (2004). Both quantitative and qualitative analyses are suggested and conducted in order to deal with the matter from various standpoints.

3. Communicative strategies discussed

In all video tutorials the audience is physically absent; therefore, all producers of video tutorials must somehow cope with the lack of feedback. In comparison with a lecture given for a class, where the participants share the same physical context of time and place, senders and receivers of the message in video tutorials are separated both temporally and locally, as they enter the interaction independently of the other participant(s). Hence, video tutorials share one significant feature: asynchronicity.

On the other hand, depending on tutors' choices, video tutorials differ in their non-verbal features, as the degree of visibility of the tutors varies considerably. While some tutors can make use of gestures and facial expressions, others can be seen just partially, so they resort to using their hands and support their verbal explanations by pointing; in some cases tutors can only be heard, so their performance is deprived of kinesics and they have to rely mainly on prosodic features such as rhythm, intonation, and stress. Based on the varying choices made regarding the tutorial setting, a question arises: Is there a correlation between the visual presence or absence of the speaker and the use of certain linguistic means? Moreover, going back to the asynchronicity, another question needs answering: Is there a difference in the use of interactional skills while addressing present and absent audiences?

3.1 Material

The investigation draws on data taken from transcriptions of recordings available on YouTube. The corpus consists of two subcorpora: the first one includes four standard lectures given by lecturers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (total length of the excerpts investigated in the present study: 40 minutes), while the second one 41 includes tutorials made by both professional and amateur mathematicians (total length: 5 hours 30 minutes). 21 speakers are involved in the entirety of the data, 16 male and 5 female; their age ranges from mid-twenties to mid-seventies. While each lecture features a different speaker, in the subcorpus of tutorials several samples can share one producer. Regarding the content of recordings, the corpus includes four sets of samples; each set deals with a different topic related to differential and integral calculus (e.g. implicit differentiation, u-substitution). However, the topics are similar enough to ensure homogeneity in the data.

All samples are divided into 5 groups (A, B, C, D, and E) in accordance with two criteria:

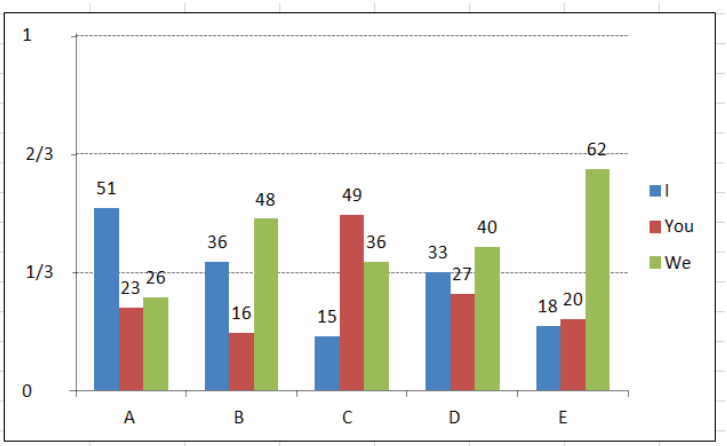
1) The first criterion was used to distinguish between the two subcorpora: in the first subcorpus the audience is present (group A), while in the second subcorpus (groups B, C, D, E) the audience is absent. Therefore, the asynchronicity of video tutorials is the main distinguishing factor here.

2) The second criterion is based on the degree of similarity to a standard lecture. The setting of tutorials in Group B resembles a lecture; Group C is characterised by an unusual setting, for example two windows, one with an emerging text and the other showing only the speaker's head, or the speaker is standing behind a glass board and maintaining eye contact while writing on the glass; in Group D only the speaker's hand is visible; in Group E there is no part of the speaker's body visible.

3.2 The quantitative analysis: method and results

To answer the questions posed at the beginning of this section, a comparative analysis of standard lectures and video tutorials was carried out; one of the means of interaction investigated was the direct speaker-audience interaction, namely the use of personal perspective (i.e. 1st and 2nd person pronouns sg/pl, the corresponding possessive pronouns, and commands). The method chosen is dependent neither on the number of words nor on the time. Obviously, speakers' choice of the perspective depends on their personal preferences. If just the active voice is taken into consideration, speakers can choose from three personal perspectives: *I*, *you*, and *we*. Theoretically, all of them can be employed evenly, which would assign one third to each perspective; in an extreme case (there is one sample of this kind to be found in the corpus) the speaker could use only one perspective. The numbers of occurrences concerning all the three perspectives are totalled, and the individual figures are expressed as a percentage of the total and rounded to integers. To facilitate the assessment, two border lines (i.e. one-third and two-third) are used, as this one-third approach has been set as an "ideal" distribution of personal perspective usage.

In Graph 1 the distribution of the personal perspective in all groups is shown. In Group A (comprising standard lectures), the *I*-perspective is preferred (51%), while the *we*-perspective prevails quite convincingly by nearing the two-thirds line (62%) in Group E (featuring an invisible speaker). Despite the diverse distribution of the personal perspective, in tutorials (groups B-E) the *we*-perspective is always used more often than the *I*-perspective. If the average of all the tutorials is taken, then the *we*-perspective is the most frequent, with 47%, and the *you*-perspective is used more often than the *I*-perspective – but the difference is not substantial (only 2%). The graph suggests a tendency towards the increasing use of the *we*-perspective while moving on the scale from the standard lecture setting with the audience present (26%) to the extreme form of the tutorial, in which the tutor's voice is the only human element present (62%). It seems that this increase has come at the expense of the *I*-perspective usage, as the use of the *you*-perspective stays almost the same (i.e. the change is just 3%).



Graph 1: Distribution of the personal perspective (figures above the columns show the average results found in each group)

3.3 Qualitative analysis: method and results

3.3.1 Theoretical background and method

The quantitative analysis has shown certain trends in using personal perspective; nevertheless, there are other aspects that should be taken into consideration as well. Using the terminology suggested by Huddleston and Pullum (2002), not only the primary uses of personal pronouns (p. 1465) but also the secondary ones (p. 1467) should be investigated, and that means shifting the focus from the form to the meaning of the personal pronouns.

The considerably frequent occurrence of the *we*-perspective mentioned in the previous section is in accordance with Wales's assessment of *we* "as a useful linguistic mediator between speaker and addressee" (1996, p. 68). Wales also states that "the actual referents for *we* are seemingly limitless" (1996, p. 63) and stresses the dependency of its precise interpretation on the particular context of use (ibid.). Hence, the interpretation based on the context was pursued in the qualitative part of the analysis of speaker-audience interaction.

In the mid-1980s, Rounds conducted an empirical study of the language produced by teachers in American university mathematics classrooms. She claimed that teachers avoid 3rd person pronouns by redefining or remapping the semantic domains of 1st and 2nd person pronouns to include 3rd person and indefinite reference (1987, p. 14). She also proposed five sets of discourse-defined semantic mappings for the pronoun *we*. Two of them are the categories of *inclusive we* and *exclusive we*, which had already been widely accepted. Rounds added three more categories that show the actual referent behind the pronoun *we*: *we* used instead of *I*, *we* instead of *you*, and *we* instead of *one* (marked in this text as *we*/*I*, *we*/*you* and *we*/*one*, respectively).

Since the corpus consists of tutorials on differential and integral calculus and the tutorial is an educational genre, I decided to apply Rounds' classification to the samples. Nevertheless, it was necessary to modify Rounds' semantic categories in order to produce a clearer classification. Several systems of person marking have been proposed that could potentially be used, e.g. Cysouw's system shown in Table 1 (Cysouw, 2003, p. 74) or its modified version (Cysouw, 2010, p. 23), in which the author employs the notion of *extendibility*. Another suitable person-marking system was designed by Sokolovskaya in 1980, when she aimed to describe pronominal systems in terms relevant for all languages (in Filimonova 2005, p. 419) and elaborated a special meta-language for that purpose. Sokolovskaya differentiates between seven basic meanings (meta-persons, in her terms) that can be encoded in the pronominal systems: 'speaker', 'addressee', 'non-participant', 'speaker + addressee(s)', 'speaker + non-participant(s)', 'addressee(s) + non-participant(s) ', 'speaker + addressee(s) + non-participant(s)'. For the purpose of modifying the semantic categories suggested by Rounds, Sokolovskaya's seven meta-persons seem to be applicable, as she identifies contrasts in persons independently of number; this might be a more viable way of classifying tutorials as the number of addressees is not known (and is also not important).

Moreover, the choice of a system which is not based on number can further be supported by the reasoning given by Cysouw (2003), who argues that the concept of 'plural' in personal pronouns is not clear and states that this term should be avoided. Cysouw redefines 'plural' marking as 'group' marking, as he claims that it is not so much the num-

ber of participants but the kinds of participants involved that define different elements in the 'plural' paradigm. His qualitative approach to non-singular marking is based on three singular participants; consequently, there are seven logical possibilities to form groups (see Table 1). Four of the seven possible groups include the speaker; they are all subsumed under the meaning of English *we*. As Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990, p. 201) state, a 'true 1st person plural' (1+1) can be found in the phenomenon of *mass speaking* (e.g. football chanting, the reactions of a concert audience). However, Cysouw disregards this category as he argues that despite being semantically feasible, it is not linguistically salient (2003, p. 74).

Logically possible category	Linguistically salient category	
1	1	Speaker
2	2	Addressee
3	3	Other
1+1 choral 'we'	- (not linguistically salient)	-
1+2	1+2	minimal inclusive
1+3	1+3	Exclusive
2+2 only present audience	- (not linguistically salient)	-
2+3	2+3	second person plural
3+3	3+3	third person plural
1+2+3	1+2+3	augmented inclusive

Table 1: Person marking proposed by Cysouw (2003)

Table 2 shows the seven meta-persons proposed by Sokolovskaya using the notation suggested by Bobaljik (2008); the traditional numerical symbols (i.e. 1 for speaker, 2 for addressee, and 3 for other) are used. However, Bobaljik (2008, p. 3) states that despite the logical possibility of a seven-way contrast, certain distinctions are never morphologized; consequently, the maximal attested contrast is the four-way contrast. Many languages show even less: in languages lacking an inclusive/exclusive opposition (such as English), the first four meta-persons are subsumed under the '1st person plural' pronoun *we*. A possible way of classifying actual-referent categories is shown in 3.3.2 by presenting instances that exemplify a particular type of discourse-defined *we.*

Sokolovskaya → Bobaljik		Rounds		
possible	attested	actual referents		
1+2	inclusive	prototypical inclusive-we		
1+2+3		I / one	you / one	we /one
1	exclusive	prototypical I	we / I	
1+3		we / they + I (I=spokesperson)	prototypical exclusive-we	
2	2nd person	prototypical you	we / you	
2+3				
3	3rd person	mathematicians		

Table 2: Actual referents classified by meta-persons (in the categories containing a slash, the first item means the word used, the second one the actual referents behind it)

3.3.2 Classification of actual referents

In this subsection, five tutorials, made by three tutors, will be commented on from the qualitative point of view; attention will be paid to the *we*-perspective usage in order to present a possible way of identifying the actual-referent categories and to exemplify and discuss several problematic cases.

Tutorial 1 (2B3, McKeague)

This tutor employs the *I*-perspective to a great extent (69%). The pronoun *I* is used by him prototypically: *he* is doing the particular task. He does not seem to consider himself to be a spokesperson for mathematicians, as suggested by Rounds (1987, p. 17), he *is* a mathematician who is employing his knowledge and applying it to this task.

We is never *exclusive* in this tutorial; if he uses *we*, he does it for several reasons, which are identified and exemplified in the following text. Firstly, he wants to refer to common knowledge shared by him and his audience:

(1) "but before I start let's just take a look at our picture of the circle over here and see that **we** already know what this derivative's gonna turn out to be and then we can check our work when we do the implicit differentiation"
(2) "I think you can see that what's happening is going to be exactly what **we** thought would happen"
(3) "and in fact that's exactly what **we** predicted that would be by just doing it geometrically over here on the circle"

According to Rounds' classification, these cases of *we* should be classified as *we*/I; however, I believe that the tutor expects the audience to share the same knowledge at least to a certain extent and to understand the process in the same way as he does. Therefore I

would classify these instances as *inclusive we*.

Secondly, the tutor invites the addressee to participate in solving the task by using clauses such as "now **let's** do **our** implicit differentiation", "**let's** try another problem" and "**let's** try the product rule". In some cases, the invitation might include an attempt to motivate the addressees:

(4) "**we** want to extend **our** work with derivatives to include a process called implicit differentiation"
(5) "alright one last problem here what **we** have is **we** wanna find the equation of the line tangent to this graph at the point one negative one"

Thirdly, he summarizes what has been done by him, and supposedly by his audience as well:

(6) "so **we** did it one way over here **we** did it with the implicit differentiation **we** got the exact same answer"

The *you*-perspective is used the least: several times as a direct address (e.g. "**you** see"; "I think **you** can see"); in one sequence (example 7) the directness can be extended to a more general statement − it might apply to anybody who does it (i.e. *you*/*one*).

(7) "so when **you** do this implicit differentiation a lot of times **your** answer will end up with both x and y in it and that's OK"

Tutorial 2 (2E6, Sal)

The *I*-perspective and the *you*-perspective are used evenly in 2E6 (both 16.5%). *I* is used only in its prototypical sense, which can be exemplified by the following examples:

(8) "but what **I** wanna do in this video is "
(9) "what **I** want you to keep in the back of your mind the entire time is"
(10) "this is just the chain rule **I** wanna say it over and over again"

Many cases of *you* could be classified as *you*/*one*, as can be seen in the examples below; however, *you* is used here in a direct connection with the particular task, so it might have the meaning of direct address (i.e. 2) rather than *you*/*one* (1+2+3)0

.

(11) "and what immediately might be jumping out in **your** brain is"
(12) "so **you** might be tempted to maybe split this up into two separate functions of x"
(13) "it might be a little bit clearer if **you** kind of thought of it as the derivative with respect to x ə of of y as a function of x"

The *we*-perspective prevails in this tutorial (67%); there is no instance of *exclusive we* and no instance of *we*/*you* either. Rounds' categories of *we*/*I* and *we*/*one* are taken into

consideration in the following examples. Example (14) includes *we* that seems to belong to the category *we*/*one*, since it is true potentially for anyone who would do the task. Example (15) features three instances of pronouns that can be discussed; the first instance of *we* would be classified by Rounds as an *exclusive we*, in which *I* is the teacher and *they* is mathematicians, since Rounds claims that "the teacher cannot perform the functions of naming and defining on their own recognizance" (1987, p. 18). However, I would classify this *we* as a *we*/*one* category because the act of defining could be considered as not linked strictly to its original pronouncement (i.e. not reserved only for mathematicians as experts) but instead available to be repeated by the whole community of practice. This matter will be discussed more closely in example (39) − we[4].

In the second part of example (15), there is a shift from *they* to *we*, which might illustrate Rounds' statement on the tendency to avoid the third person plural (mentioned above in 3.3.1). Nevertheless, it is questionable what the speaker means by *they*. He might have wanted to avoid using the passive structure "it is called" by saying "they call this", where *they* is vague and therefore does not substitute for mathematicians. This passive structure is used by McKeague in 2B3, where he says "so what I'm gonna do is called implicit differentiation" which might suggest that the "calling" is perceived more as a shared knowledge than "a property" of a closed circle of mathematicians.

(14) "and the way **we** do that is literally just apply the derivative operator to both sides of this equation and then apply what **we** know about the chain rule"
(15) "because **we** are not explicitly defining y as a function of x and explicitly getting y is equal to f prime of x **they** call this which is really just an application of the chain rule **we** call it implicit differentiation"

The instances of *we* shown in (16) can be classified both as *inclusive we* and as *we*/*one*.

(16) "and if **we** were to graph all of the points x and y that satisfy this relationship **we** get a unit circle like this and what I'm curious about in this video is how **we** can figure out the slope of the tangent line at any point of this unit circle"

However, there are three clear examples of *we*/*I* in 2E6 (see examples 17, 18, 19).

(17) "so **let's** just write this down over here"
(18) "so **we** can do this whole thing on the same page so we can see where we started"
(19) "**let's** scroll down a little bit"

All the other instances can be understood as activities that can be performed by the addressees at least mentally; therefore they fit the *inclusive we* category:

(20) "**let's** subtract two x from both sides so we're left with two y times the derivative of y with respect to x is equal to"
(21) "well **we** figured it out"

Tutorial 3 (1E7, Sal)

In this sample, all the instances of *I* are prototypical. There are only several instances of *you* in the tutorial (6%); all of them are rather difficult to classify as they can be both examples of direct address and *you*/*one* (see examples 22 and 23).

(22) "and so **you** can imagine the chain rule might be applicable here"
(23) "and **you** could simplify that or combine it since **you**'re multiplying two things with the same base but I'll just leave it like that"

According to Rounds, they should belong to the category of the remapped *you*, as "what the teacher says is true not just for himself (the *I*) or for the students he is addressing (the *you*), but, potentially, for anyone who does calculus – hence the teacher could employ a more indexical sign, such as the indefinite *one*" (Rounds 1987, p. 17).

All the instances of *we* in 1E7 can be classified as the *inclusive we*. Nevertheless, after applying Rounds' way of reasoning, several instances of *we* (such as examples 24, 25 and 26) do not fit the usual categories of semantic mapping. Rounds argues that "the teacher does the actual writing thus he could have used I" (1987, p. 18); she comments on this choice by suggesting two explanations: the speaker chose "*we* because it is a form that could denote an expanded 'authorial *we*' or even a 'royal *we*' but that could also potentially be interpreted by the addressee as an inclusive sign" (ibid.).

(24) "and so **we** figured out this first derivative"
(25) "and **we** just took the product of the two"
(26) "so **we** can write it as negative e to the cosine x"; …

On the other hand, there are parts of the tutorial in which the tutor speaks about his actual writing (see the following four examples) and in such cases he always uses *I*.

(27) "let **me** copy and paste this so **I** don't have to rewrite it"
(28) "let **me** do that in a new colour let **me** do it in magenta"
(29) "OK **I** will write it this way"
(30) "but **I**'ll just leave it like that"

Hence it can be concluded that the instances of *we* shown in examples 24, 25 and 26 are the *inclusive we*; the speaker supposes that the addressees at least mentally share his activities and (despite not being present) they participate in the process.

Tutorial 4 (3E6, Krista King)

Most instances of *I*-perspective found in this tutorial can be classified as prototypical. The pronoun *I* refers to the speaker: there are two personal remarks ("**I** like to think about it this way", "**I** hope you found that video helpful"), two instances of "**I**'ll show you", and the speaker uses the *I* when she speaks about the preceding steps she has taken without the presence of the audience (example 31).

(31) "now as a reminder **I**'ve written the standard form of the linear differential equation which is y prime plus p of x times y is equal to q of x **I** also have the formula here for the integrating factor"

The pronoun *you* means direct address, as can be seen in the clause "**you** can check that for yourself if **you** want". Only the instances from the following excerpt could be considered *you*/*one* examples, as they have a more general meaning.

(32) "if **you** have a negative sign here in front of **your** p of x function **you** have to include it as part of p of x".

The majority of the *we* instances present in this sample can be classified as the *inclusive we*. Only four cases might be seen as examples of Rounds' semantic remappings of *we*. In two cases *we* is used when the actual referent is *I* and it is obvious that the speaking is done by the tutor not by all the participants (examples 33 and 34).

(33) "Today **we**'re gonna be talking about how to solve the linear differential equation initial value problem"
(34) "and remember **we** just said"

In two cases *we* is used in a broader way (*we*/*one*); it seems to encompass not only the speaker and the addressee but also the others, i.e. anyone who is involved in solving a differential equation (example 35).

(35) "now with any linear differential equation the first thing that **we** wanna do is try to change **our** differential equation into standard form"

Tutorial 5 (2E7, Krista King)

In this tutorial there is no instance of the *I*-perspective; there could have been one − she could have said "in this video I am talking" − but instead she opted for *we*. The frequency of instances of the *you*-perspective is not high (11%); *you* is not used as directly as in tutorials created by the other tutors. The direct address can be observed either in commands (e.g. "remember") or when she refers to common experience (e.g. "or sometimes **you** just see it written y prime"); the latter example might border on *you*/*one*. The use of *you* with the actual referent *one* is quite frequent in this sample (see examples 36, 37 and 38).

(36) "so when that's the case when **you** can't solve for y when **you** have all your x and y variables mixed together but **you** wanna find the derivative of the equation what do **you** do well **you** use implicit differentiation **you** differentiate the function implicitly"
(37) "when **you** use implicit differentiation **you** differentiate both sides of the equation in the same way that **you** would with explicit differentiation so with explicit differentiation"
(38) "that's how **you** use implicit differentiation to find the derivative"

The *we*-perspective prevails in this tutorial (89%); *we*/*one* amounts to 15%, *inclusive*

we roughly to 85%. The range of the actual referents can be illustrated with examples from the following excerpt:

(39) "In this video **we**[1]'re talking about how to use implicit differentiation to find the derivative and in this particular problem **we**[2]'ve been given this equation x times sine of y plus y times sine of x is equal to one and **we**[3]'ve been asked to find the derivative of this equation the reason that **we**[4] call it implicit differentiation is because this is an implicitly defined function versus an explicitly defined function which is what **we**[5]'ve been used to dealing with in the past so an explicitly defined function is a function y equals f of x where **we**[6] have y on the left hand side and it's a function y defined in terms of x"

Actual referents identified in the excerpt are as follows: $we^1 \approx 1$; we^2, $we^3 \approx 1+2$; $we^4 \approx 1+2+3$ (Rounds: 1+3); $we^5 \approx 1+2$; $we^6 \approx 1+2+3$.

Behind we^1 there is just the person of the speaker: she is talking, so here *we* is used instead of *I*. Moreover, the expression "in this video" clearly specifies this speech act, **she** is in the video, not the addressees. We^2 and we^3 are related to the verbs *give* and *ask*; unlike the verb *talk*, these verbs enable a certain involvement on the part of the addressee. Since the speaker supposes that her addressees participate in carrying out the task (at least mentally, by following her instructions), we^2 and we^3 refer to *inclusive we*, which is called the *minimal inclusive* (see Table 1).

When it comes to classifying we^4, the assessment is not as straightforward as in the previous cases. In my opinion, we^4 is an example of the *augmented inclusive* as it relates to a bigger group: *we*/*one*. Nevertheless, Rounds would probably identify this *we* as a covert *exclusive we* with the speaker being only a spokesperson for mathematicians. She argues that teachers have "no control over the naming and defining process, only mathematicians can 'define'" (1987, p. 17) and so teachers and students "must make use of the 'authorized' terminology" (1987, p. 18). Rounds concludes that this kind of *we* "must necessarily be an exclusive-*we* in which *I* is the teacher, and *they* is mathematicians." (ibid.). However, I do not agree with Rounds here, and the following three points should clarify my standpoint.

Firstly, this question must be posed: who can call it implicit differentiation? Rounds assigns the right to name and define to mathematicians, but those who really did this in the case of calculus were just individual persons (such as Isaac Newton and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz); present-day mathematicians might work in different areas, and they might invent other terms. Who, then, are the mathematicians who could rightly use "I name, I define"?

The second point worth considering concerns the distinction Rounds makes between groups of participants. Although she stresses the inclusive role of *we* in this type of learning environment, she describes students and mathematicians as counterpoles and places teachers at the intersection of these two distinct groups (1987, p. 23). Yet, is there really in teachers' minds such a line that separates students and teachers from mathematicians? Moreover, the borderline between mathematicians and mathematics educators does not seem to be clear either, since mathematics teachers at universities can also be active mathematicians. Anyway, the suggested divisions seem not to be present in tutorials, as tutors act as members of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) helping the newcom-

ers to become practitioners.

Finally, I believe that teachers take use of terminology in mathematics in the same way as they do in other areas of their life. In my opinion, there is not much difference between calling a computer a computer and using mathematics terms such as *implicit differentiation* without thinking who is the originator of the term.

What actual referents are behind we[5] is questionable; supposing the speaker assumes certain common knowledge or experience on the part of the addressees and she refers to that, this *we* should be classified as *inclusive we*. It might also be considered as 1+2+3; nevertheless, it seems to be more personal and focused only on the addressee, thus 1+2 might fit better. The last instance of *we* in this sample, we[6], might refer to the more general group, i.e. *augmented inclusive* (1+2+3), as the clause is summarizing the method presented.

3.3.3 Results

Rounds illustrated the ambiguity of the pronoun *we* by identifying the actual referents which were in her corpus: 1, 2, 1+2, 1+3, 1+2+3, and even 3 in cases where she assigns the right to define or name only to mathematicians. Regarding the present research, 41 tutorials created by 17 tutors have been investigated, in which 7 out of 10 categories set out by Rounds were identified. I have added an 11th category, which is not mentioned as a category by Rounds, as I believe it fits in with the system as set by Sokolovskaya. The categories observed in the investigated tutorials are highlighted in Table 3. The three categories which are not found in my corpus are *we*/*you*, *exclusive*-*we* and the 3+1 category.

The category *we*/*you* is not used in tutorials because it is typical of classroom discourse. This type of *we* has the students as the actual sole referents; it is used when a teacher speaks for example about homework which "we had for today" and it is obvious that the homework was not assigned to the teacher but to the students (Rounds, 1987, p. 19). Prototypical *exclusive we* is not used in the samples either; so far I have not observed a single instance of this kind of *we*. I have already mentioned my objections concerning the category "I as a spokesperson for a group of mathematicians" (i.e. 3+1), which led to me not finding any instance of this category in the samples investigated.

Speakers in the referential group, i.e. the group of lectures, employ the same interactional means as the authors of video tutorials. All eight categories found in tutorials have been observed in the samples of Group A. However, one difference which concerns category 3 (mathematicians) is worth mentioning. In the present sample of 41 tutorials and four extracts taken from lectures, nine instances of *animate they* were found: four of them could be a substitute for "mathematicians", three instances might refer to mathematics educators, and two instances of *they* are used anaphorically for the nouns "colleagues" and "people". In the subcorpus of lectures, only one instance of *they* is present: it is the anaphor referring back to the antecedent "colleagues". It replaces a certain subset of mathematicians, namely the colleagues of the speaker who do not approve of the usage of the method the lecturer recommends. Concerning the categories not observed in tutorials (i.e. in groups B-E), there was no instance of *we*/*you*, and neither prototypical *exclusive we* nor *we*/*they* + *I* (3+1) was used in Group A samples.

Metapersons	Actual referents		
1+2	prototypical inclusive-we		
1+2+3	I / one	you / one	we / one
1	prototypical I	we / I	
1+3	we / they + I (spokesperson)	prototypical exclusive-we	
2	prototypical you	we / you	
2+3			
3	they=mathematicians		

Table 3: The actual-referent categories investigated and observed in the samples

4. Concluding remarks

The findings presented suggest that personal pronouns are strategic devices that can develop an atmosphere of communality. Especially *we*, thanks to its ambiguous nature, can be employed as a powerful device. By using this semantically ambiguous sign, speakers can evoke the interpersonal dimension and a feeling of cooperation, since the pronoun *we* enables speakers to shift between various referential positions without distancing themselves from the audience.

Both participating sides of the communicative act, i.e. speaker and receiver, were examined from the point of view of their presence and absence. Speakers are present in all the investigated situations; however, the degree of their presence is not the same − it is graded according to their visual presence (this scale feature is addressed by categorizing the tutorials into groups B to E). By contrast, receivers are either physically present or absent, which means that there is no scale: the feature is dichotomic. Concerning the communicative strategies employed by the speakers, significant differences in using interactional skills under different circumstances were found. Most importantly, it was shown that the absence of an audience is associated with a different manner of expression: it is linked to an increased number of *we*-perspective instances. Regarding the factor of visual presence, it seems that the lesser the visual presence of the participants on both sides of the communicative act, the higher the employment of the *we*-perspective.

Finally, the comprehensibility of the investigated video tutorials seems to be enhanced by the frequent and varied use of first- and second-person pronouns, which makes the text interactive and brings it closer to face-to-face interaction. The substantial employment of these devices of interpersonal interaction might help "dilute" the rather high informational density of the text and make it more digestible to addressees. Furthermore, this dialogic conduct of a monologue might contribute to attracting and maintaining the attention of

addressees and overcoming the obstacles caused by the asynchronicity of the communicative act.

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News, Announcements

Fulbrightova komise nabízí stipendia pro postgraduální studium a výzkum v USA

Nově - flexibilta v délce pobytu a dodatečný termín uzávěrky!

Studentům a absolventům vysokých škol nabízí Komise J. W. Fulbrighta možnost vládního stipendia pro pokračování studií nebo výzkumu ve Spojených státech amerických. V době uzávěrky programu, která je nově dvakrát během akademické roku, tedy 1. září 2019 a 1. února 2020, musí mít žadatelé již alespoň bakalářský titul. Stipendium se uděluje na dobu 4 - 9 měsíců a pokrývá školné do výše maximálně 15 tisíc dolarů (u kategorie Degree), u všch kategorií pak životní náklady, základní zdravotní pojištění a zpáteční letenku. Uchazeči musí odeslat on-line přihlášku a dodat další podklady pro výběrové řízení (tj. tři doporučující dopisy, kopie studijních výsledků a výsledky požadovaných testů) do uzávěrky (uzávěrka je vždy na následující akademický rok). „Každý rok Fulbrightovo stipendium do USA podpoří kolem 7mi studentů, a vzhledem k tomu, že obvykle obdržíme přibližně 12 kvalitních přihlášek, má dobrý student značnou šanci na úspěch," říká ředitelka Fulbrightovy komise Hana Ripková.

Cílem pobytu v USA může být absolvování celého studijního programu a získání titulu na americké univerzitě (kategorie "degree") nebo pouze hostování (kategorie "non-degree"). Nejobvyklejší je kategorie "visiting research student" určená pro práci na samostatném výzkumném projektu, např. dizertační práci. V tomto případě musí mít žadatel pozvání z instituce v USA. Hlásit se mohou uchazeči o stipendium ve všech oborech s výjimkou klinické medicíny, MBA a LLM. Přednost mají uchazeči, kteří v USA ještě dlouhodobě nestudovali. Základním předpokladem jsou výborné studijní výsledky během studia, české občanství a trvalý pobyt na území ČR. Uchazeč by měl mít v době uzávěrky již výsledky testů požadovaných americkými univerzitami. Veškeré další informace včetně přihlášky a podrobného popisu programu najdete na www.fulbright.cz v sekci Fulbrightova stipendia: https://www.fulbright.cz/stipendia/stipendium-pro-postgradualni-studium/ Komise J.W. Fulbrighta je česko-americká organizace založená na základě mezivládní dohody v roce 1991 za účelem podpory vzdělávacích a kulturních výměn mezi Českou republikou a Spojenými státy. Komise administruje stipendia vládního tzv. Fulbrightova programu a některé další stipendijní a grantové programy. Fulbrightova komise také poskytuje bezplatné poradenství a informační služby zájemcům o studium a výzkum v USA, včetně informací o amerických standardizovaných jazykových a přijímacích testech jako je TOEFL, GMAT a GRE. V případě dotazů ke stipendiu se obracejte na Andreu Semancovou, semancova@fulbright.cz, Karmelitská 17, Praha, tel. +420 222 718 452.

Errata

Addressing the reader: A comparison of research papers in Slovak, L1 English and L2 English

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The editors of Ostrava Journal of English Philology regret to announce that a wrong abstract was published in the above article (volume 10, number 1, 2018). On page 25, the correct abstract should read as follows:

"*The main purpose of academic discourse in general is to persuade the reader and stimulate academic debate. Therefore, a research paper needs to engage the reader, and one of the ways of doing this is to address the reader directly. This paper explores reader address in linguistics papers in native Slovak, native English and non-native English (written by Slovak authors). The results show that authors mainly use the first person inclusive plural to decrease the distance between the writer and the reader, and formulaic language in the second person imperative to signpost the reader. Slovak writers tend to use less intratextual signposting and more modality and conditional clauses than Anglophone authors*."

The editors apologise for this error.