



**Necropolitics, Existential Crisis, and Third Space in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* through the Lens of the Rohingya Crisis**

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## Certificate of Completion

This is to certify that Md. Abu Bakar Siddique, Student ID: 221-10-841, from the 55th batch of the Department of English at Daffodil International University, under my supervision has successfully completed the research paper titled *"Necropolitics, Existential Crisis, and Third Space in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness through the Lens of the Rohingya Crisis"*, which focuses on the experiences of the Rohingya crisis and the marginalized characters of Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), integrating analysis from selected text by Arundhati Roy and international humanitarian reports on Rohingya crisis. I also clarify that this work, as a component of the course ENG 431: Project Paper with Internship, is his original work.

In my opinion, it is a genuine work mostly made by him through discussions with other sources, all of which he cites without any hesitation. If he had not been brave, honest, and reasonable, then this work would not have been possible.

I wish him all the best to go a long way with such courage, skills, and ambitions.



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## Declaration

I, Md. Abu Bakar Siddique, confess that the research paper titled "*Necropolitics, Existential Crisis, and Third Space in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness through the Lens of the Rohingya Crisis*," submitted to the Department of English, Daffodil International University, is the outcome of my own independent work, overseen by the guidance of Md. Nuruzzaman Moral, Assistant Professor, Department of English. I further state that this paper has not been submitted anywhere else before for any degree, diploma, or any other type of qualification at any other university or institution.

I have totally honored the information sources and data providers for this research paper, and I have referenced them properly in the text and the references section. More so, the content here is devoid of plagiarism to the best of my knowledge.

I realize that there shall be consequences following the disciplinary procedures as per the guidelines and regulations of Daffodil International University if I am found in breach of this declaration statement.



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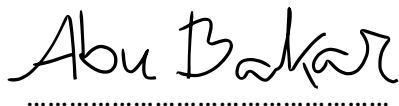
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Firstly, it is a fact that I don't know how my existence could be without God's help and support. So, without a doubt, the start and the end of this research project mark, indeed, His grace as the result of the spirit of determination, endurance, and lucidity of thought.

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## Necropolitics, Existential Crisis, and Third Space in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* through the Lens of the Rohingya Crisis

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### ABSTRACT

Necropolitics is a concept derived from postcolonial theory about the politics of death, where political power categorizes people as disposable and determines how certain individuals should live and how others must die. Roy's fictional landscapes in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) (e.g., Delhi's graveyard, militarized Kashmiri valleys, forest near Telangana) and Myanmar's Rakhine State operate under sovereign control. These political spaces align with Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics wherein life and death become indistinct due to state-sanctioned violence, erasure, and the politics of disposability. Moving from state-driven structural violence to the psychological dimensions of being descended to "bare-life", both the characters of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) and the real-world Rohingya voices come to the fore with their existential crisis, confronting the absurdity of meaning and the indifferent moral order of the universe. Transitioning from vulnerability to resilience, both Roy's fictional graveyard and the Khwabgah in Delhi and the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar offer a redemptive conclusion to the critical journey of their lives as Third Spaces of survival, healing, and solidarity. This research presents the intensifying marginalization depicted in Roy's fictional novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) as a panorama of literary testimony juxtaposing the escalating persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine State, who later on sought refuge in Cox's Bazar camps.

**Keywords:** Necropolitics, Existential Crisis, Third Space, Rohingya Crisis, Human Rights and Literature

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In an age defined by sovereign violence, mass displacement, and escalating identity conflicts, more than one million Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh transforming Cox's Bazar into the world's largest refugee settlement (UNHCR, 2024). Amid this humanitarian crisis, Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) provides a critical lens through which the inhabitation of the marginalized groups and their resistance to spaces of exclusion has been understood. The convergence of the fictional necropolitics of Roy's India and the lived necropolitics of the Rohingya crisis reveals how literature and reality intersect in the politics of life, death, and survival. Existing scholarship has separately examined Roy's engagement with necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003), existential crisis, and Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994), where a few have connected these concepts to the Rohingya crisis that is an ongoing pressing issue of identity, belonging, and erasure. While Roy's Jannat Guest House embodies the zone of refuge and resistance, the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar reflect similar liminal "third spaces" where displaced lives negotiate between despair and dignity. These two fictional and factual domains remain untapped where together they illuminate the shared geographies of dispossession and resilience. This research probes into the fictional representation and factual reality of Mbembe's necropolitics, Sartre and Camus's existential crisis, and Bhabha's third space in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and the Rohingya crisis, guided by postcolonial and theoretical-humanitarian frameworks. By merging Roy's fictional landscapes with real refugee testimonies, this research aims to fill a critical literary-humanitarian gap, exposing the moral failures of the modern nation-state to demonstrate that spaces of exclusion can paradoxically become sites of survival within abandonment.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.1 Literature Review**

Recent research titled "*Necropolitics and geography*" has found the idea of queer necropolitics, where White and Western privileged groups flourish at the expense of marginalized groups, and partake in enabling these groups towards premature death (Peters et al., 2025). They suggest that necropolitics is characterized by the mass origination of racialized death within its complex structures. Demonstrating through colonial histories of war, imperialism, and deracination, they discuss that geographers and geography have often been complicit in the production of necropolitics (Peters et al., 2025).

In Morton's (2014) article "*Sovereignty and Necropolitics at the Line of Control*," he discusses how the Government of India's Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the Public Safety Act accommodate the sovereign power's extra-judicial killings and torture. Thereby, he points out the sovereign violence in India through the interpretation of Mirza Waheed's novel *The Collaborator* and depicts the crossing of the Line of Control by so-called insurgents (Morton, 2014).

In "*Marginality and Violence in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*," Supriya Mandal states that Roy stitches the repression of the state to the segregation of the underprivileged, thereby making the violence on the marginals a daily ambiance rather than an exceptional event, revealing the upliftment of Hindutva and its brutality on the non-Hindus (Mandal, 2018).

In his article "*Writing in the Necropolis: Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*," Alex Tickell primarily refers to the work of Roy as a work of death, staging the metropolis as a necropolis that is a place of death-in-life. He also explores the subjective accommodation of death and loss by the living thus showing how the novel stages the production of disposables (Tickell, 2018).

In Sharma's article "*Necropolitics and the Precarious Lives of Rohingya Refugees in India*," on how violence has reshaped necropolitics in Delhi's Kalindi Kunj camp for Rohingya refugees, she discusses how a massive fire broke out in Delhi's Kalindi Kunj camp

for Rohingya refugees to let them die. However, the Rohingya refugees are also being cited as ‘threats to domestic security’ by the Ministry of Home Affairs, India, thus propagating the precarity of their lives by letting them die (Sharma, 2020).

The UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission’s report “*Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar*” authenticates that the Tatmadaw’s 2017 “clearance operations” are replete with occurrences of killings, sexual violence, arson, and forcible displacement, which happen to constitute crimes against humanity and even genocide by the standards of international law (OHCHR, A/HRC/39/64, 2018). Amnesty International’s report “*My World Is Finished. Rohingya Targeted in Crimes Against Humanity in Myanmar,*” attests to the high death rate, the sexual violence, and the general traumatization of the population in the areas of conflict (Amnesty, 2017). On the academic side, the paper “*Stages of the Rohingya Genocide: A Theoretical and Empirical Study*” by Mohammad Pizar Hossain applies the frameworks of genocide studies to explain the sequence of state and non-state actions giving rise to the crisis (Hossain, 2021). Regardless of the differences between these materials, they all contribute to defining the state-orchestrated campaign of dispossession and large-scale suffering of the Rohingya.

This present study focuses on the application of necropolitics in Roy's fictional work *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* to examine how the marginalized groups (Hijras, Kashmiris, Dalits, Muslims etc.) exist in “death worlds” with a comparable study of the implementation of necropolitics on the Rohingya in Myanmar, investigating the state’s control, violence and denial of citizenship towards the Rohingya.

The article "COMPONENTS OF EXISTENTIAL CRISIS: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS" reshapes a comprehensive understanding of existential crisis. The researchers have found emotional components of existential crisis such as despair, helplessness, disordered sense of integrity, emotional vulnerability, anxiety, and loneliness, as well as cognitive components like loss of meaning and goals, realization of one's own end, loss of personal values, and decision-making (Buténaité et al., 2016).

In Sukiasyan's (2024) article titled "The Mental Health of Refugees and Forcibly Displaced People: A Narrative Review," he discusses how the growing geopolitical violence causes PTSD as a consequence of violence. Thereby refugees and FDPs are prone to develop

depression as a result of loss, whereas as a reaction to uncertainty they develop anxiety disorders (Sukiasyan, 2024). This highlights the impending existential crisis growing up among them.

The study titled "Associations among past trauma, post-displacement stressors, and mental health outcomes in Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: A secondary cross-sectional analysis" has found that post-displacement stressors are related to an increased risk of depressive symptoms, expanding mental healthcare access for displaced Rohingya (Ritsema H, Armstrong-Hough M., 2023). Their research opens the door to existential crisis to be explored in the Rohingya who have been under state violence for many years.

The article titled "Assisting refugee survivors of torture and trauma: An existential perspective" has found that trauma therapists who are listening to refugee accounts of torture and trauma in the course of their job are significantly affected emotionally and psychologically that they are compelled to reevaluate their own assumptions and belief systems about themselves and the world (Fernandes et al., 2024). Their study finds that existential crisis arises as a confrontation with nothingness, the omnipotent anxiety of death terror, the absolute loss or end of oneself, revealing the sense of alienation among the therapists who assist the refugees.

This present research focuses on integrating literary analysis (Roy's novel) with humanitarian testimony (Rohingya reports) to map how structural violence produces existential crisis in both text and testimony under necropolitical regimes.

The research article titled "*The chronotope of third space in Bharati Mukherjee's 'The Management of Grief'*" analyzes how identity is formed in "the third space" during the era of immigration. The researchers have found the story's chronotopes and cinematic elements might help one understand the central character Shaila's quest for identity and her transformation from a naive, self-confident person to someone who is conscious of the instability of her identity in the third space. Mukherjee's dialogic story effectively highlights the dialogic aspect of human identity, allowing "dialogue" with others and with oneself as a means of "managing" humanity's "grief" (Jamshidian & Pirnajmuddin, 2019).

In Iesar Ahmad's article "*The Politics of Canons, Identity and Representation: A Study of the Counter Canonical Discourse Strategies in Arundhati Roy's Novel the Ministry of Utmost Happiness*," he discusses how Roy's tales highlight counter-discourse and canonical practices as a liminal zone of ambiguity, resistance, intervention, and difference. His study concludes that Roy's counter-canonical practices in the novel provide a realistic, authentic, and alternative vantage site of the liminality for postcolonized nations to contest and inscribe difference and resistance.

A recent article titled "*Digital arts – refugee engagement*" has researched the Digital Arts – Refugee Engagement (DA-RE) project in Kutupalong and Balukhali camps (Ukhiya sub-district, Cox's Bazar), where Rohingya youth (aged 18–25) co-create Third Spaces through digital arts and literacies. Drawing on Bhabha (1994), the study highlights these spaces as "dynamic in-between" zones that combine everyday camp life ("first space") and formalized arts research ("second space"), allowing for creation in the face of ambivalences such as trauma and exclusion (Aljouni et al., 2023).

This present research is focused on how marginalized communities build solidarity and resilience in the face of exclusion and vulnerability by integrating literary analysis of Roy's novel with the study of the Rohingya crisis to examine the social and spatial practices that serve as sites of meaning repair, where notions of identity, belonging, and survival are reconstructed amidst existential crisis.

## 2.2 Objectives of the Study:

- To examine necropolitics in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and the Lives of the Rohingya.
- To explore existential crisis in the Characters of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and the Lives of the Rohingya.
- To identify Third Spaces in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and the Rohingya Refugee Camps.

## 2.3 Methodology:

This research is qualitative in nature, and it employs comparative literary analysis as well as postcolonial and political theory as the context to explore the connection between fictional representation and the real-world humanitarian crisis.

The central research question that furnishes a framework for the inquiry is:

(1) How do the manifestations of necropolitics, existential crisis, and the Third Space in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) provide critical insight into the novel's characters, illuminating marginalization, state violence, and displacement of its characters, and deepen our understanding of the lived realities of the Rohingya crisis?

Roy's novel is referred to as the primary text in these data sources, which consist of international documents from UNHCR, Fortify Rights, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, etc., and academic articles on postcolonial theory, necropolitics (Mbembe), existentialism (Sartre, Camus), and Third Space theory (Bhabha) as a supplement. The initial steps of data collection are the close reading of chosen excerpts from the novel and thorough consultation of international reports and secondary literature that document and provide explanations of the Rohingya crisis.

The theoretical framework of this study combines Achille Mbembe's necropolitics to uncover the sovereign violence, Sartre and Camus' existential philosophy to sketch the crises of existence and identity, and Homi Bhabha's Third Space to point out spaces of hybridity, the survival of the spirit, and the creative reimagining of community. Thus, the interdisciplinary research design of this study follows a research method focused on theoretical close reading and comparative alignment with fictional and real-world narratives.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **Necropolitics in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and the Lives of the Rohingya**

Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics unravels the political calculation of life and death where sovereign power determines who may live and who must die. Mbembe acknowledges the state-sanctioned violence as the foundation of modern democracy. Consisting of equality and liberty, modern democracy has a shadow side to liberal democracy, thereby creating a space of necropolitics. Mbembe ventures into necropolitics to go beyond Foucault's notion of biopolitics. While biopolitics is about the regulation of life, necropolitics is about the creation of death-worlds (Mbembe, 2003, p. 40), which refer to places where people are considered as the living dead. Foucault's biopolitics is the exertion of a certain kind of force that sovereign apparatuses demonstrate when a focus on life becomes the end goal of power, where power becomes not the actor of subtracting life but of adding to life, creating mechanisms that can control populations while in many cases growing them. For Mbembe, the sovereign power's capacity to kill on behalf of people in power or by the hands of people in power within this so-called biopolitical framework opens up a discourse into the continued use of power to kill, to put people to death, to choose who can live and who can die. Necropolitics is an essential concept to be applied when looking at the depiction of the characters that are marginalized in a novel, as well as those areas of society that are excluded. Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) highlights death-worlds in postcolonial India, such as graveyard communities, the Gujarat riots, and the militarized valleys of Kashmir. At the same time, the global scale and severity of the Rohingya crisis, i.e., ethnic cleansing, mass killing, and statelessness, represent an extreme case of necropolitical control.

Roy presents the state's cruelty expressed in a bureaucratic manner, where the sovereign's initial necropolitical gesture is dramatized through the suspension of rights:

*Civil Rights had been suspended, newspapers were censored and, in the name of population control, thousands of men (mostly Muslim) were herded into camps and forcibly sterilized. (Chapter 2: Khwabgah), (Roy, 2017, p. 34).*

The intrusion of the government into the citizen's freedom over their rights on reproduction in the name of the "Maintenance of Internal Security Act," Sanjay Gandhi's government enacts necropolitics where the Muslim individual is not just excluded but intentionally manipulated

as unwanted life. In a comparable strategy of exclusion, the Thein Sein government had imposed policies to control the Rohingya's freedom of marriage and childbirth, and other facets of daily life in the Rakhine State (Fortify Rights, p.23). The government restricted Rohingya marriage in the guise of "Population Control Activities," where Muslim women must abort fetus if they already have two children. Deterring Rohingya births, the government's goal is to reduce the Rohingya population. Hence, both Sanjay Gandhi's action against Muslims and the Thein Sein government's atrocity against the Rohingya demonstrate that the powers of sovereignty extend to the most private lives and domains of reproduction, thereby strengthening the control of necropolitics.

Roy's evocation of pogroms in Gujrat, where "the mobs were armed with swords and tridents" with "cadastral lists of Muslim homes" and "the police were often part of the mobs" refusing to register murder, visualizes the bureaucratization of killing. Roy points to the chanting of saffron parakeets:

*Thirty thousand saffron parakeets with steel talons and bloodied beaks, all squawking together:*

*Mussalman ka ek hi sthan! Qabristan ya Pakistan!*

*Only one place for the Mussalman! The Graveyard or Pakistan!*

*(Chapter 2: Khwabgah), (Roy, 2017, p. 62).*

Anjum's reminiscence of the Gujarat riot in 2000, nevertheless, strengthened the representation of the sovereign power-backed violence against the Muslims who are reduced to a corpse in waiting, resonates with necropolitics. Thus, death is no longer anarchic here. It is indexed, pre-planned, and piled up with necropolitical extermination of Muslims, so that they must die. The Reuters' investigation into the Inn Din massacre uncovered the violence against the Rohingya led by the army's 33rd Light Infantry Division, assisted by the paramilitary 8th Security Police Battalion. They tormented Rohingya hamlets, killed Muslims, and burned bodies. Soe Chay (55 years old), a retired soldier from Inn Din's Buddhist community, said he helped dig "one grave for 10 people" and further added:

*"When they were being buried, some were still making noises. Others were already dead." - (Reuters Report, 2018)*

Targeting Muslim households before execution and burning entire hamlets in the Rakhine State becomes a necropolitical tool of extermination. It is what Achille Mbembe identifies as the sovereign state's "right to kill".

Roy powerfully relates necropolitics to the situation in Kashmir, and this is where she depicts deaths to be so frequent as a result of the ongoing conflict, and the murder and disappearance of people being at such a high rate that these happen automatically. The story further relates,

*“The Story of Kashmir: DEAD = 68,000, DISAPPEARED = 10,000. Is this Democracy or Demon Crazy?” (Chapter 3: The Nativity), (Roy, 2017, p. 115).*

The text depicts the pure horror that lies behind the democratic facade by using the term “demon crazy,” or it could also be “evil craziness,” thus suggesting how the very institutions that direct the sovereignty of the state are the ones that, in turn, endorse the legality of death to the masses. In the Rakhine State, the military action carried out by the Myanmar Junta in 2017 against the Rohingya resulted in a similar necropolitical situation. Over 24,000 people lost their lives in a few weeks (Doctors Without Borders, 2017), with the discovery of mass graves, disappeared citizens, and the exercise of violence against unarmed people. In both scenarios, the sovereign power is the one that determines who deserves to live and who must die, beyond the curtain of democracy.

Spatial necropolitics gets an extra layer with forced displacement. Roy writes, *“Away from the lights and advertisements, villages were being emptied... surplus people were banned”* (p. 98), and later, *“Surplus mothers perched like sparrows on the debris of what used to be their homes”* (p. 100). Roy’s depiction of the “surplus people” as banned from cities by the government, “re-settled” in poisonous swamps, and coerced to sing their “surplus children” to sleep solidifies the very necropolitical logic of expulsion. Thus, displacement becomes an outcome of state-driven violence that is a deliberate spatial strategy of necropower. The references to “surplus lives” are very close to the lives of the Rohingya, who are considered surplus population in Myanmar, not allowed to have citizenship, and driven away from villages. The government relocates them into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, vehemently tagging them as “non-Myanmar Bengali nationals”, thus pushing the Rohingya away from the Rakhine neighbourhood, ultimately out of Myanmar entirely. Those who do not relocate, the government refuses to register them, so much so that it denies them food assistance (Fortify Rights, p.27). Both Roy’s “surplus” lives on debris and the displaced Rohingya live in barbed-wire camps are examples of what Mbembe called necropolitical “death-worlds,” where life is calibrated at the edge of death.

Control and monitoring always play a major part in strengthening necropower, where people's movement and freedom are limited as a way of subjugation. The demand for permits in Roy's Delhi:

*"Do you have police permission to be here? Everybody must have permission to be here."* (Chapter 3: *The Nativity*), (Roy, 2017, p. 121).

This inquiry reveals a necropolitical regime. Here, existence is governed by state approval, where the living must obtain permission merely to live. The Rohingya encounter the same living conditions in Rakhine State, where the government of Myanmar enacts stringent restrictions on the freedom of movement. They require registration at their movement (Fortify Rights, p.22), checkpoints, and curfews to go through, as stated by Fatema Amir, who fled to Bangladesh in 2019:

*"No Rohingya could go outside without permission, there was no freedom of movement. We had problems buying the things we needed. We had a food crisis and no jobs. When we were in our villages, we used to work alongside men. But after coming to the camps, us women were not able to go outside."* – (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Living among these restrictions, the Rohingya undergo a state of caged existence where they are given the bare biological necessities. At the same time, they are deprived of their rights, labor, and the dignity of having control over their lives. In both cases, the power of the ruler converts the normal life into a demand that the person has to be under the watch and the threat of violence.

Intrusiveness and torture are the epitome of necropolitical violence. Roy notes,

*"Although the sign on the door said Interrogation Centre, it was actually a torture centre."* (Chapter 9: *The Untimely Death of Miss Jebeen the First*), (Roy, 2017, p. 380).

This melding of interrogation with torture is reflected in Rohingya accounts, where survivors recount that they were beaten, gang-raped, and killed during so-called 'questioning' by the Myanmar junta army. In both cases, the sovereign has anatomized the very organizations of law and order into agencies of terror, thus demonstrating the authority over life by killing the masses. Roy completes the loop of necropolitics with "Operation Green Hunt":

*"War against People. Thousands of police and paramilitary are in the forest. Killing adivasis, burning villages."* (Chapter 10: *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*), (Roy, 2017, p. 421).

The "war against people" is necropolitical. The state uses death zones within its own borders to show its dominance, selecting who matters and who must die to keep the appearance of national order. This culmination fits with the systemic persecution of Rohingya villages, where satellite images revealed extensive fires of homes caused by security forces in 2017. It depicts necropolitics as the most extreme and violent forms that are active. The UN Fact-Finding Mission (2018) gives detailed documentation of the 2017 "*clearance operations*" in Myanmar, which includes killing, raped systematically, and looting of villages (UNHRC, Report A / HRC / 39 / 64, para. 84–87). Amnesty International's report "*My World Is Finished*" (2017) collects the interviews of survivors who talk of soldiers setting houses on fire and shooting people who tried to escape (Amnesty 13–15). In the same line, Human Rights Watch's report, "*All of My Body Was in Pain*" (2017), narrates the use of sexual violence as a means to frighten the women and break the social organization (Human Rights Watch 4–9). In the first month of the operations to be precise, *Médecins Sans Frontières* reckons that the number of Rohingya who were killed is approximately 6,700, a point that illustrates both the immediacy and the extermination, to a large extent (MSF, *No One Was Left*, 2). In both contexts, necropolitics is not scattered but structural. It is a deliberate state policy of elimination, disguised by the rhetoric of security and nationalism.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Existential Crisis in the Characters of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and the Lives of the Displaced Rohingya**

Jean-Paul Sartre describes the necessity to create meaning and identity in a world stripped of moral certainty where individuals confront the absurdity and meaninglessness imposed by political violence and social exclusion. Albert Camus's notion of "absurd condition" delineates the desire for belonging that meets the indifference of the global order, therefore, the existential crisis arises when one recognizes the absurdity of existence that lacks meaning in life. Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* dramatizes the existential crisis where characters like Anjum lives in a graveyard excluded from society, and Tilo bears witness to relentless state oppression. Like Roy's marginalized characters, the existential crisis extends to the plight of the Rohingya who are thrust into a borderless space where humanity itself is questioned.

Existential crisis emerges as both personal and collective. This is most noticeably revealed in Anjum and her community of Hijras, marked by profound displacement, trauma, and the search for meaning amid absurd abandonment from society. She remembers how people mock those who cannot be easily understood:

*"At first people were amused and even encouraging, but soon the snickering and teasing from other children began: He's a She. He's not a He or a She. He's a He and a She. She-He, He-She Hee! Hee! Hee!" (Chapter 2: Khwabgah), (Roy, 2017, p. 12).*

Moreover, Nimmo describes the gloom of the nonbinary group:

*"It was an experiment. He decided to create something, a living creature that is incapable of happiness. So he made us." (Chapter 2: Khwabgah), (Roy, 2017, p. 23).*

At this point, the life of Hijras turns out to be ridiculous, as their identity is continuously questioned because of the "gaze of the other," which is an echo of Sartre's theory of alienation (*Being and Nothingness*, 1943). According to the 1982 Citizenship Law of Myanmar, the Rohingya are also in a similar existential crisis. Like the Hijras who claim "the forgotten ones" (p. 51), the Rohingya are always halfway between acknowledgement and extinction by the Myanmar government. Kamal, grew up in Sittwe, recalls the quiet humiliations and exclusions by his Buddhist neighbors:

*"When he was around 11, Buddhist classmates started calling him "Bengali" and "kalar," slurs for Muslims." - (Translated by HRW report, 2022)*

Kamal's testimony demonstrates that the daily practices of exclusion, slowly eroding the meaning of existence, result in existential crisis. Similar to Roy's marginalized character Anjum, the crisis of Kamal is more than just survival. It is about living with the daily reminder that his existence is questioned and unwelcome.

Violence brings out the absurdity of survival, thereby creating space for existential crisis in lives. Anjum often recalls the Gujarat riot in 2000 while thinking about her life on the edge:

*"Butchers' Luck.*

*That's all she was. And the longer she lived, the more good luck she brought them."* (Chapter 2: Khwabgah), (Roy, 2017, p. 63)

In this instance, Roy dramatizes Camus's notion of the absurd that survival is random, contingent and devoid of reason. Likewise, Saddam recalls with horror the public lynching of his father: *"Everybody watched. Nobody stopped them"* (p. 89). In Roy's universe, violence is not something that is apart from the world but the secret "yolk" of regularity:

*"Normality in our part of the world is a bit like a boiled egg: its humdrum surface conceals at its heart a yolk of egregious violence."* (Chapter 7: The Landlord), (Roy, 2017, p. 150)

This absurdity of violence is equally present in the lives of the Rohingya as their survival is also "Butchers' Luck" during the massacre in Tula Toli or Inn Din. Reports released by Human Rights Watch and Médecins Sans Frontières (2017) show that families were killed one after another in villages like Tula Toli, where survival was a matter of chance. In both contexts, the life of the characters of Roy and the Rohingya, lives become precarious where survival is absurdly random.

Displacement is depicted as producing profound loneliness in Roy's novel. The metaphor used to describe Tilottama as "a paper boat on a boisterous sea. She was absolutely alone" (p. 160) highlights her isolation:

*"Tilottama never went home for her holidays. She never said why. Nobody came looking for her. None of us was invited to visit her."*  
(Chapter 7: The Landlord), (Roy, 2017, p. 155)

Her decision not to go back home illustrates the estrangement of being unmoored from any place of belonging. As per the UNHCR report, the Rohingya in a "protracted exile without horizon" are not only deprived of their rights but also the very concept of "home." Both Tilo and the Rohingya embody Camus' exile where they are lost at sea and floating in an indifferent world with no place to anchor.

In the absence of certainty and belonging, death forms another recurring motif in Roy's novel where one must find meaning in embracing death. Anjum asks:

*"Where do old birds go to die? Do they fall on us like stones from the sky? Do we stumble on their bodies in the streets? Do you not think that the All-Seeing, Almighty One who put us on this Earth has made proper arrangements to take us away?" (Chapter 1: Where Do Old Birds Go to Die?), (Roy, 2017, p. 5),*

while Tilottama asserts,

*"I'm not marrying anybody.' When I asked her why she felt that way, she said she wanted to be free to die irresponsibly, without notice and for no reason."*

*(Chapter 7: The Landlord), (Roy, 2017, p. 159)*

Anjum wonders about divine arrangements for death while Tilottama embraces the existential freedom to die "irresponsibly." Both the reflections of Anjum and Tilo echo Camus' assertion on the absurdity of death that one should embrace death with dignity. The Rohingya refugees who have had to flee in large numbers express almost the same hopelessness. The interviews with refugees from Cox's Bazar conducted by UNHCR show that some of them say they "would rather die in Myanmar than die slowly in exile." It is an act of existential defiance showing dignity despite the absurdity of living in long-term exile without any prospects for the future.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Third Space in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and Rohingya Refugee Camps**

Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory Third Space refers to a metaphorical space of cultural negotiation against erasure. It is a site of resistance in which identities, meanings, and cultures are constantly reconstructed through new modes of existence. Displaced individuals rejuvenate a sense of solidarity amidst displacement and exclusion at this liminal zone. The Third Space becomes a political sanctuary where the marginalized groups reclaim agency from necropolitical erasure. Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a narrative that vividly illustrates the Third Space where marginalized characters negotiate solidarity beyond rigid social and political boundaries. In a similar fashion, the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar represent a literal and metaphorical Third Space where their fragmented lives find new forms of community through coexistence and mutual recognition and they find new ways of survival that are hybrid. The Third Space functions as zone of exclusion that paradoxically nurture solidarity.

Anjum's graveyard, the Fort of Desolation is a space denied by the "Duniya." Gradually it has become Jannat Guest House. Anjum turns this graveyard into a fragile home yet profound sanctuary of coexistence. Jannat Guest House operates as a Third Space of radical rehumanization within Roy's necropolitical landscape resisting both the violence of the state and the pity of humanitarianism by asserting the right to live. Her dwelling in the abandoned ruin represents a liminal site where she negotiates new forms of identity. Roy writes:

*"Gradually the Fort of Desolation scaled down into a dwelling of manageable proportions. It became home; a place of predictable, reassuring sorrow – awful, but reliable... .... Gradually Jannat Guest House became a hub for Hijras who, for one reason or another, had fallen out of, or been expelled from, the tightly administered grid of Hijra Gharanas."* (Chapter 2: *Khwabgah*), (Roy, 2017, p. 66-68).

Anjum's life at this graveyard is neither fully alive in society nor fully embraced by death. Death becomes a marker of exclusion. Anjum questions burial rights for Hijras. One of the most eerie conversations takes place between the Imam and Anjum when the former asks:

*“When you die, where are you buried? Who bathes the bodies? Who says the prayers?” (Chapter 2: Khwabgah), (Roy, 2017, p. 5, 80*

The Hijras need to create their own funeral rites as they are excluded both in life and in death. Later on, Anjum reinvents burial practices in the Jannat Guest House outside the official sanction. Roy describes this scene in the following words:

*“The one clear criterion was that Jannat Funeral Services would only bury those whom the graveyards and imams of the Duniya had rejected.” (Chapter 2: Khwabgah), (Roy, 2017, p. 80)*

The Jannat Guest House has deeply unhinged the dichotomous ideas of center/periphery. It has become a refuge for those who are socially, politically and economically declined.

The Khwabgah epitomizes the dream of liberation which symbolizes a Third Space of hybridity. At this third space of negotiation and translation, those “trapped” between binaries: male and female, sacred and profane, real and unreal can articulate a new, fluid subjectivity neither entirely part of the “Duniya” nor fully separate, creating a liminal site where the marginalized people such as Hijras, Dalits, Muslims, orphans, and outcasts forge collective identity and form bonds across differences. Ustad Kulsoom Bi explains:

*“The Khwabgah was called Khwabgah, Ustad Kulsoom Bi said, because it was where special people, blessed people, came with their dreams that could not be realized in the Duniya. In the Khwabgah, Holy Souls trapped in the wrong bodies were liberated.” (Chapter 2: Khwabgah), (Roy, 2017, p. 53)*

The Khwabgah, a sanctuary of the excluded represents Homi K. Bhabha’s “Third Space” where fixed categories of identity dissolve and hybrid forms of existence take shape. It is a laboratory for new solidarities where marginalized people create new forms of identity that resist erasure. This is the place where Hijras find recognition and a sense of community. The Khwabgah thus becomes an antidote to necropolitics, a living assertion that those condemned as “unworthy of life” can construct their own forms of ritual, care, and meaning. It transforms the experience of abjection into aesthetic and spiritual regeneration. The Khwabgah thus becomes a sanctuary of plural identities, operating in defiance of the necropolitical order that classifies certain lives as “unlivable.” Anjum, who was born intersex and raised as Aftab, enters this world after a painful confrontation with social rejection.

The Rohingya refugee camps, particularly Balukhali camp in Bangladesh, have gone on to establish an “age-friendly space” similarly embodying Anjum’s creation of the Jannat

Guest House that could be the home of elderly refugees, not only to socialize but also to get checkups and stay updated. As one report from Age International notes,

*“Every day, 200 people visit the age-friendly space in Balukhali camp... ‘I feel peace — that’s why I come here every day,’ said 54-year-old grandmother Nur.”*

Nur's "peace" at Balukhali mirrors the quiet grace of Anjum's graveyard. Both represent alternative sovereignties of care, created not through state recognition but through shared humanity. The radical inclusivity of the Jannat Guest House further mirrors the Rohingya's communal structures in exile:

*“She didn’t see the problem with either Hijras or Chamars.”* (Roy, 2017, p. 85)

The urgency of survival in the refugee camps often goes over gender and class hierarchies where women assume roles in community affairs — youth volunteer in makeshift educational initiatives and elders sustain cultural and religious practices despite displacement (International Crisis Group, 2020). The Rohingya communities in Cox's Bazar refugee camps are collaborating to enable women and decrease violence against them by establishing Safe Spaces for women and girls, thereby implementing gender transformative training for men and boys. Hasina, a regular visitor to the Safe Space shares:

*"During my free time, I can visit the place, enjoy the company of other women, and acquire new skills like sewing clothes."* – (Relief International Report)

Similar to Anjum's Jannat Guest House, the Rohingya camps demonstrate how marginalized territories destabilize the prevailing hold of power and provide access to new democratic ways of living. Though born of persecution, camps evolve into hybrid cultural zones and become a space of healing and acceptance where displaced populations reconstitute communal life. Ultimately, the Rohingya camps become Third Spaces of survival and spiritual reclamation as the living echo of Anjum's graveyard as sanctuary. Both challenge the logic of necropolitics by asserting life within death zones and transforming the politics of dispossession into a poetics of endurance.

Marginal inhabitation is a concept in Roy's evocative portrayal of the graveyards that becomes a metaphor of a liminal abode. Expelled from the Duniya, Anjum *"lived in the graveyard like a tree. At dawn she saw the crows off and welcomed the bats home. At dusk she did the opposite. Between shifts she conferred with the ghosts of vultures"* (Roy, 2017, p. 3). Lived at the threshold of death, her life encapsulates a place that is simultaneously

inhabitable and uninhabitable. The Rohingya crisis is not very far from this kind of ambiguity. Refugees in Bangladesh living in rickety shelters that are easily flooded, and infested with diseases, creating a situation which the Human Rights Watch (2022) terms as "life on the edge of bare survival." As Tim Costello, chief advocate, World Vision Australia, states:

*"Having gone to humanitarian disasters and refugee camps for the last 14 years, it is, by far, the worst I have seen. For me, going into that camp was like walking through the gates of hell."*

Much like Anjum's dwelling among the dead, the refugee camp blurs the boundary between survival and annihilation, becoming a graveyard-like existence where living is itself an act of resistance. Anjum's viewpoint on the "falling people" aligns with how the characters that are common in the novel find themselves in a state of perpetual liminality:

*"'Once you have fallen off the edge like all of us have, including our Biroo,' Anjum said, 'you will never stop falling. And as you fall you will hold on to other falling people. The sooner you understand that the better. This place where we live, where we have made our home, is the place of falling people. Here there is no haqeeqat. Arre, even we aren't real. We don't really exist.'"*  
(Chapter 2: Khwabgah), (Roy, 2017, p. 84).

Such a comparison is really about the core of the Rohingya crisis. Brutally driven out of their home country, the Rohingya remain suspended between expulsion from Myanmar and unrecognized in Bangladesh as one of Third Space. For countless Rohingya, the Bangladesh camps turned into paradoxical locations, characterized by deprivation and temporality, holding onto one another in collective survival where solidarity itself is a mode of resistance. However, according to Amnesty International (2019), the persecuted Rohingya have established covert schools, prayer groups, and micro-economies, thereby both materially and spiritually facilitating each other through communal survival. The act of falling in both scenarios is less of a degradation to a space than a common experience of endurance where those who stick together use their solidarity as a way of resistance.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

Drawing from Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, the study reveals Roy's depiction of India's marginal spaces from the militarized landscapes of Kashmir to the liminal zones of Old Delhi mirrors the Rohingya's own confinement within "death-worlds" created by sovereign power. This study unveils systemic violence, displacement, and the state's power over life and death in both fictional spaces of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) and the lives of the Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine State. This study finds that sovereign power in both Roy's India and Myanmar's Rakhine State operates through necropolitics while deciding who lives, who dies, and who is forgotten. Both contexts generate deep existential crisis where victims question the meaning of their survival. Sartrean and Camusian lenses traced existential crises in Roy's characters and the displaced lives of the Rohingya, each negotiating identity, faith, and meaning amid abandonment. Yet within these crises emerge Homi Bhabha's notion of the Third Space which captures the Jannat Guest House, the Khwabgah, and the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar as hybrid zones of survival and resistance where humanity persists against annihilation, where identity is reimagined and resistance takes root. Ultimately, this research reinterprets these spaces not merely as sites of death or despair but as zones of survival, where marginalized lives assert their humanity against the machinery of exclusion.

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## Appendix

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