

Tribhuvan University

Reiki Crins: A Subaltern Character in *Blacklisted in Bhutan: Love Lost*
and Love Transformed in the Land of Gross National Happiness

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Prasun Thapa

Symbol No.: 280704

T.U. Regd. No.: 6-2-710-137-2009

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

February, 2024

Letter of Recommendation

This research entitled “Reiki Crins: A Subaltern Character in *Blacklisted in Bhutan: Love Lost and Love Transformed in the Land of Gross National Happiness*” has been successfully completed under my supervision by Prasun Thapa in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English. I would like to recommend this research be examined by an external examiner.

Mr. Mahesh Paudyal

Supervisor

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Reiki Crins: A Subaltern Character in *Blacklisted in Bhutan: Love Lost and Love Transformed in the Land of Gross National Happiness*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, by Prasun Thapa has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Mr. Mahesh Paudyal
Internal Supervisor

Mr. Dinesh Bhandari
External Examiner

Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota
Head

Central Department of English

Date : _____

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor Mr. Mahesh Paudyal, Lecturer of English at the Central Department of English, for making this work possible. His intellectual guidance, critical comments, and genuine suggestions carried me through the entire stages of writing the paper.

I would also like to give my warmest thanks to Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota, the Head of the Central Department of English, for approving this thesis paper in its present form. I am grateful to him for his valuable suggestions and guidance.

I would like to convey my special thanks to my teachers and friends who motivated and supported me in preparing this thesis.

Finally, I would wholeheartedly thank my parents for letting me through all the difficulties. I experienced their guidance, continuous support, and understanding when undertaking research and writing my project. It is your prayer that sustained me this far.

February, 2024

Prasun Thapa

Reiki Crins: A Subaltern Character in *Blacklisted in Bhutan: Love Lost and Love Transformed in the Land of Gross National Happiness*

Abstract

This paper explores Reiki Crins as a subaltern character in her memoir Blacklisted in Bhutan: Love Lost and Love Transformed in the Land of Gross National Happiness in the light of the subaltern perspective. The memoir revolves around Crins' journey and her struggle to motivate and educate the youths of Bhutan, providing job opportunities and happiness in Tsachaphu village. Oscillating between the declaration of Bhutan as the world's happiest country and the real-life experiences of the Bhutanese, she strives to confront pragmatic problems in the village in which she plays a significant role in elevating the particular village's condition. However, Crins, a citizen from the Netherlands, is blacklisted. This research paper, therefore, focusing on Reiki Crins, deals with the three specific questions: What contradiction does she confront while visiting Bhutan? Why is she blacklisted despite her good work? And how is she a subaltern character in her memoir? To answer these questions, this research employs Antonio Gramsci, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's notion of 'Subaltern,' and Ranajit Guha's concept of 'Reflective Action.' The paper claims that Reiki Crins, indeed, is a subaltern character; however, she takes particular space as a resistive site, and being within the periphery challenges the structural domination of the Bhutanese government. Subalterns are the subordinated category of people in a particular place at a specific time; nevertheless, they are relative and in continuous flux. Thus, using the flexible position of a subaltern, Crins, challenges the hegemonic force of the dominant and portrays the self as an agency to the ordinary people. In this regard, Crins' memoir is a projection of a subaltern character, who uses subaltern consciousness to speak for the voiceless.

Keywords: Subaltern, Consciousness, Domination, Resistance and Recognition

This research work is a thorough observation of the protagonist, the writer Reiki Crins as a subaltern character. Though, Crins is a foreign citizen, she becomes a subaltern in her memoir as she faces multiple challenges for being a woman in the land which has been known for its Gross National Happiness. Her memoir becomes a voice for the voiceless as she uses subaltern consciousness to challenge and expose the hegemonic forces. However, the behavior of the government reflects the politics of exclusion. The exclusive nature of the government indicates their domination. And Crins's experience of domination and discrimination explores the issue of gender subaltern. The female gender is made subaltern because of the dominance of masculine society. And Crins, for being a female, she undergoes the trail of domination by the male society. The notion of subaltern arises when the existence and identity of female protagonist becomes the subject of dominance. As a result, she chooses to communicate and make other people hear what she had to confront through her book *Blacklisted in Bhutan*. This book is her way of resisting which also indicates that subalterns do not remain silent rather they speak according to Ranajit Guha.

Reiki Crins' memoir, *Blacklisted in Bhutan: Love Lost and Love Transformed in the Land of Gross National Happiness* (2018), is a conspicuous articulation of Bhutanese reality which inwardly encapsulates a back grounded subaltern experience of the writer. Crins, the protagonist of the memoir, a European student of M.A Anthropology, comes to Bhutan for her research purpose and falls in love with the untouched village of Bhutan named Tsachapu. She decides to help this place and the people by providing hospitality training and opening a hotel school. However, after 27 years of devotion and hard work, she is blacklisted. Crins, in her memoir expresses

her dissatisfaction towards the Bhutanese government for not giving any justification to her being blacklisted.

The memoir appears to have been capable to drag the attention of readers and critics from diverse arena and perspectives. A student from TU, Department of English has observed the memoir from the perspective of hegemonic discourse and ideology. In the paper, she specifically marks the concern on the national propaganda: GNH, to argue that Bibechana Sharma writes,

Bhutan's proclamation of Gross National Happiness as a discourse that has created an ideology to hegemonize the people residing in the country, boycotting their aspirations, rights, and recognition. (1)

Gross National Happiness as a discourse, in Bhutan which has given rise to an ideology that seeks to dominate the people in the country with disregard for their aspirations, rights, and acknowledgment. Unlike the researcher, this thesis explores the concern of the subaltern with the prime focus on the character: Reiki Crins. More specifically, the paper examines how Reiki Crins, despite numerous voluntary services, is a subaltern character.

Although, in the interview with Bhutan News Service (BNS), when she was asked about the intended audience of the book, she explicitly asserted that: "Anyone who is interested in memoirs, Bhutan, South Asia, social enterprise, setting up a non-profit project in a frontier market" (1).

The memoir, perhaps, because of its acclaim regarding GNH, has brought readers not only to entertain the thematic dimension of the book but also has compelled the audience to engage in investigation of national policy and the assertion made by the Bhutanese government in/outside of national territory.

In fact, there are variant assertions of challenges that stark the prevailing notion of Bhutan as a paradise. Presenting the incoherence in the actual experiences of the Bhutanese people and the celebrated GNH philosophy invites a closer examination of whether the principles associated with GNH are truly reflective or not. To this, reviewing the book, a reader claims:

Rieki's book, in my opinion, is most useful to the Bhutanese, inside Bhutan who is not pretentious and sincere enough to accept the truth. What are the ground realities in rural Bhutan and does that reality run in sync with the lofty concept of GNH propagated abroad? (1)

The statement assists an exploration of actual conditions in Bhutan posing questions on the idealized concept of GNH. To put it subtly, this reader exposes that the memoir is, in fact an exposition that disrobes the ornamented reality fabricated by the Bhutanese government and shows the naked reality of rural Bhutan, which is, indeed, a nightmare, perhaps, if not reality.

Similarly, Rieki herself in *Medium*, asserts,

My point is that the world should know that there is a dark side to Bhutan. It is not the land of Gross National Happiness, it is not Shangri La. In the country there are no human rights in place, there is no freedom of speech and no right to demonstrate. (2)

Crins asserts that the Bhutanese lack human rights protection as the government stays aloof in safeguarding the rights and liberty of Bhutanese citizens. Bhutan, according to the speaker, lacks the societal mechanisms to address the grievances of its citizens. Her book seems to be a rigorous attempt to dislodge the hidden reality of Bhutanese society because, though she strived to help the people, bringing innovative ideas like tourism and entrepreneurship, she was blacklisted. Her book came in response to the

cult announced by Bhutan which not only grapples with her dissatisfaction towards the Bhutanese government but also a severe disease that Bhutan is infected with, based on the ideological and political concept that inflicts any possible in/outsider who tries to interrogate the assumption and integrity of Bhutan. Her dissatisfaction can be noted in the following ways:

Whoever has blacklisted me is a coward that is hiding, why not looking me in the eye and tell me what I have done wrong. This is typical how Bhutan deals with its problems, just as with the Southern Bhutanese problem. Kicking thousands and thousands of your own people out of the country and hide them from any dialogue or not taking any responsibility for it is very cowardly. (4)

Crins' words boldly challenges the outset of the Bhutanese government and the one who blacklisted her. These words are astonishingly a remark after she was blacklisted. Now, the question is, does she show her boldness in the memoir as in the interview? If not, why she is silent in the book, and how does she reflect her position? To answer these questions, the paper argues, that Crins, in the memoir, does not recognize that she is being a threat to the government when she is helping the rural people. More importantly, she merely recognizes her condition when she knows that she is blacklisted. Since she is unaware of her own vulnerability, she is a subaltern character who is constantly in a threat by the government.

Crins, in her memoir shows the pathetic conditions of the Bhutanese people, doomed by the illusionary national concept of 'Gross National Happiness,' which drags sympathy from the audience; however, contradictorily, as the story progresses, Crins herself empathetically falls into the chasm of Bhutanese vulnerability and becomes a subaltern character in the memoir. Crins's heroic deeds to transform the social condition of Tsachapu village and the national rejection, being blacklisted in

Bhutan, which shows how indispensably and unknowingly she becomes a subaltern. To put it subtly, Crins goes to rescue the people in need, helps them, and becomes a helpless character at the end. Therefore, the memoir is not merely a transcription of personal experience but also a depiction of a journey that profoundly portrays the social experience of an individual who unconditionally fights against national policy, being unaware of, I stress, self-subalternity.’

The concept of subaltern comes from postcolonial studies, which examine the power dynamics between colonizers and colonized people. It was a term coined by Italian Neo-Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. According to him:

Subaltern refers to any ‘low rank’ person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them from the basic rights of participation. (1)

Subaltern refers to a person or group who is socially, politically, or economically marginalized or oppressed, often by those in positions of power or authority. The set of ideologies that threatens the perspectives of the dominant group is scarce in subalterns because they are positioned at the margins by the dominant power, and marginalized from participating in shaping the prevailing ideas and values.

Their ideas and values struggle to gain visibility and recognition in the face of the entrenched hegemony. In a similar instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s concept of subaltern expands on Gramsci’s definition and emphasizes the idea of marginalization and exclusion from the dominant discourse. In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, she defined the subaltern as “those who are without a voice or those whose voices are muted, oppressed, and silenced by the dominant discourse” (66). Spivak argues that the subaltern’s inability to speak is not merely due to a lack of political power, but also to their exclusion from the dominant cultural narratives

that shape knowledge and power relations. She highlights how colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy have suppressed the voices of marginalized groups and argues that the subaltern cannot simply speak for themselves, as their speech is already conditioned by the dominant discourse.

Likewise, Ranajit Guha, a historian and founder of the Subaltern Studies Group, idea of subaltern challenges traditional historical narratives that focus solely on the actions and experiences of the dominant classes, and instead seeks to bring to light the agency and resistance of those who have been historically marginalized and silenced. He argues, “Subaltern voices and struggles have been marginalized in mainstream historiography” (16).

Subaltern's presence is smaller in scale and visibility compared to the dominant narratives. The experiences, struggles, and contributions of subalterns are largely overlooked or downplayed. Despite adversities, according to him, subalterns are not passive victims but rather active agents who challenge the dominant power structures.

Therefore, the research presents the layers of the contribution of Crins in Bhutan and through the theoretical insights of Antonio Gramsci, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Ranajit Guha to examine the facets that introduce her to the domain of subaltern. As the memoir inculcates variegated sacrifices of Crins amidst the hurdles she has to experience as an anthropologist. The metamorphosis that she introduced among the youths of the country with the establishment of the not-for-profit hotel school and education in the hospitality sector has no connection merely to her elevation. Instead, these results were to facilitate the children of the nation to let them comprehend the significance of education, career goals, and prosperity of the nation. The concentration on these aspects should have been the area of interest of the nation,

however, the preservation by an outsider was supposedly taken as a hindrance. As Gyanendra Pandey writes “The history of human achievement is also a history of exertion to maintain or alter conditions of production and reproduction, comfort, and want dominance and subordination” (4737).

Humans, throughout time, have strived to improve their circumstances and reshape the world around them. Their accomplishments stories include an effortful narrative to either maintain or change the conditions that govern production and reproduction and policies of power dynamics between groups. Moreover, while considering the history of human achievements, they have struggled for power, resources, and control over the means of production. The contribution of Reiki Crins to establish a non-profit school exemplifies her effort to shape the segregated world of Bhutanese.

The identity of an individual in society has an impenetrable alliance with the socio-political dimensions. Rigid social structures like power politics intervene within the gateway to success which do not let, especially in South Asian countries, the women march towards the location wherein the identity of the gendered body is recognized. The hallmark established by society to introduce the body often hustles women into the labyrinth of power politics. This consequently snatches the propensity of an individual to limit their freedom and knocks their position to a subordinate domain where they are compelled to live an imprisoned life. Reiki Crins’s memoir inculcates these aspects vividly.

The memoir recounts the author’s experiences of living and working in Bhutan as a teacher. The book also explores cultural shock, identity crisis, and the denial of the freedom of speech in a country known for its High Gross National Happiness Index. Crins's journey begins with her excitement to teach in Bhutan; however, she quickly discovers that the reality of life in the country is not like what

she expected. Crins, a citizen from Netherlands describes her struggles with cultural differences and the challenges of adapting to a new way of life. As she becomes more involved in the Bhutanese society, Crins becomes aware of the country's strict controls on freedom of speech and expression. She witnesses the suppression of dissenting voices and the targeting of individuals who are critical of the government. In particular, she learns about the case of Michael Aris being blacklisted because of writing a book about Pema Lingpa, one of the saints of Bhutan. Similarly, a Norwegian anthropologist, Unni Wikan, got blacklisted for publishing the tragic life story of a Bhutanese nun.

Reiki Crins mentions how scary and uncertain it felt in Bhutan, which is not in line with what the Gross National Happiness (GNH) concept promises. GNH indicates that Bhutan is a prosperous country with happy citizens but in reality, it is just a facade to make Bhutan seem like a utopia. The locals feel like the idea of happiness “in GNH is being forced on them like a dictatorship as many of them also call it “Gross National Hypocrites” (Crins 128). This disillusionment is further emphasized by the observation that many young people in Bhutan exhibit arrogance and lack social values, attributes that are unexpected in the country known as the happiest. She writes “Now there are much more dangerous beings than dogs wandering the streets of Thimpu” (Crins 95). Through this book, we can shed light on the reality of life in Bhutan and address the problems that must be resolved.

Crins recognizes the necessity of education in the hospitality and tourism sector and even took proactive steps to address it. She aimed to improve circumstances related to tourism and positively influence the individuals in Bhutan. However, she navigated challenges, particularly related to the Bhutanese code of conduct, highlighting the complex power dynamics that drag her to the margin. Even

though Crins initiated educational projects, the Bhutanese government viewed her as skeptical due to her foreign origin. The rigid framework of Bhutan's government established a challenging environment through which it controlled people, that is, perpetuated the concept of the subaltern and into this Rieki Crins was dragged despite having a positive perception of establishing a hotel school.

Probably due to the fear of being erased from the national ideals, Bhutan arose concern over the work of Rieki Crins and altered her entrance to their state. Implementing the dynamics of power, the nation hegemonized Crin's contribution instead of acknowledging it. To this, Ileana Rodríguez mentions:

Hegemonic nations are very frightened that as national ideas and goals gradually disappear, parochial aims - regional, ethnic, religious, i.e., subaltern dynamics à la Guha - take their place. Violence and agents provocateurs rule the land and are no longer considered law-breakers but heroes fighting an unjust state. Riots are customized. (17)

Powerful countries are extremely worried that national concepts and objectives fade away resulting in the emergence of ethnic, or religious subaltern dynamics as described by Guha.

This shift can lead to violence and provocateurs being seen as heroes fighting against an unjust government rather than as lawbreakers. Crins's welfare for youths in Bhutan is no less than heroic work because "the children who have graduated from class 12 have no clue what to do next, how to find a job or plan their future" (Crins 78). Her aim to raise the local industry through the construction of the hotel school for hospitality training helped in sustainable development as well as supported youths. Her works are constructed with selflessness as they paved opportunistic paths for the population deprived of enjoying the essence of life.

Crins' voluntary conveyance made among the people of the nation was an evocation of a threat to the government of Bhutan, therefore she was blacklisted. To quote her opinion in the title, *The other side of Bhutan: a cruel country with no justice?* says:

But the biggest shock came when I was traveling to Bhutan in 2016. I was waiting in Bangkok Thailand for my visa for Bhutan to be cleared. My counterpart in Bhutan called me in my hotel room to tell me I could not come to Bhutan because I was blacklisted. (1)

Furthermore, she describes the phase of being blacklisted as “a nasty divorce” (1), because it snatched the opportunities and crushed the ideas she had to foster the hospitality sector in Bhutan. This can be interpreted as a reference to the challenges that women face in male-dominated industries. Crins illustrates the derogatory condition of women in Bhutan in this way “Big bones’ are *rus*, the nobility, and ‘small bones’ are *sha*, the landless. Men are *rus* and women are *sha*, inferior” (27). The word ‘nobility’ for men indicates powerful entities like government policies, that operate in a way to suppress the ideas of women as they are described as ‘inferior’ which refers to the marginalized. This illustrates that in Bhutan the hospitality sector is traditionally dominated by men, and women often face discrimination and harassment when they try to enter the field. This can make it difficult for women to succeed in the hospitality sector, and it can also discourage them from pursuing a career in the field.

The action, furthermore, can be taken as a manifestation of the lack of agency and power of the subaltern. It even reflects how the marginalized individual, who may have had innovative ideas and aspirations, was denied the opportunity to implement them due to the dominance of the powerful entity. However, Crins amidst such an

oppressive environment realized the necessity of a school to educate and therefore planned to establish “a hotel school for hospitality training and community development” (76). Amid an oppressive environment, Crins came to a profound realization of the importance of education. She envisioned the establishment of a unique institution—an innovative “hotel school for hospitality training and community development,” (76) recognizing the need for empowerment and community development. This visionary concept aimed to uplift and educate individuals within the community, providing them with opportunities for growth and economic independence.

Crins possessed the unwavering determination to transform the community and make the young generations need skills and education. The vision extended beyond mere education; it encompassed the nurturing of skills in the field of hospitality, recognizing its potential for economic growth and self-sustainability. The hotel aimed to address social issues by creating employment opportunities within the hospitality industry, thereby contributing to the reduction of unemployment in the country. To quote her statement written in the article entitled:

How a dream came true” says, “I wanted to focus on quality vocational training because there is a lot of youth that are looking for work, and hospitality vocational training institute can be a cradle for the tourism and hospitality industry development. (3)

Recognizing the pressing need for employment among the youth, she was determined to prioritize the provision of high-quality vocational training. A platform for hospitality training aimed to equip individuals with marketable skills that could lead to gainful employment and economic stability. The school would not only offer

vocational education but would also foster a sense of unity and pride within the community, inspiring a collective spirit of progress and development.

Therefore, through the establishment of a vocational training institute dedicated to hospitality, she aimed to create a nurturing environment that would catalyze the development of the tourism and hospitality industry. Her motive was to equip aspiring individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in this sector through comprehensive and specialized training programs. Because of this, Crins writes, “the hotel school was started in March 2015 located in Paro, Bhutan” (105) with an ultimate goal to bridge the gap between job seekers and the industry’s demands, fostering a workforce that would contribute to the sustainable growth of the hospitality sector.

The venture is a unique sustainable project that focuses on social initiatives in nature that aims to create job opportunities in the hospitality industry and help reduce unemployment in the country. The aforementioned shreds of evidence prove that Crins had no personal beneficiaries in establishing the hotel school in Bhutan. Her ultimate goal resides in the welfare of the kingdom’s pathetic condition and the promotion of their culture to the world as she notes “During our last evening in Bhutan I visited a friend who has a large hotel in Paro. It was built in the late 1970s when Bhutan was still very much closed to the outside world and the restaurants were in a very bad state” (95).

The statement states that her target is centric on improving the condition of the hotel in Bhutan. She had planned to provide training and employment opportunities to unemployed people, which will also promote sustainable tourism in Bhutan as the country reflects a unique cultural landscape with a distinct culture, wisdom, and customs of the people living in Bhutan. Contradictorily, her establishment, by the

Bhutan government, was not accepted as to foster the hospitality sector but rather was disregarded and also actively suppressed by the dominant forces. This attitude clarifies that she was deliberately made a subaltern character. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes, “The subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (41). Concerning Crins, who is depicted as a female subaltern, the statement highlights the further marginalization and invisibility faced by women in various contexts. The reference to the subaltern as “even more deeply in the shadow” suggests that female subalterns experience even greater levels of oppression and marginalization than their male counterparts. It emphasizes the need to address the specific challenges faced by women in subaltern positions and the importance of giving them a voice and representation to challenge their marginalized status. In Crins’s story, it becomes crucial to recognize and empower her as a female subaltern, shedding light on her experiences and providing platforms for her to express herself and affect change.

In a similar instance, Crins was being vocal through her efforts, and devaluing her efforts is equivalent to silencing her voice. To quote the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that says “For the (gender-unspecified) “true” subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself” (40).

The statement suggests that for a particular marginalized group, referred to as a subaltern group, their identity is based on being different from the dominant majority. This group is seen as not having a voice or the ability to fully understand and express themselves. It elaborates that the subaltern groups face challenges and also encounter limitations in representing themselves and expressing their voices within existing power structures. Connecting it to Crins, the Bhutanese government has silenced her

voice refusing to grant her a visa to enter the country. This act of silencing reflects the power dynamics between the subaltern and those in power.

The school was supposed to serve as a beacon of hope, offering opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and community upliftment because, through education and training, youths acquired the necessary tools to break free from the chains of oppression and forge a path toward a brighter future. Besides the hotel school, Crins was sidelined even when she was planning to establish a school and was in search of an investor. Her meeting with Paolo, who is a seasoned financier and banker, was “regarded with a level of respect than the way she was treated” (95) by the civil servants. Paolo is treated with a higher level of respect whereas Crins’s presence by the same people was taken trivially. The depreciated treatment performed by the people of the government toward Crins sheds light on the gender dynamics and disparities that she faces as a woman, especially a subaltern individual. She defines the situation as “how it works in the male world!” (95) and indicates that “it’s so much easier for men to get things done and to be taken seriously” (95). She becomes aware of the privileges and advantages that men have in terms of getting things done and being taken seriously. This stark contrast makes her realize the challenges she faces in a male-dominated world. The experience also serves as an eye-opener for Crins, highlighting the systemic barriers and inequalities she encounters as a female subaltern, inspiring her to challenge these gender-based disparities and strive for equal treatment and opportunities.

To a certain extent, the subaltern is always, by definition, epistemologically below the dominant culture. This even crushes the voice and obstructs them from being visualized as the people in mainstream positions. Because of this, as J Maggio writes, “The ‘self/ other’ distinction is tied up in the tension between ‘speaking’ and

‘being heard’” (430). The discrepancies between ‘self’ and ‘other’ is about how we see ourselves and others which is ultimately tied up between ‘speaking’ and ‘being heard’ as it challenges one to be understood and acknowledged by others. This takes a complicated turn in a case when some voices are disregarded or silenced, causing a sense of exclusion or marginalization. In the context of Crins, being blacklisted in Bhutan, individuals or entities are effectively designated as the ‘other’ by those in power who control the narrative or have the authority to silence certain voices. The act of blacklisting serves to position Crins outside the accepted boundaries of society to exclude individuals because, through the hotel school, she was communicating extravagantly which even the government was not able to do.

The ‘self/other’ distinction represents the dichotomy between those who have the power and agency to speak and be heard and those who are silenced or denied a platform to express themselves. This distinction is not merely a binary division but a relational concept that exists in a dynamic interplay. Similarly, the tension between ‘speaking’ and ‘being heard’ emphasizes the power dynamics at play. This can be explicitly comprehended through the statement of Crins as she writes “When we handed out forms to be filled in, one question was ‘What makes you happy? One boy wrote ‘not to be hungry’” (94).

If a boy could not speak he would not have expressed his suffering. But when provided agency he spoke out the reality. This illustrates that individuals or groups possess the capacity to speak and express their thoughts, ideas, or concerns, only when people in power presents their concern and express their ability to be heard, and therefore, it is solely dependent on the willingness of those in power to listen and acknowledge their perspectives.

The act of blacklisting aggravates this tension by actively suppressing the voices of the marginalized and impeding their chances of being heard. This connection also implies that the self/other distinction is not solely about individual identities but also about the power dynamics and structures that shape the ability to speak and be heard. It highlights the significance of inclusivity, fairness, and equal access to platforms of expression, which Crins was able to serve, and through her determination on hotel school presented her potential consequences in eliminating the sense of marginalization and exclusion from society.

People in power may have taken her project as her strategic attempt to bring herself into the mainstream discourse and to let others be recognized. This is because Crins is from the Netherlands, and for the project, she was collecting funds, she had also “applied for a budget at The European Union” (86). Moreover, she also contacted “the Dutch organization, Swiss Bank and also Nepalese entrepreneur” (87) for fundraising purposes. For the Bhutanese government, the revelation of the actual picture of how Bhutan is to the world was a threat because Bhutan claims them as the “happiest country” in the world. *Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity, and Happiness* mentions that:

The development of Bhutanese society has traditionally been an ‘inclusive’ process. Our rural communities made full use of the knowledge and skills of all members of society, including the functionally illiterate and the elderly.

They were societies without discrimination. The inferior position occupied by women in many countries was unknown in Bhutan. (20)

The official report of Bhutan writes that throughout its history, Bhutanese society has followed an inclusive development approach, wherein rural communities actively engaged and valued the contributions of all individuals, regardless of their literacy

levels or age, thus avoiding any form of discrimination. The traditional fabric of Bhutanese society was woven with an egalitarian thread, as women did not experience the inferior status that many women faced in other nations, reflecting a unique absence of gender-based discrimination in the country. In Bhutan, societal progress was driven by the collective wisdom and expertise of every member, going beyond mere qualifications or formal education, as even the functionally illiterate individuals and the elderly were recognized and actively involved in shaping the growth and development of their communities.

The development path of Bhutanese society stood out for its inclusive nature, ensuring that no one was left behind or marginalized, as the knowledge and skills possessed by people, irrespective of their educational background or age, were highly valued and utilized for the betterment of the entire society. Unlike in many other nations where gender disparities persisted, Bhutan stood as a remarkable exception, where women did not encounter the inferior position or discrimination prevalent in various countries, underscoring the absence of gender-based inequalities and the inclusive ethos that prevailed within Bhutanese society. However, I argue that if Bhutan was concerned about the youths of the country and had respectful attitudes towards the women Crins would never have to devote herself, leaving her family behind in her homeland, to the promotion of Bhutan.

Moreover, Bhutan would never have blacklisted her rather would have praised her work and provided her a token of love for visualizing what the government itself was indifferent to about the condition of societies of the country. Because she was made subaltern, she choose to communicate and make other people hear what she had to confront through her writing, *Blacklisted in Bhutan*. The book is her way of resisting and also indicates that subalterns do not remain silent rather they can speak

and it connects with the argument of Ranajit Guha according to whom subalterns are not passive victims but rather active agents who challenge the dominant power structures. According to Ranajit Guha, “Spontaneity is synonymous with reflexive action so that to rescue the peasants from ‘spontaneity’, rebellion is posited as “a motivated and conscious undertaking on the part of the rural masses” (2).

Guha asserts that the concept of reflexive action is associated with the idea of spontaneity. He argues that spontaneity is not a passive and unorganized response of the masses to their oppressive conditions but rather it is an act of rebellion that should be viewed as a motivated and conscious undertaking by the rural masses. Moreover, in his framework, reflexive action involves a deliberate and purposeful response from the subaltern groups, rather than a spontaneous outburst without agency or direction. By reframing rebellion as a motivated and conscious endeavor, Guha challenges the notion that the actions of the rural masses are simply reactionary or impulsive.

Guha’s perspective also emphasizes that the reflexive action of subaltern groups involves thoughtful planning, strategizing, and organization. It acknowledges the agency and intentionality of the masses in their efforts to resist oppression and assert their rights. Likewise, reflexivity, according to experts, has two distinct categories that indicate, “A low rate of reflexivity results in an outer-direction of the individual’s identity, whereas a high rate of reflexivity results in independent action forming pro-actively and inner-directed autonomous identity” (Giddens 14).

The statement defines people with a low rate of reflexivity as having less self-awareness and introspection. Consequently, their identity is more influenced by external factors and expectations, leading to an outer-directed identity. In this case, their actions tend to be driven by external influences and societal norms. In contrast, lies a high rate reflectivity of in individuals who possess a greater level of self-

awareness and introspection. They actively reflect on their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, which leads to a more independent and self-directed approach to their actions. Their identity is shaped proactively and autonomously from within, resulting in an inner-directed identity. Crins holds a high rate of reflectivity as she internalizes that the government sidelined her crushing her devotion and efforts towards the country. As a reaction, she writes the text and engages in introspection to understand how her identity and actions are perceived and interpreted by people in power in the country including her familiarization with the actions and intentions. Her text is also a question of the power dynamics, systemic biases, and structures that led to her exclusion despite working for their welfare.

She actively seeks avenues and challenges their reason to blacklist her and expresses their perspectives towards her works and advocates for change. This reflexivity allows her to navigate her circumstances with a deeper understanding and the larger social context. To connect it to her text, *Blacklisted in Bhutan*, is a strategic resistance towards the oppression she is obliged to experience which is a deliberate act of the Bhutanese government. She writes, “Writing this book feels so liberating” (126), and this shows that through the book, she is freeing herself from the oppressive conditions and constraints. She tries to break the system of power and claims her rights which have been deliberately squashed. Wang Lingzhen defines transformation as “a total dismantlement and transformation of structures at both local and global levels” (315). It is a transformative process that aims to create an equitable and inclusive society by reducing discriminatory ideologies. Similarly, Crins writing advocates for a deeper recognition of their agency and conscious decision-making processes as it also helps in reducing the actions of subaltern groups to mere

spontaneous reactions. Thus, it can be interpreted as a more nuanced way of resistance and action of empowering the self in struggles against oppressive forces.

Crins resistive actions define that even subaltern has the potential to resist their oppressor asserting their agency. Arun K. Patnaik incorporating Antonio Gramsci's idea mentions:

The whole idea of 'losing sight of' one's subjectivity, one's potentialities, the causality of one's action, means only this: the working class is tied to the totality of "structural antagonisms" in bourgeois society without any knowledge of being so tied; it is consequently 'duped' by the possibilities in the bourgeois system. (8)

The loss of subjectivity and potentialities indicates being confined within the boundaries with no insight on why is individual there. In this context, the term "structural antagonisms" refers to the inherent conflicts and inequalities which often exploit the marginalized. To relate it to Crins, she strives to understand or realize the "reason for being blacklisted" (Crins 126) which to some extent it affected her psychology. She feels deceived by the government which failed her to recognize the barriers that limited her potential and let her question herself as she writes, "This was strange because I am not a spy, nor do I work in politics. I am not a threat to society or wait a minute, maybe I am?" (127).

This internal dialogue showcases a moment of introspection and self-doubt, as Crins grapples with the idea of her own impact on society and the potential implications of her actions or beliefs. The statement reflects a moment of uncertainty and self-reflection regarding her own identity and the potential impact she has been able to make on society. At first, she finds it strange to consider herself as a spy or someone

involved in politics, as she has no connection in those fields and even believes that she is not a threat to society.

However, upon further contemplation, she begins to question her assumptions and wonders if there might be a possibility that she is indeed a threat. This realization prompts her to rethink if there are negative aspects of her actions, beliefs, or influence that could potentially be seen as threatening or harmful to society. It highlights the complexity of self-perception and the recognition that one's role in society may not always be as straightforward as initially assumed. Because of this, she intended to recognize her agency or the power to challenge and transform the existing social structures that made her question her capabilities. Furthermore, Patnaik points out, "some cognitive processes of the subaltern groups in the hegemony process are in a crucial sense created by the subalterns themselves" (8). Despite being marginalized, the subalterns can create or develop certain cognitive processes that help them navigate their circumstances and resist the oppressive systems they face.

These cognitive processes are shaped by the subalterns themselves based on their experiences, perspectives, and struggles. In the context of the hegemony process, which refers to control over society, the subalterns are not merely passive recipients or victims. They actively contribute to the development of cognitive processes that allow them to understand their position and resist the hegemonic power. These processes can include critical thinking, alternative worldviews, forms of collective consciousness, or strategies of resistance. By engaging in these processes, the subalterns challenge the dominant narratives and ideologies imposed upon them and create their own ways of understanding and responding to their circumstances. To relate it to Crins, she resists the government's attempts to silence her by continuing to report on Bhutan from outside the country. She writes, "Now that I am blacklisted

too, I am free to tell my story” (126). This statement is a declaration that reflects a sense of resilience, determination, and a desire to have her voice heard despite the adversity she has faced. It highlights the power of storytelling and the importance of self-expression as a means of reclaiming agency and shaping one’s narrative. It also suggests that the speaker has been blacklisted, and this indicates that she has faced some form of exclusion or restriction imposed upon her. However, instead of seeing this as a negative or limiting experience, she finds a newfound sense of freedom in her situation.

Being blacklisted can often come with social consequences, such as being silenced or marginalized. However, in this case, Crins perceives it as an opportunity to share her story without inhibition. The act of being blacklisted has liberated her from any constraints or fears she may have had about speaking out. Stating that she is now free to tell her story, she also implies that the previous barriers or limitations placed upon her no longer hold her back. She feels empowered to express herself and share her experiences, regardless of any potential consequences or judgment. This act of resistance shows how the subaltern can use their agency to antagonize the structure of power that limits their freedom. Through the writing, she develops an instinct of rebellion against the people in power deeply resenting the perspectives of oppressors.

However, the behavior of the government reflects the politics of exclusion. The exclusive nature of the government despite the contributions made by Crins indicates their domination which has a connection with hegemonic tendency.

Regarding this, Christopher Chase-Dunn writes,

Dominance and subordination are relationships of the parts, and dominance is inherent hegemony. However hegemony is more than dominance. Hegemony

is a form in which dominance is obscured by achieving an appearance of acquiescence to this whole as if it were the natural order of things. (366)

The statement highlights the distinction between dominance and hegemony, emphasizing that while dominance involves the relationship between the dominant and subordinate parts, hegemony goes beyond mere dominance. Hegemony is described as a form or mode in which dominance operates, but it also involves the obscuring or concealing of dominance through the creation of an appearance of acquiescence.

Dominance is an overt expression of power dynamics, where one entity is clearly in a position of superiority or control over another. Hegemony, on the other hand, goes beyond the direct exercise of dominance. It involves the construction of a broader social, cultural, and ideological framework that makes dominance appear natural, inevitable, and accepted by both the dominant and subordinate groups. Hegemony operates by creating a sense of consent and acquiescence to the existing power structures, presenting them as the "natural order of things" rather than the product of specific interests or power relations. To this, Hyug Baeg Im writes:

The dominant class obtains consent from the subordinate classes through ‘a process of massive indoctrination’ or ‘ideological predominance over the subordinate classes’ or ‘endless production of false consciousness’ or ‘ideological mystification’. (124)

The statement identifies that in the context of hegemony, the dominant class secures the consent of the subordinate classes through various means. This involves the dissemination of dominant ideologies and values that shape the consciousness of the subordinated groups.

Another strategy is the ideological predominance over the subordinate classes, where the dominant class establishes its ideas as the prevailing and unquestioned norms. Additionally, the perpetuation of false consciousness plays a role, as the dominant class continually produces misleading beliefs and narratives that mask the true nature of power relations. As Crins writes, “I learned that the royals in Bhutan can do anything they want and get away with it” (127). The statement suggests a perceived hegemonic tendency in Bhutan, particularly with regard to the royal family. It implies that the royals have unchecked power and authority, allowing them to act without consequences. This notion aligns with the concept of hegemony, where a dominant group, in this case, the royals, exercises control and influence over society.

In Bhutan, the perception that the royals can act with impunity implies a dominance that extends beyond legal and moral boundaries. This hegemonic tendency allows them to evade accountability and maintain their power. The ruling class or dominant group establishes their actions as acceptable or even natural, perpetuating the perception of their authority and control. However, if the perception of the royal family's ability to act without consequences is widespread, it raises questions about the extent of their hegemonic influence and the challenges faced by those who seek to challenge or question their authority. Because of this, they neglected Crins's efforts and marginalized her as she had obtained ideas of how actually royals are. This process of ideological mystification, that is, rejecting Crins obscures the underlying power dynamics, enabling the dominant class to maintain its control while appearing legitimate and natural. Again, relating to Crins writes, “A visitor from Bhutan told me that Bhutan is a very difficult country to do anything in, especially in investments. You can never be sure that you will get your money out of the country again, and even much worse things can happen”(127).

This clarifies that Bhutan does not restrict people who tend to invest in the country but once the investments are made, the country ignores the owner but rather accepts the contributions made by the people.

The visitor picturizes the actual intention of Bhutan. His perspective highlights concerns about potential risks associated with conducting various activities, particularly investments, in Bhutan. It is a tactic of the Bhutanese government as it presents its actions to the world as natural and in an unquestionable order, but internalizes the view of domination. Relating it to Crins, they subordinate her with no threats or use of force leaving everyone strange. Dante Germino elaborates on this as a hegemony which can be defined as:

. . . the means by which the modern state generates consent without the use or threat of force. Consent is most easily generated in civil society, which appears to be independent of political control. In fact, all of the institutional mechanisms of civil society are saturated with politics. Hegemony is the exercise of control over the masses through the swindle of consent. It will be superseded in the “regulated society.”(26)

Hegemony plays a role in maintaining subordination by exercising control over the masses through the manipulation of consent. The ruling class establishes their ideologies, values, and norms as the prevailing ones, creating a false sense of consensus and natural order. For Crins, being a subaltern implies occupying a marginalized and subordinate position within the power structure. In her experience, this hegemonic control may manifest in ways, such as the challenges she faces in her efforts to make a difference in Bhutan. The difficulties she encounters in investments and the uncertainty surrounding the ability to withdraw money from the country reflect the control and constraints imposed by the dominant structures.

The concept of hegemony suggests that Crins, as a subaltern, is subject to the swindle of consent, where the dominant forces create an illusion of agreement and acceptance of the existing power dynamics. However, the statement also implies that this hegemonic control is not permanent. It suggests that in the “regulated society, (26)” which could signify a transformed or restructured social order, hegemony will be surpassed or replaced. Challenging the dominant structures and elevating the condition of the marginalized village, Crins is confronting the hegemonic control that seeks to maintain subordination. By resisting and seeking to empower the subaltern groups, she becomes a site of resistance within the periphery.

In a similar instance, her memoir becomes a voice for the voiceless, using subaltern consciousness to challenge and expose the swindling of consent perpetuated by hegemonic forces. As she writes, “In Bhutan there is no freedom of speech, journalists cannot do their work, they are not allowed to report on corruption or shady practices, and certainly nothing that involves members of the royal family” (127). The statement suggests a lack of freedom of speech and restrictions on journalism in Bhutan. It indicates that journalists face limitations in their work, particularly when it comes to reporting on topics such as corruption or questionable practices. These restrictions on freedom of speech and media indicate a control mechanism that limits the flow of information and curtails transparency. Such limitations align with a hegemonic tendency, where the dominant forces seek to maintain their power and authority by controlling the narrative and suppressing dissenting voices. By imposing restrictions on freedom of speech and journalism, the dominant forces in Bhutan may be able to manipulate public perception, maintain a positive image, and protect their interests. It suggests an environment where dissenting views or information that challenges the existing power structures are silenced or ignored.

Bhutan restricted Crins, probably, with an attitude to keep the situation of the nation confidential. But, little do they know, their act raised questions that in turn were heavier for the royals themselves. The secret did not remain within a closed circle but rather exploded. As Crins points out:

It is ironic that the Western world admires the country so much for its Gross National Happiness. Having said that many Bhutanese themselves call it the Gross National Hypocrites because the people, who work for the Centre of Bhutan Studies, this institution is responsible to implement the GNH principles into Bhutanese society are the unhappiest people in Bhutan. (128)

The irony lies in the contrast between the external admiration for Bhutan's focus on happiness and the internal perception that the very individuals entrusted with implementing GNH principles are not experiencing happiness themselves. This dissonance raises questions about the effectiveness of the implementation and the well-being of those involved. It's important to recognize that this statement represents a particular perspective and may not reflect the experiences and opinions of all Bhutanese or individuals involved in promoting GNH. However, if there is a widespread perception of unhappiness among those working on implementing GNH principles, it invites critical reflection on the effectiveness and impact of these efforts.

In conclusion, Reiki Crins is a subaltern character in her memoir, *Blacklisted in Bhutan*, despite her voluntary contributions to the societies of Bhutan. Crins exposes herself as a revolutionary character with the establishment of a hotel school; nevertheless, her revolution does not reckon her position stronger enough to surpass the domination of the Bhutanese government. She intends to educate the youths in Bhutan as they needed the proper guidance regarding career opportunities, but fails to consolidate her firmness to grip her indestructible position in Bhutan. She faces a

stark contrast in an image of Bhutan which is visualized as the world's happiest nation and known for its Gross National Happiness and the real condition of the people living in the particular nation, but helplessly fails to acknowledge her contradictory position, which is to say what she was thinking as her good deeds were in fact diabolical for the government.

Crins's contribution helped in solving the issues by providing training in various fields like cuisine, housekeeping, guiding, and basic skills to youths that is essential to perform the work of hospitality effectively. Instead of admiring the contribution Crins made, she was taken as a threat. And, interestingly, she was unaware of her own vulnerability and the atmosphere that was composed by the government she barely knew it. She experiences the dominance from the masculine society and the government that restricts her without her knowledge. And after being blacklisted, she chooses to confront by publishing her story where she shows her dissatisfaction towards the Bhutanese government. Crins confronting the hegemonic control that seeks to maintain subordination. By resisting and seeking to empower the subaltern groups, she becomes a site of resistance within the periphery. Hence, she is a subaltern character who tries to concretize others' foundations without knowing the hollowness of her own.

Works Cited

- Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness II*. Planning Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan, 2020.
<https://www.greengrowthknowledge.org/sites/default/files/downloads/policy-atabase//Bhutan%20Vision%202020%20II.pdf>. Accessed 29 March 2023.
- Burney, Shehla. "Chapter Two: Edward Said and Postcolonial Theory: Disjunctured Identities and the Subaltern Voice." *Counterpoints*, vol. 417, 2012, pp. 41–60. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42981699>. Accessed 29 May 2023.
- Chase-Dunn, Christopher, et al. "Hegemony and Social Change." *Mershon International Studies Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, 1994, pp. 361–76. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/222747>. Accessed 29 May 2023.
- Crins, Reiki. *Blacklisted in Bhutan: Love Lost and Love Transformed in the land of Gross National Happiness*, Independently Published, 2018.
- Crins, Rieki. "The other side of Bhutan: a cruel country with no justice?" *Medium*, 28 December 2018, <https://medium.com/@riekicrins/the-other-side-of-bhutan-a-cruel-country-with-no-justice-ab623a4432b6>.
- Danius, Sara, et al. "An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *Boundary 2*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1993, pp. 24–50. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/303357>. Accessed 29 May 2023.
- Germino, Dante. "Antonio Gramsci: From the Margins to the Center, the Journey of a Hunchback." *Boundary 2*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1986, pp. 19–30. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/303231>. Accessed 29 May 2023.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford University Press, 1991.

Guha, Ranajit. *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

–“How A Dream Came True.” *LinkedIn*, 9 September 2015,

https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-dream-came-true-dr-rieki-crins-rubinstein?trk=article-ssr-frontend-pulse_more-articles_related-content-card.

Im, Hyug Baeg. “Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony in Gramsci.” *Asian Perspective*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1991, pp. 123–56. *JSTOR*,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/42705295>. Accessed 29 May 2023.

Lingzhen, WANG. “Women’s Liberation.” *Afterlives of Chinese Communism:*

Political Concepts from Mao to Xi, edited by Christian Sorace et al., ANU

Press, 2019, pp. 315–24. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvk3gng9.54>.

Accessed 29 May 2023.

Louai, El Habib. (2012). “Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to

Spivak: Historical developments and new applications.” *African Journal of History and Culture*, vol. 4(1), 2012, pp.4-8.

<http://www.academicjournals.org/AJHC> DOI:10.5897/AJHC11.020.

Maggio, J. ““Can the Subaltern Be Heard?”: Political Theory, Translation,

Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2007, pp. 419–43.

JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40645229>. Accessed 29 May 2023.

Pandey, Gyanendra. “The Subaltern as Subaltern Citizen.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 46, 2006, pp. 4735–41. *JSTOR*,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4418914>. Accessed 26 Apr. 2023.

- Patnaik, Arun K. "Gramsci's Concept of Common Sense: Towards a Theory of Subaltern Consciousness in Hegemony Processes." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 23, no. 5, 1988, pp. PE2–10. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4378042>. Accessed 29 May 2023.
- Rodríguez, Ileana. "Rethinking the Subaltern: Patterns and Places of Subalternity in the New Millennium" *Dispositio*, vol. 19, no. 46, 1994, pp. 13–25. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41491503>. Accessed 26 Apr. 2023.
- Rubinstein, Dr. Reiki Crins. "Bhutan News Service, this is a review of a reader about the book "Blacklisted in Bhutan" by Rieki Crins." *LinkedIn*, 4 February 2019, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/bhutan-news-service-review-reader-book-blacklisted-crins-rubinstein/>.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Edited by Rosalind C. Morris, Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Timsina, Bibechana Sharma. *Gross National Happiness: A Hegemonic Construct in Rieki Crins's Blacklisted in Bhutan*. 2023. Tribhuvan University, Masters thesis.