

Tribhuvan University

Critiquing Capitalist Ideology in Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*

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By

Tilak Prasad Kafle

Roll No.: 279/068/069

T.U. Regd. No.: 6-2-48-2726-2006

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English
Kritipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Recommendation

Tilak Prasad Kafle has completed her thesis entitled "Critiquing Capitalist Ideology in Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*" under my supervision. He carried out her research from 2075/08/01 B.S. to 2076/04/19 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

Hem Lal Pandey

Supervisor

Date:-----

Tribhuvan University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Approval Letter

This thesis entitled "Critiquing Capitalist Ideology in Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Tilak Prasad Kafle has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date:.....

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Abstract

This thesis on Italo Calvino's The Path to the Spiders' Nests examines how major characters' schizophrenic acts have the potential to subvert the capitalist ideology of Italian regime during the period of Second World War. It analyzes the novel from the perspective of schizoanalysis using ideas of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of schizoanalysis. Schizophrenic characteristics of the play display subversive politics with the radical potential to overthrow capitalistic ideals. In an attempt to resist fascist regime, Pin, Kim and Dritto attempt join partisan groups. In their acts, they become chaotic, disruptive and rebellious. They do not conform to the ideology of the regime. Moreover, Pin's childish acts whims reflect schizophrenic behavior as he imitates the activities of adult. Their innocent imitation proves to be revolutionary and their acts and desires lead them to a different world of their own. Thus, in their acts, they end up becoming split or schizophrenic personalities, which helps them cope with totalizing or repressive capitalist ideology of their society.

Key Words: Capitalism, Subversion, Schizophrenia, Power, Ideology

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I. Schizophrenic Personality of Characters in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*

This research work studies Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* (1998) from the perspective of schizoanalysis. The study examines how the major character Pin, an orphan young boy, becomes a schizophrenic during wartime in Italy. Moreover, his sister's involvement in prostitution makes him depressed. He becomes a comic character in the groups of adults. He even mixes up with the partisan groups to fight three types of war: a civil war against Italian fascists, a war of national liberation against German occupation, and a class war against the ruling elites. So, his revolutionary acts similar to that of schizophrenia reflect subversive act against oppressive ruling ideology.

Pin, as a homeless boy, makes considerable efforts to be accepted and understood by everyone in the chaotic time. He is thus a nomad in the analysis of Deleuze and Guattari. In his daily life, Pin suffers the consequences of the war. His revolutionary and aggressive character reflects the environment in which he has been brought up. Since he was born, his country Italy has been at war. Another thing that makes him revolutionary is that the regime has compelled his sister to engage in prostitution.

The story of the novel *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* revolves around a gun that Pin steals from a German soldier who regularly visits his sister. He hides it where the spiders build their nest. From then on the thought of the gun takes much of his time. Although Pin completely feels at home in the hostile surroundings and survival does not pose a challenge, he becomes a revolutionary due to the ongoing war. Pin's innocent and sometimes aggressive acts reflect his revolutionary nature even though that he is not depicted as having extraordinary capabilities or a sense of judgment. So, the attempt to possess gun symbolizes the attempt to possess power.

From the beginning to the end, the narration is characterized by complete simplicity, and disguised with hidden symbols. The novel is full of war images and symbols, which symbolize the devastation and debris left by the Second World War in Italian province. Calvino brings out such images and symbols in order to make the young protagonist Pin ready to face the anarchy and disorder of the repressive regime during the war period. Thus, by using the images and symbols of chaos, war and devastation, Calvino shows man's initiation into the world of uncertainty, disorder and anarchy, which make common people psychotic.

As the novel *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* was written during World War II, critics have tended to view the novel as a neorealist text. The idea of neorealism holds that in society, conflict is a possibility at any time and the social system is viewed as completely and always anarchic and chaotic. And power is the most important factor in international relations. In this novel, Calvino relates the story through the child protagonist who is pushed into this chaotic and disorderly world as the war takes place. In this regard, Constance Markey observes that throughout the early narrative works of Calvino, "the child would be a dominant image in neorealist literature (and films), as well as in early Calvino" (31). The child image in neorealist narration shows the innocence unpolluted by the miseries of the war and poverty.

The novel offers a picture of Northern Italy at the end of World War II, with fighting (and espionage and betrayal) among various political and military forces-- Germans, fascists, communists, Bolsheviks, and local residents recruited to one side or another. There is no overall description of these groups, or their different political agendas, or their relative strength, or their success or failure, nothing to indicate who is winning or losing. This is in no way a history. The picture is of pointless, chaotic

fighting, which is a consequence of the story being presented mostly from the perspective of a child, Pin, who is caught up in it. Pin is a slum child, who is apprenticed to a shoemaker, who lives with his older sister, a prostitute who serves whoever will pay, with no concern about political or military affiliation. Through the portrayal of young and innocent protagonist Pin, Calvino examines how a devastating war ruined not only the Italian city but also the innocence of a child. This shows how the war affects everyone whether it is the one is young, or old.

As neorealist critics have shown, Joseph Francese views the novel as semi-autobiographical work as he states how Calvino repeatedly stressed his regret for having "transfigured his comrades-in-arms into literary characters" (174). Calvin depicts the real situation of that period through this novel. Pin appears as a rascal, singer and entertainer, assistant to a cobbler and a brother to a prostitute. These different dimensions of Pin reflect his conscious individual with revolutionary potential against exploitation and injustice, which is reflected through his songs. So, reality gets transformed into revolutionary potential through the acts of young boy.

Although Pin has lost the innocence of childhood, he is not mature enough to engage in adult world. Moreover, it can well be stated that he is inexperienced in matters related to politics and ideology. Franco Ricci states that Calvino's characters are often "non-participating observers of history, beginning with the 'non-adult' Pin and ending with the 'non-man' Palomar" (85). Reality, narrated through the eyes of Pin, turns out to be an eerie fairytale. Annalisa Sacca, in the article "Towards a European Millennium: The Legacy of Italo Calvino," supports this with the example of the pistol that Pin steals from the German officer. She states:

The story is narrated with the flavor of a tale, where the protagonist Pin steals and hides a pistol that becomes a kind of talisman, his magic wand in a magic

place that is the path of the nests of the spiders. In his vicissitudes, he comes in contact with the world of the adults, which he does not understand, cannot judge, but in which he witnesses tragedies, sufferings, and love. (1570)

There is also another aspect to the employment of a child hero in the works of Calvino. As Markey again observes, the stories in *Adarn*, *One Afternoon* have many stories with child protagonists, giving us a glimpse of 'Calvino's notion of neorealism,' and also an early sign of the characters that would follow in his later works and are all like, "a naive misfit who loquaciously spins Huck Finn yarns for the reader's amusement or who, like the misanthropic Pin in *Path*, suspiciously withdraws to a world of private fantasies" (31). It was due to these qualities that are specifically related to language, narration and plot settings, which were the characteristics of Neorealism.

Italo Calvino is always remembered for continual literary innovation. Over the almost forty years of his creative career in fiction, Calvino investigated so many disparate approaches to form, narrative and genre, that this very experimentalism could be said to be the only really predictable element of the author's style. Yet behind this never ending formal revising lies a motivation that might appropriately rise to the level of a guiding principle for Calvino. He seemed to answer the question as to what is literature for. This inquiry motivated Calvino from the very beginning, and haunted him until the very end. His earliest Neo-Realist works, such as *Youth in Turin* place anti-authoritarian ideological messages about social and political progressivism at the center of an immediate and material world. His later fable-like and self-reflexive stories *Marcivaldo* and *Winter's Night* approach the same political concerns precisely by avoiding the immediate and material in favor of the intellectually demanding and uncertain world.

The nature of this lifelong re-visioning reveals Calvino's dedicated pursuit of the political usefulness of literature and provides a critical conceptual framework for reading any of his fiction. If Calvino's art is useful to us, it is certainly not in a narrowly definable sort of way. Rather, it has something to do with that last, broad and penetrating insight quoted from his 1976 lecture: "Politics, like literature, must above all know itself and distrust itself." There has been a great deal of discussion in this paper of Calvino's critical distrustfulness. For as it becomes explicitly clear over the many years of Calvino's artistic career, the author's conception of literature eventually comes very near to that of understanding. Angela Jeannet has observed that Calvino's protagonists are "usually searchers," who "inspect and watch intently the world around them in order to understand themselves and it" (61). Pin, with his innocent curiosity, tirelessly observes the smallest of details about what is happening around him, and ultimately discovers his own unique place in the world: the secret place where the spiders make their nests.

When *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* was first published, many critics felt that Calvino consciously chose his subject and theme. But the theme of the early short stories and first novel of Calvino, was not his choice, because Calvino was simply giving expression to the collective "intellectual consciousness" against "Fascism, German occupation, the Resistance, and the unsettling aftermath of a long war, and an even longer despotic regime," which "were the devils of the day" (Olkin 143). Thus, Calvino raised and dealt with the burning issues of the time.

The violence of representation has been effectively expressed by Calvino in the introduction to *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. He explains what happens when young writers wish to express their thoughts about a powerful, important experience:

. . . the first book instantly becomes a barrier between you and that experience, it severs the links that binds you to those facts, destroys your precious hoard of memories—a hoard in the sense that it would have become a reserve on which to draw permanently if you had not been in such a hurry to spend it, to squander it, to impose an arbitrary hierarchy on the images that you had kept stored there, to separate the privileged images, which you believed contained a genuinely poetic emotion, from the others . . . in short to set up in your arrogance a different memory, one that has been given another shape. (1)

Franco Ricci notes that Calvino's objective in writing the novel is to prepare the protagonist Pin to make him a mature individual as he states the shooting of a rifle is an attempt to possess an object because in the novel the "object" that Pin tries to possess is only an entrance and acceptance into the adult world. But he remains as an outcast from the "genuine manhood" (Ricci 51). However, this research work attempts to study how Calvino's text is an attempt to make a man prepared to face and enter the chaotic world which is marked by anarchy, disorder, capitalist ideology and schizophrenia.

During his early phase of his writing career, Calvino's association with the Communist party and the neorealist thought of school grew weak. While he always maintained a 'strong identity with Italy's oppressed groups,' his early skepticism of dogmatic ideologies prevented him from ever giving himself fully to Communism. According to Markey, in the mid-1950s his ties to the Communists which shaped his political writings were very unstable:

The final blow to Calvino's Communist allegiance probably came with the brute Soviet takeover of Hungary in 1956. In an interview years after the incident, Calvino acknowledged that the news of the Hungarian invasion,

which spelled the end of personal freedom in that country, also ended once and for all his Communist Party affiliation . . . From this moment on, the author's politics took on an Italian flavor, in that (not unlike other Italian writers, including the great political poet Dante), he declared himself a party unto himself. Indeed, by the end of his life, the author fairly bristled at the mention of politics. (11)

Almost a decade after Calvino's political self-liberation during the reconstruction period of Italy's post-WWII independence, the author tried to fill the gap left by his abandonment of politics with structuralist and poststructuralist theories of language.

Calvino was always against all types of political propaganda, as he felt that it would divert natural energies into cruel unnatural activities. As J. R. Woodhouse points out, Calvino felt that "the fascist propaganda conditioned and cultivated in the young such adolescent illusions that perpetuate fanatically nationalist tendencies" (406). Deployment of ideological elements is found in the novel. Franco Ricci views the ideological elements of this chapter in another way. Ricci states:

These partisans are not real men, but narrative spaces through which ideology passes. Their actions are a futile attempt at discovering and preserving the self from dissolution. For this reason these war stories, unlike many postwar stories, do not deal with heroic acts, or conquering heroes. They are instead intimate moments of private choice. Even in these early tales, Calvino is exploring realms of the unknown, delving for motivation and meaning. (35)

This shows that by creating stories of partisans, Calvino deals with the capitalist ideology of the wartime and how schizophrenic response counters the capitalist ideology.

In general terms, schizophrenia is a psychiatric disorder characterized by hallucinations, delusions and impairment in the perception or expression of reality. People who suffer from schizophrenic behaviour often have trouble knowing how to differentiate the real from the imaginary, because the boundaries that demarcate the ego or self are distorted. They often experience multiple senses of self. These senses haunt the mind through psychotic hallucinations of visions or voices. It often seems as though several different characters live in a schizophrenic individual's mind. A schizophrenic person has paranoid or bizarre delusions, disorganized speech and thinking. Such a person faces the problem of significant social dysfunction as well. As a result, he is unable to establish proper relationship as normal capacities of communication are severely damaged. These symptoms are involuntary and uncontrollable, so the schizophrenic's subjectivity is shattered causing delirium.

Deleuze and Guattari believe that such psychotic delirium results from oppressive capitalism's inhibitions of an individual's freedom. Deleuze and Guattari see the schizophrenic as capitalism's "exterminating angel" (qtd. in Murray 156). For them, the schizo is a radical, revolutionary, nomadic wanderer who resists all forms of oppressive power. They claim that schizophrenic sensibilities can challenge and replace ideological and dogmatic political goals with a radical form of productive desire. This "desiring-production" brings the unconscious into the real, and helps unleash its radical potential. Productive desire includes the "group psychosis" inspired by radical postmodern artistic creations and political movements. Desiring-production is not limited to clinical schizophrenics. Rather, it brings out the schizophrenic potential in everyone to resist the power of repressive capitalist ideology.

In fact, it is the capitalism which produces 'schizos' in society. But the schizophrenic is put in institutions under strict observation and treated as a patient

under “confined clinical entity” (Deleuze and Guattari 245). As capitalist system focuses only on materialistic gain disregarding the holistic aspect of individual, the system brings about anxiety in the common people. Deleuze and Guattari believe that the schizophrenic really represents the anti of the culture of capitalism. So, 'schizos' should be celebrated as heroes and heroines in contemporary capitalist society as Deleuze and Guattari conclude:

Schizophrenia is the exterior limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it pushes back or displaces this limit. . . . Hence schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death. (246)

As capitalism exploits every field of socio-political life, it reaches a limit at which point it must artificially make itself strong by strengthening the state apparatus, and repressive bureaucracy and regimes. On the other hand, the schizophrenic never reaches any limitation and boundary. Thus, a schizophrenic resists such repressive activities of capitalism.

According to Freud and Lacan, the desire is associated with lack. But, for Deleuze and Guattari a schizophrenic cannot experience lack. For an individual, the unconscious is not fantastical but productive. Desire itself produces the real and creates new world which is different from the recognized and the accepted one. In this way, Deleuze and Guattari see schizophrenia as a central part of a subversive postmodern politics with the radical potential to bring down capitalism. As schizophrenic logic allows for the inclusion of many heterogeneous and different elements within a single subject, schizophrenic strategies are helpful in coping with a totalizing or repressive capitalist system.

II. Critique of Capitalist Ideology in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*

The 'nest' in the title of the novel symbolizes how the protagonist Pin, as a schizophrenic, becomes a spiderlike in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. Pin is entangled and lost in the state apparatus similar to that of tiny subways and mazes of the nest. As the novel narrates the aftermath of the period of World War II in Italy, the research explores how the impact of war makes people schizophrenic. Thus, Pin becomes revolutionary and partisan Communist fighter to resist the oppressive and authoritarian regime.

Calvino uses the child protagonist Pin, who is downtrodden, to explore fascist ideology. As a homeless child, he becomes a nomad. Pin comes from a broken family, who lives in the slums of a war-torn Ligurian town of Italy with his sister Rina, a young prostitute. His mother is dead, and his father has long abandoned them. Pin works as an apprentice to a cobbler, and frequently visits the local tavern. He is only thirteen years of age, without a friend of his own age. As a young man from broken family, he tries to get recognition from the society. As a schizophrenic personality, he steals and gets free drinks from the customers at the local bar, whom he entertains with vulgar songs and jokes. These activities of Pin make a resistance to the oppressive power center. Calvino narrates how the cobbler's family shouts at him:

. . . - and a chorus of shouts and insults pours from every window. 'Pin ! At it already, making our lives a misery! Sing us one of your songs, Pin! Pin, you little hooligan, what's he doing to you? Pin, you little monkey-face! Why don't you just wrap up? You and that chicken-thief of a master of yours! You and that mattress of a sister of yours!' (31)

Pin "little monkey" and "little horror" is described as a strange being in a big jacket, which is stolen from New Harbour (32). Everyone finds him 'risky' to insult him as he

knows all the things and one can never tell how he responds to others even though he is very young. He smokes, steals drinks from men in the local bar, sings them dirty songs and tells them filthy jokes to win their approval, but despises them so thoroughly that he "inevitably turns on them with his cruel, accurate wit" (41). The men turn on him with their fists and boots and kick him out into the street. For Pin, however, adults are his only companions; he cannot get along with boys his own age. He hangs around the window singing and shouting at the top of his voice. In fact, Pin's act is close to insanity, which is one of the characteristics of schizophrenia and a means to subvert capitalist ideology.

The novel *The Path to Spiders' Nests* narrates the events of war during in Italy in the year 1944. The Germans are locked in battle with the Allied forces advancing from the south, while the countryside is frequently visited by partisan groups, ambushing German convoys and disrupting their supply lines. Overhead, Allied bombers pass by on their way to the destruction of cities and factories, while at sea the low, dark shapes of warships patrol the coasts. The situation of a world at war is directly affects Pin, who political and revolutionary consciousness.

Conventional psychiatry sees insanity and weirdness as a problem of the mind. Yet, Deleuze and Guattari see insanity and madness as an opportunity to overthrow capitalist society. They view that schizophrenics do not distinguish between personal and social experiences. Because for the schizophrenics, to say and to act are the same thing. Thus, the relationship between word and action, wish and act is direct and immediate. As Deleuze and Guattari remark:

The schizophrenic passes from one code to the other, that he deliberately scrambles all the codes, by quickly shifting from one to another, according to the questions asked him, never giving the same explanation from one day to

the next, never invoking the same genealogy, never recording the same event in the same way. (15)

In this sense, schizophrenia works for liberation as Deleuze and Guattari state. In the first place, desire must be at the centre, because desire is revolutionary in nature. For them, capitalist power cannot tolerate the revolutionary potential of desire because only desire possesses the power to challenge capitalism.

In the novel, *The Path to the Spider's Nest*, the major character Pin tries to escape from the reality of authoritarian capitalist ideology. So, Calvino creates an illusory world of fantasy where Pin acts as a young clown, countering the extremities of the existing regime. This makes him a schizophrenic character who at various stages flouts the enforced values of capitalist ideology.

Deleuze and Guattari say that schizophrenia “is the direct or unfettered expression of a naturally rebellious desire”, as opposed to “an aberration, an exception to the norm that is the result of a neurological, psychobiographical, or sociological problem” (qtd. in Woods 157). According to Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenia becomes displaced or dispersed. It no longer remains the area of pathology, but “a deterritorializing process” which “swiftly dismisses the interdisciplinary debate concerning its aetiology” (qtd. in Woods 158). The political implication of dispersed schizophrenia arises from its uncontrolled higher aspects. It moves beyond its simple therapeutic area of clinical psychoanalysis. Its real working, that is the revolutionary schizo, can freely work and disrupt and subvert the capitalist mechanism. Yet, as Woods has already explained, it is unclear from Deleuze and Guattari’s explanation as to what really differentiates the schizo from the schizophrenic. However, Deleuze and Guattari schizos or schizophrenics move beyond the boundary of social and psychic

organization, therapeutic intervention and theoretical representation breaking any kind of limitation,

Schizophrenia must in some sense remain resolutely exterior to capitalism; it must exceed the boundaries of social and psychic organization, refuse interpretation and interpretive closure, and resist therapeutic intervention and theoretical representation. This is certainly an anti-fascist mode of being, as Foucault famously declared in the preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, but it is anti almost everything else as well. This model takes the concept of micro-politics to new extremes, radically undermining all forms of collective and individual political action. (qtd. in Woods 160)

Supporting the position of Deleuze and Guattari, Woods concludes that schizo is not only anti-Oedipus, he is anti-society, anti-politics, and most importantly anti-capitalist.

In the novel, Pin does not act as society demands. His activities are thus anti-social. As he has revolutionary desire and consciousness, he exposes the hypocrisy of the capitalist values, which have exploited the common people. When Pietromagro calls him a pimp, Pin retorts:

I may be a pimp, but I know what your wives are upto behind your backs . . .'
Pin shouts back, copying their voices, and gulping down cigareet smoke that feels sharp and rough against his tender throat, but which has to be gulped down, who knows why, till his eyes water and he breaks into a violent fit of coughing. . . he calls out 'By God, I'll tell anyone who stands me a glass of wine something he'd like to hear.' (33)

Although Pin is very young boy, he possesses the potentiality to resist and challenge every attack that comes his way. He is not afraid of making a counter attack even in drunken state.

As a schizophrenic personality, Pin is desperate to be taken seriously by the regulars at the bar, and so when one of them dares him to steal the gun of Frick, the German sailor who is his sister's most frequent visitor, he sees the chance of acceptance. Having stolen the gun, his first instinct is to play around with it but then he wonders at the power it gives him, the power he wants so desperately. On a schizophrenic whim, Pin cannot resist the temptation anymore and points the pistol against his temple; it makes his head swim. As Calvino writes:

On it moves, until it touches the skin and he can feel the coldness of the steel. Suppose he put his finger on the trigger now? No, it's better to press the mouth of the barrel against the top of his cheek bone, until it hurts, and feel the circle of steel with its empty centre where the bullets come from. Perhaps if he suddenly pulls the gun away from his temple, the suction of the air will make a shot go off; no, it doesn't go off. Now he can put the barrel into his mouth and feel its taste against his tongue. Then, the most frightening of all, put it up to his eyes and look right into it, down the dark barrel which seems deep as a well. Once Pin saw a boy who had shot himself in the eye with a hunting-gun being taken off to hospital; his face was half-covered by a great splodge of blood, and the other half with little black spots from the gunpowder. (86)

In an attempt to retain power, Pin hides the gun in a secret place he knows on the riverbank where some spiders have built their nests. This place, known only to Pin, acquires a symbolic significance. All the time, he seems unstable, so he looks for

someone he can trust enough to share the secret of its location, someone who will understand its beauty and power.

Steven Best and Douglas Kellner support Deleuze and Guattari's notion of schizianalysis as having subversive nature as their intention is to design schizoanalysis as a 'weapon' that "deconstructs modern binaries and breaks with modern theories of the subject, representational modes of thought, and totalizing practice" (85). Thus, Best and Kellner reiterate the fact that schizoanalysis ruptures every binary in society.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the main task for a society, either in the form of despotic or capitalist, has always been to repress and dominate desire, to centralize power within its closed system or its state apparatuses. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, "to code desire—and the fear, the anguish of decoded flows—is the business of the socius" (139). For them, even socialization is just a process of this process:

We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. There is only desire and the social, and nothing else. (Deleuze and Guattari 38)

It is exactly for this reason that "the deterritorialization of the socius . . . constitutes the most characteristic and the most important tendency of capitalism" (Deleuze and Guattari 34). According to Deleuze and Guattari, the form of desire found within a society also determines its structure. For them, there are two kinds of desire in society: the paranoid and the schizophrenic. The paranoid and the schizophrenic

desires suggest two different sides of delusion: paranoid and schizophrenic. While paranoid desire is despotic, schizophrenic desire is liberating. Paranoid society is a society that is built on the authoritarian structures and vertical hierarchal orders. But schizophrenic society has small horizontal communities that have no hierarchy. This kind of society is the most liberated one.

Schizophrenic sensibilities can replace ideological and dogmatic political goals with a radical form of productive desire. This “desiring-production” brings the unconscious into the real, and unleashes its radical world-making potential. Productive desires are not self-centered but they include the 'group psychosis.' This is inspired by radical postmodern artistic creations and political movements. So, desiring-production is not limited to clinical schizophrenics. But it unfolds the schizophrenic potential in everyone to resist the power of authoritarian tendency and capitalist centralization.

Pin actively observes the discussion on whether or not to form a partisan resistance group against fascism. Pin is in favour of rupturing the binary between immature/mature, young old, small/great and experienced/inexperienced, Pin, who has been sidelined in the discussion, suddenly claims to have the ability to steal a pistol from a German S.S officer who visits his sister regularly. The members of the group dismiss his claim and challenge him to do the same, saying that until and unless he gets a gun, they cannot provide him entry into the group. Silently, their challenge works as a critical point on which Pin should prove his bravery in order to be at equal terms with the adults. When the next time the German S.S officer comes to visit his sister, Pin hides himself in the room and steals the pistol. Pin does this act of stealing to prove himself as able and equivalent to that of an adult. It is informative to quote from the text: "Pin's inferiority as a child in the face of the grownups'

incomprehensible world corresponds to my own, in the same situation, as a bourgeois youth" (24). But the people at the bar by this time have already forgotten about their words to Pin. Or rather, it can be generally assumed that they have not considered the claims of Pin seriously, and had put the challenge just to silence him. The German officer soon realizes that his pistol is stolen, and in the search, they locate Rina's home and then Pin. The holster, which Pin keeps after hiding the gun, becomes the clue for the S.S officers to catch him. Pin hides the pistol in a riverside spiders nest. Later, the pistol becomes one of the narrative forces of the novel, and the spiders nest symbolically provides Pin with a mysterious power and energy to fight oppressive regime. The narrator says: "Pin decides that he will keep the pistol himself and not give it to anyone or tell anyone that he has it. He'll just hint that he possesses a terrible power, and everyone will obey him" (51). Thus, the possession of a pistol is an attempt to counter dictatorship and injustice. The "object" that Pin tries to possess is only an entrance and acceptance into the rebellion groups in society even though he remains as an outcast from the mainstream.

Pin is soon caught, beaten and jailed in an S.S prison, where one of the turning points occurs. There, he gets opportunity to strengthen his revolutionary consciousness. Pin meets there an older partisan member named Lupo Rosso, also known as Red Wolf. Red Wolf makes an clever plan to escape from the prison. Pin decides to take part in this plan. Pin then becomes an enthusiastic admirer of Red Wolf. Joanna Stephens views that Pin's admiration for Red Wolf comes mainly from the latter's "habit of reiterating formulaic political phrases" (86). As revolutionaries, they escape from the prison challenging the authority. After escaping from the prison, Red Wolf does not give Pin any responsibility; rather, he sets him free to select his own way as per his desire. As Red Wolf goes to organize the Resistance fighters,

Pin is left free alone in the street in the middle of the night. He soon meets a man with a pistol, whom we later understand as the legendary Cousin, one of the partisans camped in the Liguarian Mountains. Cousin, who is a member of the partisan brigade, takes him to the Ligurian Mountains, where a unit of the Partisans is placed. Pin soon joins the famous group of mountain partisans, headed by Dritto in the Liguarian Mountains. This partisan is made up of all the rejected and marginalized members from the other units. They include "military deserters, psychopaths" and the like (68). These people do not believe in any kinds of hierarchy in any kind of organization. They only believe in subverting the very hierarchal order. The partisan headquarters and the brigadier Kim do not trust this unit, so much so that they are not entrusted with any of the major combating plans and acts. Although Pin does not carry any weapon, he becomes a part of this unit, working as the cook's helper.

Dritto, who is the leader of the brigade, at times becomes weak and incompetent even though he is a revolutionary. He does not know much about the big power game at higher level. Dritto pretends ill when their unit is ordered to fight, and he remains back in the mountain. Calvino writes, "Dritto is thinking how much he would like to leave the partisans and hide away in a place he knows of, till the end of the war" (135). As the state has forced the dictatorial ideology on the people, Dritto has become schizophrenic as well. Soon, he goes to bed with the wife of their cook. One night, while flirting with Giglia, the wife of the cook, Dritto distractedly sets the cabin of the partisans' on fire, destroying their weapons and supplies. Interestingly, it is Mancino, the cook, who is the only worldly and practical man in a group of revolutionaries, who tries for a radical transformation of the society. Mancino has a pet falcon, Beheuf, which is named after the early revolutionary. When Kim orders

everyone in the camp to go for an attack against the Fascists, many in their camp consider the falcon as a bad omen.

As the group of fighters –including Dritto – comes from the lower strata of the society, they have a tendency to resist the ruling elites of the state. In doing so, they end up being schizophrenics. Calvino writes:

Dritto does not like discussions much either; or rather he only likes to talk about actions and weapons, about the new small tommy-guns which the Fascists are beginning to use and how he would like to lay his hands on one; but what he likes more than anything is giving orders, getting the men into position under cover while he himself jumps up to fire short bursts. (127)

The authoritative ideology of the regime in Italy has forced the poor people into joining the resistance group and thus becoming revolutionaries. This is the example how the state capitalist ideology begets schizophrenics.

In *The Path to Spiders' Nests* Dritto act of setting fire to their secret hiding place is not accidental alone. Rather, it is an act of resistance to the authority. He is then caught by the Party commissars and led off to execution. Later, it is deliberate that the reason for such a group which only consists of social outcasts is an experiment by the writer to resist the capitalist rulers. Although Pin remains alienated in the camp and displayed detachment, he experiences a sense of belongingness among the lower strata. As the group did not want any harm to happen to Pin, they did not take him with them, when Kim ordered them to go to the "vanguard positions" (93). The partisans go into deep front line, and when the time comes for them to clear out of the mountains, they again leave Pin behind. When he gets left behind, he decides to retrieve the pistol from the spider's nests. But, he returns to the spider's nest to find it is no longer there. Pin then remembers that he had revealed his secret to

Pelle, one of the former resistance fighters, who unfortunately decided to side with Fascists. Pin becomes disheartened to see the pistol stolen from the spider's nest. This makes him weak and powerless.

However, Pin has revolutionary nature even though he is young and weak. He does not take anything for granted. He questions everything. When Dritto intervenes and threatens to send him on guard duty if he does not obey, Pin selects a suitable song that reflects Dritto's treatment of other members of the brigade. He sings,

'Tis a Moorish captain with all his slaves,
with all his slaves,

'Tis a Moorish captain with all his slaves. (115)

Although Pin is little, and does not understand much about the ideals of revolution and politics, he keenly observes what people do in the camp; he thus cultivates revolutionary characteristics.

Pin's natural, childlike infatuation with the gun and partisan movement is an example of how oppressed people in authoritarian regime suffer. Calvino describes Pin playing with the German soldier's pistol that he has impulsively stolen:

Pin unrolls the belt, opens the holster, and with a gesture as if he were taking a cat by the neck pulls out the pistol. It is really big and threatening . . . suddenly Pin cannot resist the temptation anymore and points the pistol against his temple; it makes his head swim. On it moves, until it touches the skin and he can feel the oldness of the steel. Suppose he put his finger on the trigger now? No, it is better to press the mouth of the barrel against the top of his cheek bone, until it hurts, and feel the circle of steel with its empty centre where the bullets come from. Perhaps if he suddenly pulls the gun away from his temple, the suction of the air will make a shot go off; no, it doesn't go off.

Now he can put the barrel into his mouth and feel its taste against his tongue. Then, the most frightening of all, put it up to his eyes and look right into it, down the dark barrel which seems as deep as a well. (11)

This extract shows the schizophrenic behavior of Pin as he works on whim. As a depressed individual, Pin sometimes displays psychotic behaviour. He moves his hand almost cinematically from the belt to the holster to the pistol and to each new part of Pin's body. At the same time, Calvino delves into Pin's own intimate thought processes with the childish implicit questions and answers—"suppose he put his finger on the trigger now? No, it is better . . ." (123). Throughout the novel, Calvino narrates from the perspective of Pin exposing his desires and actions.

The passage also illustrates the kind of infatuation with concrete, convincing, and detailed physical description that Calvino attributes to the psychoanalytical elements. An obsessive, almost sadistic, psycho-sexual quality to the way Pin takes in the experience is described. It is not that Pin simply plays with the gun like a child; he examines it from all possible angles, fondle its various component parts, taste its unique flavor.

Calvino offers a hierarchy of ideological justifications for joining the Resistance group, prioritizing some as more worthy than others. The commissar Kim of the partisan forces comes to review Pin's detachment before a decisive battle. The leader's visit creates an opportunity for Calvino to reflect on his large cast of characters, as Kim, as a revolutionary, thinks analytically about each man's perspective and place in the movement. Some, like the young Red Wolf, are more ideologically motivated. However, the vast majority of partisans have narrowly self-interested reasons for fighting: to improve the social or economic position of their family, such as the Calabrian brothers-in-law, or to carry out "revenge on a woman,"

(113), or even to exercise some obscure exorcism of self-punishment, as is the case with Dritto, the small detachment's leader.

Kim offers the most sophisticated and intellectual answer to the essential question: why people fight. Kim, who aside from Pin, is probably the novel's only clearly sympathetic character, appropriately offers Calvino's political message. The commissar's perspective is wide and historically oriented—it is concerned not simply with fascists and anti-fascists, but with changing the course of history, with redeeming the dignity lost in the hands of "human misery" (136). So, the revolutionary groups in the novel are in favour of subverting the authoritarian regime, thereby changing the course of history.

Most significantly, Kim appreciates that the future of postwar Italy will depend on the continuation of these ideals of the resistance. He muses aloud to himself:

I could be making a mental study of the details of the attack, the dispositions of weapons and squads. But I am too fond of thinking about those men, studying them, making discoveries about them. What will they do afterwards for instance? Will they recognize in post-war Italy something made by them? Will they understand what system will have to be used then in order to continue our struggle, the long and constantly changing struggle to better humanity? (14)

In short, Kim does not think of the resistance movement as confined to a specific historical moment, but rather as a continuous effort, promoting understanding and solidarity among all helpless Italians. The purpose of the resistance is thus associated with progress in the most powerful sense of the term, because for those who do not incorporate its ideals will "become individualists again, and thus [also] sterile, they'll

fall into crime, the great outlet for dumb resentments, they'll forget that history once walked by their side" (156). Calvino means to say that if people do not possess revolutionary consciousness, they will not live a worthy life; and they just ignored the history that demanded action.

As the novel revolves around the gun – a symbol of power – later, Pin sees the same pistol with his sister Rina. She confesses that one of her customers, Pelle, gave that pistol to her. Pin takes the pistol from her and leaves home partly due to the fact that when Pin returned, his sister had become a "fascist informer" (145). After this incident, Pin again finds himself alone, first rejected by the Partisans, then by his own sister. Another characteristic feature of Pin is also revealed in this scene: he gives the pistol to his cousin Cugino, so he could execute a traitor. The traitor is his own sister, who, by the end of the novel, becomes S.S informer. This shows an unusual mixture of innocence and brutality in Pin. But, it also reveals Pin's staunch support for the ideas that he believes right. In fact, Pin has been puzzled by the adult world of power and politics because he looks upon the pistol as a symbol of terrible power. The feeling of alienation, both from the mature people and from fellow friends, makes him an introvert to some extent and psychotic to a greater extent. So much so that he hardly expresses his thoughts. Towards the end of the novel, Pin becomes distraught and runs into his cousin Cugino, who first introduced Pin into the Resistance movement. This marks the conclusion of the novel, where Pin is thrown again into the streets, but meets his cousin, Cugino, who protects him and emotionally supports him. Although he feels defeated, Pin has cultivated political and revolutionary attitudes towards the power holders.

In addition to the major character Pin, Kim's conceptualization of the Resistance serves as a kind of post-realist historical narration of the partisan

movement. With subtle emphasis on historical purpose and constant and continual struggle, Calvino's resistant message is convincingly presented by Commissar Kim. This gives the positive message and hope for the betterment of human society improvement in Italy's future. Calvino reflects that for himself and others who had participated in the Resistance, "having been a partisan" seemed to be "an irrevocable event in [their] lives, not a temporary condition like military service" (138). All this consciousness is instrumental in shaping the future of Italy.

Furthermore, after the Liberation, "[they] saw [their] civilian life as a continuation of the partisan struggle by other means" (115). Importantly, because of the Neo-Realist quality of *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, these ideological positions have been subtly interwoven in the novel. Ideological authority is concentrated in Kim's character, which, in turn, is manifested in the book's narrative. Kim's presence is greatly felt over the rest of the text, as he symbolizes an anonymous, stable authority on which and the rest of the partisans, depend for ideological orientation, awareness and resistance. The people who join the partisan group include spies, traitors, ordinary villains, and opportunists along with patriots.

Calvino's selection of characters in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* portrays this diversity, as well as the difficulties encountered by the partisan recruits. Especially at first, not all of the brigades were either well organized or sufficiently equipped, as this excerpt from the novel suggests. There is a kind of chaos and disorder even though the characters possess rebellious quality:

They [the partisans] might even be soldiers, a company of soldiers who had disappeared during a war many years ago and been wandering in the forests ever since without finding their way back, their uniforms in rags, their boots

falling to pieces, their hair and their beards all matted, carrying weapons which now they only use to kill wild animals. (95)

Thus, as they had political and ideological consciousness, they were equipped with political awareness, so the partisans often stole equipment from the Nazi-Fascists—cannons, armored cars, machine guns, Tommy guns, rifles, pistols, mortars, hand grenades, ammunition. This is an example of great subversive act against the capitalist regime.

The novel is written in a way which has the potentiality of subversion. This view is expressed by the commander of the brigade, Kim. He upholds the proletarian views of revolution, saying that "partisan warfare is as exact and precise as a machine; he has taken the revolutionary impulse matured in factories up into the mountains . . ." (132). These views not only reflect the general tone of the Resistance movement, but also that of Calvino. This effort of Calvino to infuse and integrate the political and artistic necessities thus demands the schizophrenic interpretation as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari.

It is worthwhile to note the analysis of Albert Sbragia about women characters in the works of Calvino. In the article, "Italo Calvino's Ordering of Chaos," he gives an original analysis of the nature of Calvino's chaotic narration. The author says that Calvino had always been intrigued by an inclination to create chaos or desire in his narratives. Sbragia states: "This is not to say that Calvino does not experience the attraction of disorder" (29). Calvino in the novel highlights chaos in the form of tempting, elusive, and powerful woman character Pin's sister, Rina. She indeed behaves out of order thus creating chaos and by spying for the Germans. She is an 'enchanted' prostitute and a symbol of desire to the Germans. Thus, the motives of chaos and desires which are clearly narrated in the novel, reflect schizophrenic

tendency having subversive potentiality. Though she works as a spy, she exercises political power. She acts as an informer both for Germans and the partisan groups. So, torn between the two combating groups, she, too, becomes a nomad in the explanation of Deleuze and Guattari.

III. Resisting Capitalist Ideology in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*

The analysis on Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* concludes how major characters' schizophrenic acts subvert the capitalist ideology of Italian regime during the period of Second World War. The study analyzes schizoanalysis explained by Deleuze and Guattari's concept of schizoanalysis. Schizophrenic characteristics of the play reflect subversive politics with the radical potential to overthrow capitalistic ideals. In the novel, in an attempt to resist fascist regime, Pin, Kim and Dritto attempt to join partisan bands. In their acts, they become chaotic, disruptive and rebellious. They do not conform to the ideology of the regime. Moreover, Pin's childish acts and wishful activities such as stealing a gun from a German soldier reflect schizophrenic behavior. However, this act, albeit a bazaar, attacks the authoritarian ideology of warmongers. Their acts and desires lead them to a different world fantasy. In their acts, they end up becoming split or schizophrenic personalities, which helps them to come to terms with the repressive capitalist ideology as described by Deleuze and Guattari.

The major character Pin is a vulgar, adolescent cobbler's assistant, both arrogant and insecure who - while the Second World War rages - sings songs and tells jokes to endear himself to the grown-ups of his town - particularly jokes about his sister, who they all know as the town's 'mattress'. Among those his sister sleeps with is a German sailor, and Pin dares to steal his pistol, hiding it among the spiders' nests in an act of rebellion that entangles him in the adults' war. So, in an act of rebellion against a warmongering regime, Pin's acts reflect schizophrenic acts which work as an act of subversion of the oppressive ideology.

The Path to the Nest of Spiders has become one of the key post-war novels in Italian literature, despite the fact that it is a work which demands psychoanalysis, both

in the context of Italo Calvino's other output and in the context of the developing neo-realist movement. The novel is at once far more realistic portrayal of wartime than those that would later bring Calvino fame and tinged with a certain fairy-tale symbolism that distinguishes it from most neo-realist novels. There are a few hints of the crystalline structure and playful fantasy that would characterize his subversive perspective, but for the most part this novel represents an attempt by Calvino to transform his own experiences as a partisan in the Italian resistance into fiction and to enter into the contemporary polemic about the nature of the partisans and the growing Communist movement as the movement tried to subvert the capitalist ideology at that time.

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Tribhuvan University

Critiquing Capitalist Ideology in Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
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Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Tilak Prasad Kafle

Roll No.: 279/068/069

T.U. Regd. No.: 6-2-48-2726-2006

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English
Kritipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Recommendation

Tilak Prasad Kafle has completed her thesis entitled "Critiquing Capitalist Ideology in Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*" under my supervision. He carried out her research from 2075/08/01 B.S. to 2076/04/19 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

Hem Lal Pandey

Supervisor

Date:-----

Tribhuvan University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Approval Letter

This thesis entitled "Critiquing Capitalist Ideology in Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Tilak Prasad Kafle has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date:.....

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Abstract

This thesis on Italo Calvino's The Path to the Spiders' Nests examines how major characters' schizophrenic acts have the potential to subvert the capitalist ideology of Italian regime during the period of Second World War. It analyzes the novel from the perspective of schizoanalysis using ideas of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of schizoanalysis. Schizophrenic characteristics of the play display subversive politics with the radical potential to overthrow capitalistic ideals. In an attempt to resist fascist regime, Pin, Kim and Dritto attempt join partisan groups. In their acts, they become chaotic, disruptive and rebellious. They do not conform to the ideology of the regime. Moreover, Pin's childish acts whims reflect schizophrenic behavior as he imitates the activities of adult. Their innocent imitation proves to be revolutionary and their acts and desires lead them to a different world of their own. Thus, in their acts, they end up becoming split or schizophrenic personalities, which helps them cope with totalizing or repressive capitalist ideology of their society.

Key Words: Capitalism, Subversion, Schizophrenia, Power, Ideology

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