



Third space and integrity of reconciliation in Han Kang's human acts

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ABSTRACT

Han Kang's *Human Acts* (2014) explores the clouded boundaries between life and death, authority and rebellion, and presence and absence. This study examines how characters like Dong-ho and Jeong-dae embody the tension between legitimate and illegitimate power, reflecting on how these blurred lines affect individual identity and collective resistance. Using a qualitative textual analysis grounded in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands Theory* and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of liminal space, the research argues that conflict resolution lies in recognizing the "in-between"—a "transitional space where binaries collapse and transformation occurs. The study portrays how the merging of symbolic and physical spaces and the blurring of power structures reveal a third space where social rupture can be understood and healed. Ultimately, the study underscores how identifying this liminal zone helps dismantle rigid hierarchies and opens possibilities for collective renewal and emotional catharsis. Posthumous narration blurs the line between life and death, the transformation of the soul obliterates physical and symbolic space, and a role reversal blurs the authoritative and unauthoritative power. Recognition of the liminal space, in other words, the third space, minimizes territorial conflict, maximizes the financial and power-related boundaries that, in turn, synchronize national and international relations among people.

Keywords: Borderland Theory, Cloud Spacing, Life and Death, Third Space

I. INTRODUCTION

Han Kang's *Human Acts* deals with the significance of the third space as Anzaldúa (1987) labels, "The third element is a new consciousness, a mestiza consciousness" (p.80) which is intertwined with the past and the future, life and death, and authoritarianism and authoritarian reversal. After the deaths of the two main protagonists and narrators, Dong-ho and Jeong-dae, in the uprising in South Korea, they witness the uprising events in the form of a ghost. Dong-ho narrates the story after death and is representing the entire people of Gwangju, "Our bodies, tossed there like lump of meat. Our filthy, rotting faces, reeking in the sun" (Kang, 2014, p.57). The treatment to the living is like dead, and tries to identify the reason for their execution by the state. Current scholars examine Kang's novel from diverse perspectives, ranging from resistance to resolution. Cloud space not only denotes physical space but also a symbolic location between life and death, reality and imagination, and the powerful and the powerless.

The novel illustrates the South Korean Gwangju uprising in the 1980s triggered by an extreme military dictatorship and state control over civilians. Kang (2014) mentions the brutality through the voice of the narrator Dong-ho, "But the generals are rebels, they seized power unlawfully...people being beaten, and stabbed in broad daylight, and even shot" (p.18). People's opposition and resistance result in the death of the people, and ultimately, it is the people that gain power. The consequences of rebellion generate interest in the study. The atrocities as depicted in the novel present that the lives of the people are under the total control of the rulers. The autocratic state mechanism imposes martial laws on civilians, and its state results in the untimely death of the innocent citizen. Kang (2014) depicts the brutalities, "Unidentified corpses, and those coffins which had no one to watch over them" (p.21). The exposure of the brutality of the power that treated people as a commodity interested critics. South Korean Gwangju State has unleashed their cruelty against the dead bodies after their murder. So, the narrator of the story, Don-ho, is narrating his or her other stories as a ghost or soul, erasing the line between life and death, physical territory, and authoritative and unauthoritative power.

Thus, at the symbolic plane, Han Kang's *Human Acts* portrays the South Korean uprising at Gwangju, highlighting social, political, and psychological in-betweenness. The liminal space between imagination and reality, life and death, and integration and disintegration form the crux of this study. Failure to fix the events to a dominant line



problematizes the existing study. Therefore, this study generates novelty by hooking the liminal space between the fragile identities of the characters, including Dong-ho, pinpointing death and after-death haunting, remembrance and reality, and trauma and resistance. Certainty and fancy, ordeal and confrontation, and the alive and the deceased exist simultaneously, generating a niche for this study.

1.1 Research Objectives

The objective of this paper is to identify the liminal space and its role in maintaining symmetry in social relations, neutralizing territorial conflict and power exploitation within the nation, and to explore the concept of the third space in Han Kang's novel *Human Acts*. To validate the argument, the researchers employ borderland theory to analyze the text and validate its social implications.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This research employs borderland theory reveals that the essence the liminal space with the theoretical support of Anzaldúa's Borderlands Theory that incorporates the thought that "Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is to stretch psyche horizontally and vertically" (p.79), Bhabha's (2011) elaborates the concept of the third space "Indeed for us, the question must be how to think-how to represent-the liminality of the conditional within unconditional...this interstitial space of thirdness" (p.6). The third space is supposed to resolve conflict

Kang's novel *Human Acts* drew multiple responses from critics ranging from the brutality of military power and resistance to the authority to the presentation of historical reality. Prihatiningsih and Anwar (2019) discuss the brutality of the government using military power and state control to dominate the people during the uprisal at the country. Their concern is the enforced regulation and state control for the common civilian.

The excessive control of the public leads to the unrest that Kim asserted in the analysis of the novel. Kim (2020) deals with the effective witnessing of the revolt in South Korea: "*Human Acts* is a model of a contrapuntal way of reading contemporary South Korean works that is alternative to the national context in which it is written. It deals with the Gwangju uprising, a peaceful civilian movement that emerged in 1980 against military dictatorship" (p.375). People long for the harmony and peace, but the unnecessary suppression generates rebellion in the nation or the state.

Cross-cultural information develops international connectivity of the writing, which Debora Smith's translation of *Human Acts* accomplished. Yoon (2021) argues translation as a means to disseminate the national culture and history across borders that in turn amalgamates diverse knowledge in relation to culture and other facets. Reading the translation from the Westerner about South Korea is a milestone to go beyond the border.

Social reality hooks readers attention since critics 'highlight the historical reality of the novel. Yundayani et al. (2021) highlight a realistic aspect of the society highlighting urgent need for the morality to address the crisis of the society of the contemporary period. The painful historical reality is one of the themes of the novel in the eyes of the critics.

Protection of human rights is the common concern because violation of the rights leads to chaos in the society. Kim (2021) asserts that "I examine how Han interrogates the human in human rights and professes speculative philosophies of history that frame human rights violations, particularly in the context of the South Korean Cold War" (p.431). The South Korean Cold War generated excessive violation of human rights that in turn led to an uprising of the people.

Literature taps human experience, drawing information from the society. Tache (2021) analyzes three authors and their texts, analyzing the down-to-earth human experience of the novel: "These texts authored by Ogawa, Kang, and Tokarczuk allow for a repositioning of the standpoint from which the consequences of subject-object relation are approached in literature because they tap into human experience" (p.246). These texts reposition people through social consciousness.

Finck (2022) illustrates violence and proposes an alternative model for peace in society. He emphasizes, "Han Kang's work depicts the mimicry of or engagement with non-human forms of life as both passive strategies for resisting human acts of violence and exploitation and alternative models of sociality and care" (p.149). Social harmony and care need to be managed in the society for harmony and fraternity.

Chung (2023) emphasizes that the novel is aesthetically important for depicting South Korea: "*Human Acts* is a literary product of the post-memory generation, having intertextuality, and polyphony. The novel is a means for trauma transmission" (p.27). Aesthetic presentation of the society transmitting trauma to the text is the unique ability of the writer, in the words of Chung.

Universality of the text through transborder message. Circulation is the crux of the novel, in the words of Park. Park (2025) critically asserts that the value of the novel is to familiarize the readers "across borders to comprehend



through effective translation. The use of literary devices to trigger and manage readers' emotional engagement" (p. 1). Literature circulates the message of the society.

Critical proclamation for the authority and expression of compassion to the oppressed is the crux of the critical assertions. Pokharel et al. (2025) evaluate Han Kang, saying that "Han Kang invites readers to question the oppressive systems in their cultural, social, and environmental surroundings" (p.39). Voice for the awareness supports social transformation.

Literature generates ecological awareness, as done by Han Kang. Zahra (2025) asserts the novel as fictionalized history: "*Human Acts* is an anthropocentric piece of fictionalized history about a pivotal democratic movement that changed the history of South Korea. This study deals with the eco-consciousness brought about by the suffering of human beings by making women the fighters for the conservation of nature via ecofeminism" (p.2187). The historical facts of South Korea through ecological awareness generate popularity of the text for them.

Current researchers have embarked into the analytical standpoints of Han Kang's novel *Human Acts*, indicating it as a historical document of military dictatorship, resistance of common civilians against state oppression, and civil movement of people in 1980 for freedom from totalitarian rule. Other critics asserted it as a piece for the projection of transcultural and transnational literary pieces since, through translation, South Korean culture and Western culture assimilate and circulate to one other line. A few critics linked its value to the translation because translation blurs the border of transborder cross-cultural dissemination. While others asserted it was an assortment of human experience, human rights advocacy, and human trauma transmission. However, this study analyzes Han Kang's novel *Human Acts* as a unique piece of writing that merges the diverse areas of death and life, physical and symbolic significance, and reality and imagination, generating cloud space. This study reveals the South Korean rebellion at Gwangju, giving prominence to societal, political, and psychological in-betweenness. The third but overlapping point between life and death, obliterating physical space, and authoritative and unauthoritative power is the nub of this paper. Failure to shoot the actions to a foremost contour problematizes the prevailing research. Therefore, this study creates uniqueness by fastening the liminal space between the flimsy distinctiveness of the characters, including Dong-ho, indicating death and after-death moving, commemoration and truth, and ordeal and resistance in the novel. The alive and the departed exist concurrently with posthumous narration, tribulation, and hostility; authoritative and unauthoritative role reversal generate a niche for this study.

2.2 Empirical Review

Scholars have examined the Gwangju uprising linking it to the historical struggle between democracy and military rule. Lewis (2002), through ethnographic research focused on the 1980s and 1990s, argues that the uprising led to a shift in South Korea's political culture and paved the way for a democratic system. Similarly, Katsiaficas and Kahn-chae (2006) contend that the movement demonstrated the eventual triumph of civilian will over military dominance, emphasizing that democratic governance is essential for political legitimacy.

Yoon (2017) introduces a nuanced dimension by highlighting the role of religion, particularly Christianity, in this political upheaval. He notes a contradiction wherein Christians supported the civilian uprising against the Rhee regime, yet later endorsed Park Chung-hee's military coup in 1961, revealing ambivalence rather than a unified vision for political transformation (p. 233). This ambivalence indicates the in-betweenness of the religious thought.

Park (2021) conceptualizes the democratization of South Korea in two waves: first, the brutal state violence in 1980, and second, the establishment of democracy in 1987. Chong (2024), applying Max Weber's theory, historicizes the post-1945 uprisings and argues that Korea's Confucian tradition evolved into a meritocratic modernity, which became foundational for democracy (p. 6). Collectively, these empirical studies underscore key elements such as the rejection of military dictatorship, the evolution of political thought, meritocratic reforms, and the pursuit of democratic values. While existing literature foregrounds historical, religious, and political factors, this study proposes that the recognition of liminal space—between state and people, military and civilian—offers a productive site for minimizing conflict and fostering democratic reconciliation.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Han Kang's *Human Acts* is an epitome for the study of the overlapping between diverse stages of life and the physical world. To validate this argument, this study uses a qualitative research design employing Gloria Anzaldúa's borderland theory and Homi K. Bhabha's liminal space as the theoretical framework for the text of the novel.

3.2 Theoretical Framework: Borderland Theory

The borderland theory is a discipline that discusses geography and spaces both in literal and metaphorical contexts where boundaries are blurred, identities are fluid, and power structures are contested. The term is coined by



the Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldua in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* in 1987. The book explained that the United States and Mexico border is not only the boundary of two countries as a physical line but also as a site of sociocultural and political intersections. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldua describes the history of migration, violence, and identity in the borderland. The term refers to the border between Mexico and America. The border is a form of segregation and division of the people, which depicts the social position of the person and the country. Anzaldua (1987) mentions that “a border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (p.18). Borderland is the narrow space imposed by powerful countries that affects the well-being of the people and the parameters of safety. In other words, it is the restrictive parameter to create bondage for the people of a third-world country.

Land and any other natural resources are natural resources that are free of cost in the environment. Nature does not bias who is its consumer and accepts each single creature’s response towards it. History has witnessed that the land and other resources were freely utilized before imperialism. There is free access to move to different places according to humans’ needs and free choice of location based on their context and movement. Anzaldua (1987) asserts that, “By the end of the nineteenth century, powerful landowners in Mexico, in partnership with U.S. colonizing companies, had dispossessed millions of Indians of their lands” (p. 25). The rise of colonial power, such as U.S. companies in collaboration with the landowners of Mexico, controls the lands of the Indians. The tendency to control land symbolizes the rise of power and its supremacy. So, control is the landmark of the built border in Mexico.

Borderland theory reveals that the essence of the post-colonial framework resonates with scholars like Homi K. Bhabha, and Gloria Anzaldua who have examined how colonial histories create hybrid identities and cultural dislocations. Bhabha has coined the term ‘hybrid’ to show the mixed and fluctuating identity and ‘third space’—a space where cultural translation occurs and static identity dissolves. Bhabha (1994) asserts about borders, “Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed” (p.23). Bhabha’s (2011) focus is “on the third space as an interstitial moment produced through the negotiation of contradiction and ambivalence” (p.6). Anzaldua (1987) confesses about the focus of the study, “My instant focus on the third space as an interstitial moment proceeds through the negotiation of contradiction and ambivalence” (p. 6). The division between the two gets dissolved. Milostivaya et al. (2017) elaborate on the theory, “The theory of H.K. Bhabha, introduced in 1994, is based on the existence of such space where cultural borders open up to each other” (p. 2). Consequently, it generates new hybrid space.

Likewise, Edward Said’s notion of exile resembles the condition of marginal people who never fully belong to a particular place and culture. At the end, people of the margin rest their lives upon the liminal space. Ultimately, all of this act creates a power dynamic that reinforces and creates inequalities among the people. As a consequence, the people living in the borderlands often engaged in acts of resistance against domination and the power structure. Domination and suppression are not only a form of power imposition; rather, they are an act of abolishment of weak, powerless humans’ existence. Spivak (1988) used the term ‘epistemic violence’ that is created by the power holder to misinterpret the voice of the subaltern. When power is imposed on the powerless, then it generates margins, borders, and boundaries, and a repressive voice of the people who live under these circumstances. Hence, the power and property that undermine and devalue the humanity and essence of being human.

Border studies deal with the transformative process other than the territorial space and boundary. In the words of Wilson and Donnan (2012), “Border studies are akin to what we study; rooted in space and time, they are also about process of fluidity” (p. 4). The process of fluidity ranges from politics to social and other experiences. Wilson and Donnan (2012) assert that “Borders and frontiers are also elements in the transforming dimensions of culture, politics, society, and economics at every level of social and political complexity” (p. 2). Michaelson and Johnson (1997) discuss the secret of the border theory: “The secret in short is the border of identity, the limit between inside and outside, between self and other” (p.28). In the same way, Pokharel (2024) elaborates on the function of the third space: “The literary art of liminal space supports racial synchronization through cooperation and togetherness” (p. 120). Thus, the major concern of border studies is to go beyond the limits of physical territory to social and psychological aspects.

IV. ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

4.1 Life and Death Clouding in Han Kang’s *Human Acts*

Human life and demise delineation becomes blurred in the novel due to the narrator's posthumous presence. The narrators, Dong-ho and his friend, raise their voices from the grave and show a keen interest in identity. The dead characters speak to each other, sharing the violence and untimely demise. This study asserts that the ghostly presence of the characters obliterates the line between life and death in the novel.

Life and death have been blurred by the presence of the narrator Dong-ho, who narrates the story after death. His mother speaks to him after his death. Death resembles crossing the boundaries and physical bodily lines. Death frees



the soul from the body, or in other words, the body is freed from the metaphysical world. The narrators' presence after death is the epitome to show the blur between life and death. The shift from one fixed physical space to the next is the deletion, the line between life and death. The body's storage in the Red Cross Hospital shows a demarcation line between the soul and body, as well as between one body and another body. Kang (2014) states, "When you asked how many dead were being transferred from the Red Cross hospital today, Jin-su's reply...thirty...thirty coffins will be lifted down from the truck, one by one" (p. 8). Dead bodies are the representation of cloud space where, after death, they are freed and the boundaries between life and death seem blurred, as well as at some point dismissed. The transformation of those dead bodies in the hospital is the act of changing the location. Therefore, the dead body and hospital are the representation of the interlocutor in terms of space, which are both interconnected and interlinked with each other. Furthermore, Kang has used the word "corpse" (p. 8) for the dead bodies, which no longer belong to the living body. In other words, the body without a soul marks the lines between life and death.

The body and face reveal the identity of the person through distinct structure, marks, and other features. When a human is alive or dead, they are recognized through their body and face. In that sense, the human body is the essence of identity as well as it also reveals the identity of the human. However, such identity can be hidden when the masks are put on the face or the body is covered. Moreover, if the body is distorted, then the true essence of the human being is lost. The depiction of the dead bodies in the distorted form is a very cruel level that, at some point, makes it difficult to recognize them. Such brutality is conducted under the command of the militants against the civilians. Kang (2014) asserts that "their faces are revealed only occasionally, when someone comes looking for a young girl or a baby. The sight of them is too cruel to be inflicted otherwise." (p.11). The exploitation against the civilian when they are alive and even after their murder, the state of the bodies not being in the normal form, depicts separation of the body's organs from its original space, shape, and form. That indicates the separation of the locality from its original point or the space. In addition to that, the state of decomposition of the body is another level of changing the location of the body in itself. The transformation of the body into a decomposing state dissolves the space of the body from constant to inconstant. Kang (2014) writes, "She was still recognizably a smallish woman in her later teens or early twenties; now, her decomposing body has bloated to the size of a grown man" (p.11). The storage of the dead body changes its structure and form from recognizable to unrecognizable in terms of the body, size, and appearance. The space between life and death and constant and inconstant identity blurs the line between the human and its body in the novel.

Human identity has a deep connection with its origin, location, and memory. Human lives revolve around physical/geographical, emotional, and psychological notions when they are alive. Additionally, the same origin is carried by humans even after they depart from this world. Nonetheless, the living body also carries its invisible soul. The invisible soul resembles the state of uncanny. The soul before physical demise and the soul after physical demise generate a point for the discussion. Similarly, humans are familiar and unfamiliar with their soul—the state where they know it exists but they are not able to make it tangible, catch it, or even project it in front of themselves. Freud coined the term 'unheimlich' (p. 4), which refers to the opposite of 'heimlich, which means homely and not homely. So, the uncanny is the state of being familiar with the context and at the same time not being familiar with the context. Freud (1919) elaborates the concept of known and unknown: "the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar" (p. 4). It is the state created by the existing familiar scenario where a person is not completely familiar with their context, and when it is, it gives rise to fear and horror among the people. The conflict between the body and soul presents an uncanny situation where the body is familiar and unfamiliar with its soul. As a result, after death, the same soul becomes the source of fear and horror. Kang (2014) poses a question: "When the body dies, what happens to the soul? How long does it linger by the side of its former home?" (p. 13). This transformation is the point for obliterating the demarcation of the body and soul. The question represents the blurred line between life and death in terms of the soul because the soul is neither born nor does it die. The soul is now no more in the body and not even in its own space, which is not sure where it is. Moreover, it does not belong to the previous body as well, and it has shifted its existence. The word 'former' in the question states the concept of home as the real home where people of Gwangju are living, as well as the body as home for the soul. Moreover, Kang (2014) states, "Many of them hadn't been dead long and still looked uncannily alive" (p. 21). The condition of death is also in the situation of being familiar and unfamiliar, where the body looks like it is dead and alive at the same time, which arouses pity and fear among the witnesses.

The dichotomy of the soul and body functions as the binary opposition. But Shankar Vedanta philosophy asserts the non-duality of the soul and the soul as an eternal, intangible, and disembodied entity. Radhakrishnan (2008) elaborates, "Shankara regards Atman as one, universal, and infinite" (p.450). On the other hand, the body is tangible and unembodied. The body and soul always function in the dichotomy of visible/invisible, corporeal/incorporeal, and form/formless. In between these lines, humans believe that the body cannot function without the soul. The soul is essential for the body. Kang (2014) questions, "A soul does not have a body, so how can it be watching us?" (p. 23). The question reflects that without a body, a soul cannot exist, so once people die, their body and soul function separately. However, the borderland theory explains that creating a border is beyond the physical one. Hence, the soul exists without



a body in a formless manner, which indicates it relies not only on what is obtained from sight but also on listening, observing, and taking information from intuition as well.

The posthumous experiences become a liminal experience, such as an experience between life and the afterlife where the soul, particularly, does not rest and keeps moving around invisibly. According to Gloria Anzaldua, borderland is not only the physical/geopolitical spaces but also reveals the psychic and cultural terrains where identity is fluid. Anzaldua (1987) describes “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (p. 3). Boundaries are not only determined by the physical and visible ones, but also, rather, they can be created through psychological notions. In the novel, the death that occurs from the repression of the soldier creates the body and soul's liminal experiences between life and the afterlife. Kang (2014) explains, “What about those who are now in the gym hall—have their souls also escaped their bodies, flying away like a bird? Where could they possibly be going? It surely wasn't some alien place like heaven or hell” (p.24). The term ‘flying away like a bird’ denotes multiple meanings here. In a literal sense, the soul is captured through the body, so once it is released, the location of the body and the soul function as separate. In other words, the body and soul ambiguity present neither fully alive nor fully at peace, neither in heaven nor in hell, but suspended somewhere in between—is the formation of the new space.

Teachings of life are as important as death, as the dead characters discourse about epistemic violence. Human beings learn to live through their surroundings and their closest ones. It is difficult for a human to survive alone in the world. Humans are dependent on either another human or the environment. From both spots, they get survival tools. Living is learned by not being solitary. It is taught by self or by the other. The other is not only human or any dependency factor; rather, death can be. Death can teach people to live through value, loss, and suffering. Derrida (2006) argues, “To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself; it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death” (p.17). Living is not always self-centered and self-determined. The lesson of life is always taught by others, and even the great lesson of life is taught by death. The lesson given by death emphasizes the present and post-stage of human life, where people understand the value of life and death. Kang (2014) highlights, “How long do souls linger by the side of their bodies? Do they flutter away like some kind of bird? Is that what trembles the edge of the candle flame?” (p.49). The status after the death of the person is uncertain. It is questionable whether the soul exists immediately from the body right after death. Or do they convert into some being that has life and stay around us, or should an alive person mourn with the candles for the dead one? Such uncertainty gives lessons on how to live life with some life skills, such as how to handle when a person's closet dies.

The massacre in the novel is associated with the spectrum of death. The term ‘death to Specter’ was coined by Derrida. According to him, the spectrum relates to hunting presents associated with death or ghosts. Derrida (2006) asserts, “It is not there, this ghost, like any ghost worthy of the name.? And even when it is there, that is, when it is there without being there, you feel that the specter is looking, although through a helmet; it is watching, observing, staring at the spectators and the blind seers, but you do not see it seeing; it remains invulnerable beneath its visored armor” (p.145). Even though the body is dead, its heart can be felt. People are not able to see it, but the hunt is watching, observing the alive one. They are not only supernatural figures, but they seem absent yet present. The specter hunts without physical presence. Kang (2014) illustrates, “There were the bodies, of course, but I didn't meet any others like me. They were there, perhaps, pressing close in the confines of the truck, but I couldn't see them, couldn't feel them” (p.50). This statement was made by Dong-ho after he died in the hospital, where his soul is hunted. The hunted soul of Dong-ho observes the scenario of the body in the hospital and can differentiate between himself and the others. He is narrating the context based on his observation. Which indicates a soul hunt when it separates from its body.

Life and death have been kept at the same significant point, obliterating the fear of death. Kang (2014) mentions, “We would rather die on our feet than live on our knees. Let's join together for a minute's silence in tribute to those who have already paid the price. Let's follow in their footsteps and fight to the end, because... we are noble” (p.168). Rebel and peace are tied together since rebel brings peace.

4.2 Obliteration of Space in Human Acts

Space in the borderland theory indicates that the third space does not necessarily represent the physical space, but psychological, symbolic, and even in-betweenness. The concept of a nation refers to a sovereign state where the state and nation have a shared identity and territory. The territory is encompassed by a sociocultural and political entity. Human Acts merges bodily and emblematic space through the disjointed psychology of the narrators, along with life and death, and the powerful and powerless. The references to the unstable places indicate symbolic imbrication. The blurring in the novel occurs between the school, the morgue, and the commemorative site.

Han Kang's *Human Acts* revolves around the cloud space to denote metaphysical as well as metaphorical notions that show the physical place as well as the psychological notion of the space. The physical locations of the novel are Gwangju, Red Cross Hospital, and the Gymnasium. Each of the places depicts the literal essence of space that holds an incident, record, or link with the identity of the people of Korea. So, the space in that sense is represented in the novel



as the space of storage, a unified place for the common people, and the crossing point for all. Therefore, liminal space has a significant role in the novel to blur the demarcation line.

The shift in the setting is a sign of the transformation of the line. Kang (2014) mentions, “Brothers and sisters, our loved ones are being brought here today from the Red Cross Hospital” (p. 7). The statement indicates that it portrays three settings, which are the home, municipal gymnasium, and Red Cross Hospital, as the physical places where the people from Gwangju are moving around. Therefore, place is the demarcation of the space where it blurs the lines of border between the known and unknown places, as well as fixed and non-fixed. The movement of people from one location to the next is the blurring of the exact location.

The formation of the nation-state has its long history in the establishment of establishing power. History has witnessed that the concept of the nation entered into politics during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Benner (2012) describes, “the word ‘nation’ was used to mean a body of people who had ultimate authority or sovereignty over rulers and laws and who possessed in this capacity a moral identity distinct from the state” (p.699). Nation states consist of the legitimate people’s body and the geographical boundaries of the country. But body and boundary always float due to their everlasting physical and psychological flexibility.

The nation-state has symbolic representations such as the national anthem, animal, and flag. Such icons are the identity and representation of any state in front of the world. Those symbols show the national identity of the people of their own country. Kang (2014) mentions, “It is strange to see the Taegukgi, the national flag, being spread over each coffin and tightly in place” (p.17). Taegukgi, the national flag of Korean society, discloses the nation’s identity with its flag. The flag differentiates nations from each other and their people from each other, too. Tying the body with a flag means highlighting the lines between the nations and their people. The nation-state also represents lines between two or more countries. Where each nation-state holds its distinct identity and values, including recognition. The recognition of the country is not only through its identity but rather its function and status among other countries. That includes progress, politics, as well as conflicts. Kang (2014) indicates, “We have to make them promise to admit the facts about what happened here, so we can recover our honor in the eyes of the rest of the country” (p. 22). The longing to circulate to the rest of the world is the longing to blur the boundary. Because of the internal politics and conflicts of the country, the people suffered. The civil war reveals that inside the nation, there are two opponents with distinct ideologies that are leading towards the conflict. As a result, the state suppresses the civilian population and imposes its power. The rise of the civil war is not only a matter of its own country; rather, it becomes a global interest. Becoming a global interest or connecting with the global history involves crossing the boundaries of one’s country to others. Kang (2014) states, “The rise of Chun Doo-hwan, the young general... riding into Seoul on a tank as in a Roman triumph, swiftly appropriating the highest position in the central government” (p.165). The rise of Chun Doo-hwan is the youngest general to hold the monarchy or autocracy. His victory is seen on the road as grand as the rise of the Roman Empire. The word ‘Roman’ refers to the largest and most powerful empire in European history. Which has its legacy in terms of power and control all over the world. Even Rome is the origin of the regime and politics. Taking the examples of Roman and Roman is the way of adapting grand narratives in the context of novels. At one point, it shows two different million spots of power as a physical border, whereas on the other side, it assimilates the Korean context to the context of Rome.

The global context and politics influence the other country in each state way. Moreover, it leads to harsh, rigid, and strict rules and regulations. History has witnessed that the rise of any empire is based on the despotic system where people are oppressed, killed, and captured and obliged to live with few rights but no privileges at all. Kang (2014) narrates, “The Cambodian government killed another two million of theirs. Nothing is stopping us from doing the same” (p.214). The government of Cambodia has killed millions of people who seemed against the government. The government has the right to take the lives of the people. If Cambodia can do that, why not the Korean government for their people? They conduct the same rules or approach to their people as well. The application of the same methods of the Cambodian government designates the border’s influences and cross-border notion, where a country’s positive and negative impact on the other country. In addition to that, war and its victory depict the matter of pride as well as rewards to the country that wins it. When Korea won the war against Vietnam, they, the winning country, got the rewards. Kang (2014) describes, “Committing such actions in wartime had won them a handsome reward” (p. 141). It explains that the victory of the war is associated with the rewards to the winning country. Furthermore, Kang (2014) explains, “It happened in Gwangju just as it did on Jeju Island, in Kwantung and Nanjing, in Bosnia, and all across the American continent...” (p. 141). The tendency of winning and losing in the war can be seen both in internal conflict and conflict with another country. However, the conflict with the other country is the cross-border issues and a matter of pride. Not only that, it is the way of expansion of the geographical border of the victorious country to the others. The expansion of the land, control over the resources, and the implied rules are the rewards for the winner.

4.3 Authoritative and Illicit Power Apparatus in Human Acts

In the novel Human Acts, the two major parties are the army, as an authoritative group within the state mechanism, and the ultimate civilians, whereas civilians are the people of the state, sharing common values and a shared



identity with the shared value indicates the third space. In that sense, the nation-state is built with this distinction. The legitimate and illegitimate power do not have a clear-cut division because even the authoritarian are the rebels. However, the authority has always had a higher position and power of decision-making to create the border within and outside the country. Kang (2014) asserts, “But these generals are rebels; they seized power unlawfully... people being beaten and stabbed in broad daylight, and even shot” (p.18). The generals are the authorities that hold power, which is legitimized forcefully. To show the power and legitimacy of it, they are beating the people, murdering them either by stabbing or shooting. The demarcation lines between legitimate and illegitimate power, between authority and common people, are the idea of the nation-state. Authority is power, politics, and rules.

The space is not only a place, but sometimes it is attempting to adjust all the political activities. In that context, politicians are visionary and obliterate the dividing line. When they feel authoritarian in their power and position, then they organize mass killings. An authoritative state mechanism has the power to control the life, liberty, and resources of the people and country. Authority is associated with rigidity and obsession with a strict control regime. The power creates division between people of the nation, such as the power holders and the followers of the power. Moreover, the real essence of the power only becomes successful when it can create agony for other parties. Kang (2014) outlines, “The soldiers are the scary ones’... What’s frightening about the dead?” (p.31). The term ‘scary’ suggests that the body and the appearance of the soldier are not friendly. It’s not only in terms of the physical aspects; rather, it is from the mental imprint that people have carried due to the acts of soldiers. Thereupon, the terms soldiers and death are interconnected and have a mental imprint of agony, danger, and trauma on the people that are creating a traumatic space. The line between the authoritative and illicit power indicates the traumatic line for both.

Rebel for the peace that the novel indicates is a significant point for the study of the blurred line between peace and violence. Rebel is the subjective act to resist consciousness under dominant structures or systems. A rebel is represented in borderland theory as someone who does not fully belong to either side. Neither to the dominant group nor to the marginalized one. This fragmented position reflects Anzaldua’s idea of the *mestiza* consciousness—a consciousness that embraces contradiction and multiplicity. Anzaldua (1987) asserts, “There is a rebel in me—the Shadow-Beast. It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. It refuses to take orders from my conscious will; it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership” (p.31). Do not take the orders from the outside, or the outsiders are an act of being with self. It is a matter of being conscious about self-will and self-status. Being conscious in the context of being conscious under the supervision of others reveals a strong psychological and emotional state of mind. As a result, the rebel one becomes the problematic one in front of the others. In the novel, the murder of the civilians, Don-ho and his sister, is an example of an act of rebellion. As a result, most of them are killed. The novel depicts the act of rebellion not through the protest but through being a resistance, which is an example of it. Kang (2014) explains, “Foreign journalists announced that our defeat was certain. He’d told them that we all knew we were going to die, but that we were not afraid of death” (p.120). Knowing the death is near, but not giving up on their mission and not surrendering in front of authority, is an act of rebellion. Such a rebel is depicted through most of the characters in the novel, which project the boundaries between the civilian and the, system.

The result of the rebellion is the mass slaughter. The slaughter of humans by other humans draws the lines between the human and the non-human. Human or inhuman? As it depicts the dark psyche of the human. Kang (2014) questions, “Is it true that human beings are fundamentally cruel? Is the experience of cruelty the only thing we share as a species?” (p.140). The question demands the answer of how a human can be cruel to another human, since humans are known as one of the most intelligent species in the world. In that sense, human beings share other humanistic characteristics, such as humanism that is guided by moral, ethical values, which are for the betterment of the entire human race. On the contrary, when humans indulge in projecting anthropocentric notions, they keep them in the center and act accordingly. Then the dark sides of the human are revealed, like envy, hate, kindness, and cruelty. Moreover, Kang (2014) asks, “Is the dignity that we cling to nothing but self-delusion masking from ourselves this single truth: that each one of us is capable of being reduced to an insect, a ravening beast, or a lump of meat? To be degraded, damaged, or slaughtered, the essential face of humankind, one that history has confirmed inevitable?” (p.140). Wearing the masks of self-delusion and innocence and projecting them accordingly is a blurring of the boundaries between reality and delusion. In that sense, the delusion works on two levels. One is the humans who are deceiving themselves and others. Both kinds of delusion mitigate with the clear boundaries that blur at one point where they merge at some point. The contradictory conception brings the question of what is real and what is non-real. At the end, the truth is constructive.

The kind and sensitive are also one of the truths that humans have created, whereas acting as a beast or attacking as an animal is another type of truth that is constructed by humans. Similarly, deconstructing the definition of the human and transforming it into a truth-beast, an insect, or a lump of meat is the symbolic representation of merging the boundaries between human and non-human. And when the boundaries are crossed or eliminated, then the slaughter seems essential to build another boundary of power, fear, and control over the people.

The autocratic system suppresses the value and ethics of the human and humanity. In other words, it deconstructs and redefines the definition of the human and humanity. Where the fundamental rights of humans are suppressed and



the suppressed human's humanity. Then the people of the state revolt against it to preserve their rights. Kang (2014) writes, "We fight for justice, we are, we are, we live together and die together, we do, we do, we would rather die on our feet than live on our knees, we are fighters for justice. (p. 166). The voice that is an outburst from the suppressed search for their essence. Their voice symbolizes rage against any sort of prejudice and discrimination. The fight is for justice, not for self-motive. It is guided by the selfish motive for the welfare of the entire humanity and human race. So, at that time, the value of unity was seen as a tool, a power and strength, and a weapon against inhuman activities. Likewise, surrender is not a matter of only the physical; rather, it is a matter of pride that holds the truth and justice of the fighter. Power role reversal and the third space between authoritative power and unauthoritative power signify the role of blurred in-betweenness for maintaining the harmony in the society.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The narrative point manages to merge the life-death demarcation, raising the voice from the dead, employing the posthumous narrator. The narrator, Dong-ho; his mother speaking to him; and his friend have a discourse after death, but the subject for the discussion is about their life before physical demise. This is the cloud spacing of the life-death point. This study infers that metaphysical and metaphorical points merge through locational shifting and soul transformation. The third space is a point for all the activities. Moreover, state mechanisms, state authority, and civilian power have cross-pointed shared values after role reversal. When authoritarians are rebels, the roles reverse. Therefore, this novel generates cloud space for merging the life-death dichotomy, physical and symbolic space clouding, and valid and invalid power exercise.

5.2 Recommendation

The extreme value of the territorial division between the two geographic allocations, two nations, life death division, powerholders and powerless generates detachment. The search for the liminal space blurs the territorial boundaries, nations conflict, the life-death division, the past-present demarcation, the reality and imagination points, and develops harmonious relations among the people. Social mechanism delves into the power exercise mechanism that creates division among people, which in turn creates conflict. The identification of the intersection points between the two produces synchronization. Therefore, the third space is the point for the solution of every struggle.

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