

**SHIFTING THE PARADIGM IN VICTIM-PERPETRATOR
RELATIONS AND THE AMBIVALENT SPACE IN TANIKA GUPTA'S
SANCTUARY**

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ABSTRACT

*A British playwright of Bengali descent, Tanika Gupta's, a British playwright of Bengali descent, Sanctuary (2002) emerges as an outstanding play in two ways that are mutually dependent on one another. First, it challenges the traditional definitions of victim, perpetrator, and savior thanks to its complex and conflicting characters. Secondly, the play achieves this emancipating and challenging perspective through its depiction of an ambivalent setting that dismantles similar essentialized entities. With its critique of Western hypocritical stance towards stories of victimization in non-Western countries, the play presents a critical perspective from the boundaries of the West signaling it an unsafe setting. Thanks to this ambiguity of space, the setting contributes to the play's debunking of the paradigms. Divided in two major sections, the theoretical background and the close reading of the play, this article argues that Tanika Gupta's Sanctuary resists settling into categorizations such as the non-Western victim and the Western savior and disputes these binaries through its non-conventional characters and ambivalent space. **Keywords:** Tanika Gupta, human rights theatre, Sanctuary, space*

**TANIKA GUPTA'NIN SİĞİNAK ADLI OYUNUNDA KURBAN-
FAİL İLİŞKİSİNDEKİ PARADİGMAYI DEĞİŞTİRMEK VE ÇELİŞKİLİ
MEKAN ALGISI**

ÖZ

Bangladeşli İngiliz yazar Tanika Gupta'nın 2002 yapımı oyunu Sığınak, birbirleriyle ilintili iki açıdan seçkin bir oyun olarak ortaya çıkar. İlk olarak, girift ve çelişkili karakterleriyle kurban, fail, ve kurtarıcı kavramlarının geleneksel tanımlarına karşı çıkar. İkinci olarak, oyun yerleşik olgulara karşı duran çelişkili mekan algısıyla bu özgürleştirici ve düşündürücü bakış açısını elde eder. Batılı olmayan ülkelerdeki mağduriyet hikayelerine karşı Batı ikiyüzlülüğünü öne çıkararak, Batıdan gelen eleştirel bir bakış açısını ve Batının artık güvenli bir sığınak olmadığını gösterir. Çelişkili mekan algısı sayesinde oyun aynı zamanda paradigmalari değiştirme olanağı sağlar. Teorik

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kısmı ve detaylı metin okuması olmak üzere iki ana bölümden oluşan bu makale, Sığınak oyununun Batılı olmayan kurban ve Batılı kurtarıcı kategorilerine karşı çıktığını ve bunu girift karakterleri ve çelişkili mekan algısıyla ortaya konduğunu tartışır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Tanika Gupta, insan hakları tiyatrosu, Sığınak, mekan*

Introduction

Western idea of humanitarianism revolves around helping and protecting the needy. With the advancement of social media, which is mostly utilized by the educated and well-off populations, Westerners find it even easier to help others and provide a safe sanctuary for the victimized albeit virtually. Western humanitarianism usually appears in forms of donating money, sharing photos and posts of vulnerability, and an increasing interest in stories of victimization from the Third World. For instance, about a year ago, on September 2, 2015, the photo of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year old Syrian refugee, lying dead on the Aegean coast has been widely distributed in social media and drew international attention. However, couple of weeks later, despite arising sympathies with Syrian refugees that began with Kurdi, European countries decided to take stricter measures to prevent the Syrian refugee flux to Europe. Although the image of Aylan Kurdi stroke us with a profound sense of empathy, it still did not move Western individuals to acknowledge the possibility of becoming neighbors with the very same refugees. Their heightened compassion on social media failed to stretch to real life, probably due to their short-sighted motivation to know more about his victimization and to remain distant from it simultaneously.²

Moreover, in the past decade, with a number of refugees that Western powers decided to take in i.e. USA's welcoming many child soldiers and young survivors from African countries such as Sudan,

² This motivation, though, is reversed when a real horrific event takes place nearby. For instance, in the light of the ISIS bombings in several European capitals i.e. Paris in November 2015, Belgium in March 2016, Facebook not only initiated *the safety check button*, but also showed more sympathy for the victims and their families. However, the same social media site failed to expand similar sympathies to similar attacks in the Non-Western world i.e. Ankara in October 2015 and Baghdad in July 2016.

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Darfur, and Sierra Leone, the image of West as being a safe haven for the Third World is being imposed and promoted. The images of Europe as a safe sanctuary, or the USA as the land of opportunities have been widespread, and further highlighted. Similarly, Tanika Gupta's 2002 play *Sanctuary* plays with these conventions and challenges the concept of Europe being a safe harbor for refugees. Through written in 2002, the play seems to beckon the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015 and reveals the hypocritical nature of Western humanitarianism. Gupta's *Sanctuary* is set in an idyllic garden at the back of a church that will soon be closed down in London, which triggers the shifting of the paradigm of victim-perpetrator relations in the play. Thanks to the ambivalence of space and setting, the play challenges the traditional definitions of victim, perpetrator, and savior through its complex and three-dimensional characters. Furthermore, the setting itself turns out to be complicit in this act of victimization and suffering and becomes an additional character, the seventh-one, in the play. Divided in two major sections, the theoretical background and the close reading of the play, this article argues that Tanika Gupta's *Sanctuary* resists settling into categorizations such as the non-Western victim and the Western savior and disputes these binaries through its unstable and wavering characters. Moreover, it achieves this emancipating and challenging perspective through its depiction of a setting that dismantles similar essentialized entities. The setting, therefore, comes out a significant character, which is instrumental in creating a topical and a brand new narrative.

1. Challenging the Western Perceptions of Victim, Savior, and Perpetrator

The last few decades witness a surge in the clearly defined roles for Westerners and non-Westerners in regards to the proliferation of human rights narratives and memoirs. A certain schematic role play is at stake in these stories of victimization and salvation, especially prominent in the ones published in Western

countries.³ These symbolic roles defined by clear-cut boundaries not only perpetuate the image of the vulnerable other, who is dependent on his Western supplier, but also solidify the neo-imperialist tendencies. In “Savages, Victims, Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights,” Makau Mutua argues that the current Eurocentric discourse of human rights is based upon the triangle of a barbaric savage, vulnerable victim and the white, Christian savior. Stating that the construction of the three-dimensional prism “falls within the historical continuum of the Eurocentric colonial project, in which actors are cast into superior and subordinate positions,” Mutua calls for a change in the human rights discourse, which bolsters the savage-victim-savior triangle (2001: 204). In the same manner, Gupta challenges this paradigm as a response to the Western-based human rights discourse that is oriented towards vulnerability and sees humanitarianism as a civilizing mission. In her play *Sanctuary*, Mutua’s example of a savage-victim-savior triangle is invalidated as the Rwandan genocide survivor turns out to be a perpetrator and the white savior Jenny is vulnerable when she cannot save the church for the sake of the refugees she protects.

In addition to its apparent display of its schematic relationship among savage, victim, and savior, Mutua’s article also makes readers question their proximity to the other and the ways in which the Western savior views the perpetrator and the victim. In *Violence: Six Ways Reflections*, Slavoj Žižek discusses our relation to the victimized other, and foregrounds our proximity to our neighbor. In regards to the Western self’s subjection of the other, he writes:

Today’s liberal tolerance towards others, the respect of otherness and openness towards it, is counterpointed by an obsessive fear of harassment. In short, the Other is just fine, but only insofar as his presence is not intrusive, insofar as this Other is not really other. ... My duty to be tolerant towards the Other effectively means that I should not get too close to him, intrude on his space. In other words, I should respect his *intolerance* of my over-proximity. ... The tortured

³ See Ajak et al., Beah, and Yousafzai’s memoirs.

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subject is no longer a Neighbor, but an object whose pain is neutralized, reduced to a property that has to be dealt with in a rational utilitarian calculus. (2008: 41-45).

Highlighting the seemingly close and pretentious attitude towards the victimized other, Zizek pinpoints a very relevant and topical issue on human rights and the Western perception of the victimized other.⁴

Despite the fact that Zizek's attack on the Western subject and his reductionist attitude towards the victimized other makes valid claims within the capitalist and neocolonialist parameters of the twenty-first century, his argument sidelines the reciprocal interdependency of all three parties. In *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Kelly Oliver defines the process of witnessing abuses as requiring an address and a response, and she underscores the mutual reciprocity in this complex relationship. Introducing the two terms *address-ability* and *response-ability* as integral aspects of witnessing, Oliver argues that subordination or trauma undermines the possibility of subjectivity, which also destroys the possibility of witnessing. Arguing that address-ability and response-ability are inherent parts of witnessing, Oliver states, "If we conceive subjectivity as a process of witnessing that requires response-ability and address-ability in relation to other people, especially through difference, then we will also realize an ethical and social responsibility to those others who sustain us. ... Witnessing is the heart of the circulation of energy that connects us, and obligates us, to each other. The spark of subjectivity is maintained by bearing witness to what is beyond recognition, the process of witnessing

⁴ Zizek's ideas on one's proximity and distance to the other has been derived from French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's theory of face-to-face interaction, which has been of great interest for scholars who specialize in human rights theatre. Basing his arguments on Husserl's intentionality of consciousness and Sartre's theory of the Other, Levinas introduces his theory of face-to-face relations and brings attention to the non-intentionality of consciousness as being the driving force behind an individual's recognition of his responsibility for the Other. He states: "The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question. Responsibility for the Other, for the naked face of the first individual to come along" (Levinas, 2003: 83).

itself" (2001: 19-20). According to Oliver, being closer to a survivor stands out to be a significant medium to resist violations and burden the witness with responsibility. In some aspects, this proximity to the other and witnessing her suffering makes the savior less of a savior, but more of a victim, as seen in Jenny in *Sanctuary*.

In this discussion of witnessing distant others and their suffering and the spatial relation between the Western savior and the non-Western victim, the theatre genre plays a very relevant role. It not only provides a safe distance to the site of suffering and the victimized other, but also creates a compassionate impact at the same time. It provides the venue for witnessing through its publicity and immediacy. It is thanks to theatre that the two parties, the survivor and the witness, are taken into account and in that sense, it surpasses human rights novels and memoirs through its active engagement with the audience and its ambivalent power relation between the actor and the audience. Moreover, through its inherent metatheatrical quality, it helps to unpack and dismantle this paradigmatic shift in the relationship between the powerful and the needy.

In his book *Distant Suffering*, Luc Boltanski underscores the newly changing role of theatre in this act of witnessing distant suffering. Making a clear-cut distinction between the roles of the actor and the spectator in early modern drama as opposed to contemporary drama, he argues: "From anywhere, the new spectator observes the actors and their spectators both of whom are involved in a common scene since the actors know themselves to be observed by the spectators and the spectators know that they know this. He is not absorbed by what takes place on the stage in that state of 'participation' or 'identification' so often described in the innumerable commentaries arising from the ambiguous notion of 'catharsis.' Nor does he identify or thrill with the other spectators, but instead keeps control of his emotions" (1999: 26). It is this newly-adopted role of the spectator and his anti-cathartic stance to the site of suffering that makes theatre align with witnessing and proximate to suffering. The theatre helps the audience to be liberated from the boundaries of a cathartic experience and locates her in the middle of this ambiguity of witnessing. Similarly, the use of

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metatheatricality and role-playing within *Sanctuary* paves the way for an anti-cathartic experience of witnessing.

In regards to the dramatic performances that dismantle the paradigms and handle human rights issues, Karen Malpede coins the term "Theatre of Witness" to define "a new ritual poetic theatre whose substance is the inner life as lived in the presence of history – a form ... which by becoming cognizant of the extremity of the twentieth-century violence poses the question: what does it take to be human in such an age as that?" (1996: 122). Breaking with classical tragedy and building on Brecht's anti-Aristotelian theatre, theatre of witness "takes form which connects self to deeper, previously hidden layers of self; connects self to the other; and provides a renewed connection to the social world ... and the audience becomes not only witness to the testimony, but witness to the witness of testimony" (Malpede, 1996: 134 and 132, respectively). It is this renewed connection to the social world that enables theatre a unique medium to publicize conflicts and wars, to call for bearing witness and ethical responsibility, and to build up a new model of spectatorship, which resists empathy and a cathartic experience.

2. A Non-Conventional Setting for a Non-Conventional Family in Tanika Gupta's *Sanctuary*

Tanika Gupta, a British writer of Bengali descent, deals with topics of racial and sexual discrimination especially in her plays *Meet the Mukherjees*, *Sugar Daddies*, and *White Boy*. In her interview with Peter Billingham, she draws attention to her double identity and familial background and resents the fact that she is classified as either a black or an Asian writer (2007: 204). In an attempt to explicate her position in contemporary British theatre, she writes:

I'm very clear now, I'm much clearer about this – I'm not an Asian writer, I'm a writer. You wouldn't call Tom Stoppard a Czech writer or a white writer or an English writer, would you? So, why should I be labelled? ... Of course, I'm still proud

of being Asian, but the major factor remains that it shouldn't *determine* your writing because in a sense it denigrates you as a writer. (2007: 207)

In addition, Kathleen Starck underscores the fact that Gupta is interested in addressing to a more international audience (2006: 348). Likewise, her two plays in particular, namely *Gladiator Games* and *Sanctuary*, not only adhere to her favorite theme of human rights, but also bring a fresher perspective with their focus on human rights issues in general, rather than a narrowed-down discussion of race and gender.⁵

Sanctuary, apart from Gupta's other mainstream plays, narrates the story of the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide.⁶ The play opens and ends in a church's garden, reminiscent of Garden of Eden, which seemingly provides a haven for the six characters of the play. A strict division of race, gender, nationality dominates through the characters as the three characters Kabir, Michael, and Sebastian are the non-white refugees in London and Jenny, Ayesha, and Margaret are the white, female Londoners of the play. The non-white ones have experienced death and trauma in their home countries and represent death and gloominess (Starck, 2006: 351). The fact that the plays opens in the cemetery reinforces this representation as the opening stage directions state: "*We are in the corner of a graveyard – a small Eden-like, neat patch of luscious green packed with shrubbery, ornate flowering plants (orchids) and small tubs of herbs etc. ... In the background we can see row upon row of gravestones, which stretch into the distance*" (Gupta, 2002: 15). The play's emphasis on death and dying are strengthened when Michael, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide and now a refugee in London, and Sebastian, an African-

⁵ *Gladiator Games* (2005), a verbatim play, tells the story of a young British Asian man, Zahid Mubarek, who was killed by a racist cellmate while in prison. Although the theme of racial discrimination is apparent in the play, *Gladiator Games* opens up a wider discussion on the issues of Western hypocrisy on race and the injustices that followed.

⁶ Rwandan genocide took place between April 1994 and July 1994 and in 100 days, 800,000 Tutsis, an ethnic minority group who were the landowners in Rwanda, were killed by Hutus, the ethnic majority who were the laborers and the servants.

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Caribbean art photographer who takes photos of baby graves, converse on death and dying in the cemetery:

SEBASTIAN: You like it here?

MICHAEL: Yes.

SEBASTIAN: Lots of dead people. Makes you feel lucky.

MICHAEL: Eh?

SEBASTIAN: That we're alive, man! However bad things are out there, at least we're not fucking six feet under. Know what I mean?

MICHAEL: (*Polite.*) I certainly know what you mean.

SEBASTIAN: Too right! Especially when you look at all those gravestones. Young people – half my age. Cut off in the prime of their lives. (Gupta, 2002: 16)

As opposed to Michael and Sebastian's perspectives on death and life, Kabir, an Indian gardener and the tender of the church, holds a more positive attitude towards life and wants to adopt Ayesha, a biracial teenager who lost her father. He is the organizer and the leader of the group and fights against the government's offer to close down the church.

On the other end of the spectrum, the Western characters, Jenny, the priest of the church, and Margaret, Jenny's grandmother, intervene and interact with the residents of the garden. As a close friend and a surrogate daughter for Kabir, Jenny does her best to save the church and the garden, the two places to which Kabir has devoted his life. She is representative of a white Western woman, who is ready to play the role of the savior and a naïve woman, who truly understands the condition of refugees in the church. Her grandmother, Margaret, on the other hand, is the racist Westerner, who fails to grasp why Jenny is helping these black and Asian men (Gupta, 2002: 32).

The juxtaposition of varied characters, stereotypes such as Margaret and Jenny, along with non-traditional characters i.e. Ayesha, reinforces the idea of a non-conventional family made up of six varying characters brought together in a church setting.

Moreover, Kabir's insistence to become a surrogate father for Ayesha, whose father's grave he takes care of in the cemetery further strengthens Gupta's attempt to portray a new form of family (Gupta, 2002: 63). The display of loose blood relations as seen in Jenny and Margaret along with closer non-genetic relations (i.e. Kabir becoming Ayesha's surrogate father and Michael and Sebastian acting like brothers) dominate the play. Of course, Kabir's genetic daughter in India, who is unaware of the fact that her father is still alive, contributes to this enigmatic web of relations (Gupta, 2002: 44). As Michael and Sebastian encourage Kabir to contact his daughter, he insists on adopting Ayesha instead.⁷

Space and spatial dynamics play significant roles in Gupta's play, in which this non-conventional family takes refuge in a church garden. First and foremost, the setting itself places an ambiguity in the way the characters interact with one another. On the one hand, as the title suggests, it provides a sanctuary for these outcasts and refuges from different parts of the world. For Michael, for instance, it stands for an escape from his tempestuous past and the memories of the genocide. For Kabir, it is a Garden of Eden, in which he finds a substitute daughter for his long lost one in India. With those positive connotations, the image of Garden of Eden placed at the backyard of a church is even more foregrounded (Hemming, 2002: 1). On the other hand, the fact that the location is actually a cemetery garden further bolsters the setting's association with death and dying. Particularly for some characters such as Sebastian, who is there to take photos of baby graves and Ayesha, who is there to visit her father's grave, it symbolizes their traumatic past. Moreover, in the second half of the play, when Kabir finally finds out that the church is going to be closed down and that he will lose all his life and dedication, it becomes nothing, but a dead and a useless garden for him.

This idea of uselessness and the association with death are displayed when more events unfold in the second half of the play. In her review of the play, Gabriele Griffin foregrounds the symbolic existence of the church, as a character and a setting, as displaying its

⁷ This concept of close-knit non-genetic family is bolstered when Michael, Sebastian, and Kabir fear of the coming of an intruder into the garden in Act I Scene 3 (Gupta, 2002: 41).

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inefficacy in preventing atrocities: “the sanctity of the church at sanctuary, proved ineffectual against the onslaught of ethnically motivated genocidal atrocities” (2011: 231). This notion of a religious institution being ineffective during genocide and other atrocities has been a widely discussed topic in Rwandan genocide, in which a Hutu priest, Elizaphan Ntakirutimana provided refuge for 3,000 Tutsis in his Seventh-day Adventist church in the Rwandan town Mugonero and then ordered them to be killed in the same church in April 1994 (Schlote, 2012: 76). These horrible incidents are enacted in the play through the character of Michael, who turns out to be one of these Hutu priests while he was in Rwanda during the genocide. It is also no coincidence when Sebastian becomes suspicious of Michael's acts and his past at the party given during the closing of the church in Act II Scene 2. As Michael is about to leave for a trip with his friend, Sebastian confronts him as being complicit in the crimes of the Rwandan genocide:⁸

SEBASTIAN: Tell them the truth. Tell them what you did.

MARGARET: What did he do?

MICHAEL: Don't listen to him.

SEBASTIAN: Herded them into the church... innocent people... brought the killers....handed out machetes...Kibungo... the Church

JENNY: Sebastian, stop this nonsense right now. You're imagining things.

SEBASTIAN: It was unspeakable what his kind did.

MICHAEL: No- not me.

...

SEBASTIAN: I spoke to witnesses. They saw him in his truck handing out weapons and giving orders... people he left for dead, who hid in fear under the bodies of their dead mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children... I went in search for him. (Gupta, 2002: 93-95)

⁸ Sebastian remembers those days while he was working as a war photographer in Rwanda.

It is this very striking scene in which Sebastian reveals the true face of Michael. Despite the fact that the rest of the party attendees do not really believe in Sebastian's accusations, Michael's bloody past and his murderous acts are revealed in the next scene.

In the next scene when Michael openly confesses his crimes, he also points at Kabir's own complicity in the killing of his wife. This dialogue between Kabir and Michael in Act II Scene 3 raises questions on the conventional definitions of a victim and a perpetrator:

KABIR: You were the persecutor.

MICHAEL: It will mean certain death for me if they take me back. They hate the Hutus – they plan to kill us all. They won't give me a fair trial – they took our land from us before, forced us into slavery and servitude – they will do it again. I can't go back there.

...

MICHAEL: I have told you the truth.

KABIR: You haven't.

MICHAEL: I harmed no one. Why don't you trust me?

KABIR: You are still lying! I know you have killed to be saving your family.

MICHAEL: And I know you have stood back and allowed your wife to be killed. (Gupta, 2002: 98-99)

In this dialogue between Michael and Kabir, two important ideas are brought to daylight. First, the boundary between a victim and a perpetrator is blurred as Kabir's complicity in his wife's death is reminded by Michael. Secondly, through the end of the play, Michael finally tells the entire story, which is a fictionalized version of a real event. Therefore, *Sanctuary* underscores how real life and fiction go hand in hand on theatre stage. In her seminal book *Theatre of the Real*, Carol Martin draws attention to the concept of the theatre of the real, in which the fictional and the real mingle and counteract. Theatre of the real comes out as a new and challenging form of contemporary theater where the spectator assumes an active role in this staging:

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Regardless of style, theatre of the real does not necessarily document the real with complete historiographic accuracy. Creators of performance reinterpret history and represent it according to their fascination, proclivities, imagination and individual convictions about whether or not a definitive truth can be known, all the while using the archive as source material. ... The bona fide and the counterfeit, the authentic and the forged, the real and the fake continue to be close partners. (2013: 12-13)

Similarly, the way the victims tell their real stories in a fictional setting debunks the strict division between the real and the imaginary.

Therefore, fictionality and metatheatre come out as significant literary devices in Gupta's *Sanctuary*. For instance, when Kabir narrates his own story twice, first in Act I Scene 2 and then in Act I Scene 5, he simultaneously acts out the story as well. When Jenny calls his narration a story, he corrects her by saying, "It is not a story. It is being a fact" (Gupta, 2002: 36) and underscores the truth value of his story. Later on, when he talks about how he let the soldiers kill his wife in order to save his life and his daughter's, imaginary gunshots and voices intervene his storytelling (Gupta, 2002: 73). After his story, when Michael tries to console him, he, then, starts to tell his own story, which we find to be inaccurate at the end of the play, but it foreshadows Michael's possible complicity in the crimes of the Rwandan genocide:

MICHAEL: I understand your guilt my friend but don't let it eat you up. I have done much worse. We hid some friends in our chicken house at the bottom of our garden. A Tutsi family who had run from their land.

....

MICHAEL: On the tenth day, as I was returning home with food – they began to shout at me and kick me.

KABIR: Even though you were a Pastor?

MICHAEL: It meant nothing to them. They knew I was hiding a family – someone must have informed them. ...

KABIR: What did you do?

MICHAEL: What could I do? I showed them to the chicken house. We hear the terrifying sound of children as they are butchered. Broken eggs and blood everywhere. The screams of the family die out and it is silent. (Gupta, 2002: 75-77)

This camaraderie and solidarity between Kabir and Michael come to an end when Michael confesses his real crimes – as opposed to the fictionalized ones – to Kabir, who in a moment of rage kills him (Gupta, 2002: 106). In Act II Scene 4, Kabir openly confesses his murder of Michael and is reproached by the others, especially Sebastian.

The play's ending has a significant role in Gupta's attempt to provide new definitions for victim, perpetrator, and savior. In the opening of the play, Jenny stands out as the savior, who allows victims, Kabir and Michael in this case, to take refuge in her sanctuary. The play seems to highlight the established roles of a savior and a victim. However, through the end of *Sanctuary*, both Kabir and Michael turn out to be perpetrators, as Jenny almost defines herself as a victim, who refuses to become a witness to the crime committed by Kabir. Ironically, Jenny could also be regarded as a perpetrator since her role in the play, the priest who protects the refuges and the victims in her church, is reflective of Michael and Elizaphan Ntakirutimana. As Kabir claims to have done justice for the 3,000 Tutsis who were massacred in Michael's church and have acted as their savior, Jenny refuses to be involved in Kabir's murderous act and wants to come off clean. Despite the complaints and the objections of the rest of the team members, they finally agree to cover up the crime:

MARGARET: (*Urgent*). We've got to get rid of it – before the fire department arrive.

...

JENNY: Gran? What are you doing?

SEBASTIAN: We should go to the police.

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JENNY: We can't cover this up.

MARGARET: Yes, we can. All of us protected Michael. You took him under your wing.

JENNY: I didn't know... how was I supposed to...?

MARGARET stops.

MARGARET: Look at him, Jen.

JENNY: I can't be seen to condone this.

MARGARET: So, we just stand back and wash our hands? We're all culpable.

JENNY: No.

MARGARET: For once in your life, Jen, will you please listen to me? Look at him.

JENNY looks over at KABIR.

You want to ruin another man's life?

JENNY is torn.

I can't do this on my own.

JENNY picks up the other spade and helps MARGARET in her digging. (Gupta, 2002: 110-111)

With this particular scene, more questions on the dyad between the victim and the perpetrator surface. Margaret questions the traditional definitions of a victim and a perpetrator and labels Sebastian, Jenny, and herself as a group of perpetrators who protected Michael. In addition, when Kabir reads the real letter sent to Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, the priest of the church on Michael's grave, he also alludes to a seminal memoir by Phillip Gourevitch further highlighting the West's and the UN's complicity in the Rwandan Genocide.⁹

Rwandan Genocide is undoubtedly a sensitive and an apt topic in Gupta's handling of the shifting paradigms of certain concepts and definitions. Given that moderate Hutus had two choices, either to give in names and kill Tutsis, or to be murdered by

⁹ *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* is the title of a chronicle written by Phillip Gourevitch, who, in his book, focuses on this specific incident and discusses the shifting paradigm of victim and perpetrator in the Rwandan Genocide.

extremist Hutus, it led to a dispute on the social and political constructions of victim, perpetrator, and savior. Moreover, Rwandan Genocide is notorious for UN's indifference to the events.¹⁰ It is one of the most renowned atrocities in which the Western world and media played dumb for 100 days of the genocide. Therefore, by focusing on the topic of Rwandan Genocide, Gupta not only achieves her goal to address more international topics, but also critiques Western imperialism and complicity in the atrocities done elsewhere. Similarly, Kathleen Starck underscores how the theme of Rwandan Genocide in *Sanctuary* is being criticized for "not only postcolonial condition but also the Euro-centrist attitude of the West and the ongoing reproduction of colonial thinking in racial/racist hierarchies" (Starck, 2006: 352). Despite the fact that *Sanctuary* is Gupta's only play that goes beyond the boundaries of Britain, it still makes an important critical stance to the citizens of the Western world.

Simultaneously, Gupta's choice of an ambivalent setting, a cemetery of a religious institution that is cloaked as a symbolic Garden of Eden, fits well into this ambiguity of Western complicity. As Schlote also argues, "While the garden functions foremost as a supposedly safe refuge and a place where the characters look for peace and quiet and the occasional friendly chat, it can also be read as a metaphor for England as an island welcoming refugees, yet ultimately rejecting them" (2012: 75). As the characters take on different and conflicting roles i.e. Michael's role reversal from a victim to a perpetrator, then from a perpetrator to a victim or Kabir's transformation from a victim to a perpetrator, the spatial ambiguity goes hand in hand with this similar rearrangement. Each character has a darker and a good side so does the church as a place for sanctuary. Ironically, the church, the setting that enables the formation of a new family, comes forth with another dubious role at the end of the play. It both becomes a final resting place for Michael, who is buried in the cemetery, but also takes on its initial role, a

¹⁰ For further information, see Former Force Commander of UNAMIR in Rwanda Romeo Dallaire's memoir *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* and the same-titled movie by Roger Spottiswoode.

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sanctuary for the other characters, who, this time, search for a refuge for their crimes, not victimizations.

Conclusion

Tanika Gupta's *Sanctuary* emerges as an outstanding play in that it not only dismantles the existing Western triangle of a savage-victim-savior – to quote from Mutua – providing a mind-boggling narrative, but also handles human rights issues in a challenging manner that covers international issues. With its critique of Western hypocritical stance towards stories of victimization in non-Western countries, the play presents a critical perspective from the boundaries of the industrial West. Through its unusual setting and the ambivalent spatial relation to human rights abuses, Gupta's play disintegrates the clear-cut distinctions among victims, saviors, and perpetrators with the help of its unstable characters. As an alternative response to Westernized human rights narratives and literary genres, Tanika Gupta's *Sanctuary* gains its due respect and place in human rights theatre as an example of theatre of witness that "connects self to the other" (Malpede, 1996: 134).

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