



TEN DAYS IN A MAD-HOUSE: INCARCERATING THE IN/SANE IMMIGRANT BODY WITHIN THE AMERICAN CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM

TEN DAYS IN A MAD-HOUSE: 'AKIL HASTASI' GÖÇMENİN AMERİKAN ISLAH SİSTEMİNE HAPSEDİLİŞİ

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Abstract

In 1887, journalist Elizabeth Cochrane, using the penname Nellie Bly, went undercover for a mission to expose the dynamics of the Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum for *The New York World*, and following that the paper published her work *Ten Days in a Mad-House*. For this purpose Nelly Bly impersonated an insane woman, and even more interestingly a "crazy Cuban girl." Her narrative *Ten Days in A Mad-House* demonstrates the reception of the racialized insane immigrant body in late nineteenth century American society as well as in the institutions of the time. The text is analyzed by contextualizing it within the eugenic and biopolitical framework of the era, which denationalized the insane immigrant body, since their 'disposable' bodies were seen as nothing more than a burden on the capitalist structure of the United States. Foucault's ideas on biopolitics and the carceral system are applied to Bly's text to question further the institutional operations within this power system. Moreover, Agamben's theories on the bare life of the homo sacer is used to demonstrate how the insane bodies of immigrants are unfreed within the correctional system. In this article, the incarceration of the undesired immigrant is analyzed in relation to how Nelly Bly performed the biopolitics of insanity, and used the power of writing as she crossed color, class and social lines as a white, professional woman impersonating an insane, impoverished immigrant woman.

Öz

1887 senesinde Nellie Bly mahlasını kullanan gazeteci Elizabeth Cochrane, *The New York World* gazetesi adına Blackwell's Island Akıl Hastanesindeki dinamikleri ifşa etmek için gizli göreve gittikten sonra *Ten Days in a Mad-House* adlı yazısı gazetede basıldı. Bu amaçla akıl hastası bir kadın rolüne, daha da ilginç akıl hastası Kübalı bir kadın rolüne giren Bly'nin *Ten Days in a Mad-House* adlı anlatısı akıl hastası göçmen bedeninin 19. yüzyıl Amerikan toplumunda olduğu kadar dönemin çağdaş enstitülerinde de nasıl karşılandığını göstermektedir. Metin, 'gözden çıkarılabilir' akıl hastası göçmen bedeninin Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin kapitalist yapısına bir yük olarak görünmesinden dolayı ırk islahı, biyopolitika ve göçmen bedeninin ulussuzlaştırılması gibi temel kavramlar ile birlikte incelenmektedir. Foucault'nun biyopolitika ve islah sisteminin işleyişleri üzerine fikirleri, erk sistemi içerisindeki kurumsal işleyişleri daha da sorgulamak için Bly'nin metnine uygulanmaktadır. Buna ek olarak Agamben'in homo sacer (kutsal insan)'in çıplak hayatı hakkındaki savları akıl hastası göçmenin özgürlüğünün islah sisteminde nasıl elinden alındığını göstermek için kullanılmaktadır. Bu makalede istenmeyen göçmenin hapsedilişi, Nelly Bly'nin deliliği biyopolitik bir performans olarak nasıl sergilediği ve akıl hastası göçmen bir kadını canlandıran beyaz bir kadın olarak hem ırksal hem de sosyal sınırları nasıl geçtiğiyle ilişkili olarak incelenmektedir.

In 1887, journalist Nellie Bly went undercover for a mission to expose the dynamics of the Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum for *The New York World*. Her mission was to get accepted into the asylum and write "a plain and unvarnished narrative of the treatment of the patients therein and the methods of management" (Bly, *Ten Days in a Madhouse*). The revealed story of the asylum exposé was a great success: The New York City issued \$1,000,000 more per year for the care of the insane and the incident attracted the public attention to the corruption of the asylum.

Nelly Bly's *Ten Days in a Mad-house* is a narrative that sheds light on the conditions of institutionalized others—especially immigrants—who were trapped within the dehumanizing power relations of mental asylums in the late nineteenth century. Bly's story not only exposes the filthy conditions of the asylum, but it also demonstrates how the unequal and hegemonic structures within the walls of the Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum work. The systematic violence against patients – especially towards women and immigrants—and the dehumanizing treatment by the nurses form one of the central complaints in Bly's work. It is important to remember that these patients were sometimes institutionalized and labeled insane for refusing social gender roles such as doing household chores, even though they were completely sane. Apart from gender issues, there is also the question of ethnic identities of the insane asylum's inmates. Most of the patients described by Bly are Irish, German, French, and Jewish. This brings up two questions for the subhuman treatment they receive from the hospital staff. First, are these patients dehumanized because they are incarcerated within the insane asylum? Second, what role did their ethnic identities as well as their sex play in their institutionalization?

There are questions regarding the asylum as an institution that bars the inmate behind the walls in order to tear down the individuality of the patient. As Bly describes the common baths, the mandatory undressing process at night, and the uniforms worn by the patients (after their personal belongings are taken), the mission of the government and social institutions to create identical patients out of a variety of ethnic/immigrant/insane bodies as well as their mission to make it easier to control these patients surface. The accounts of asylum inmates' physical and psychological torture relate to Foucault's ideas on biopolitics and the launching of the power system within the institution. The otherized body is more apt to be taken out of its mold, broken and shaped into something else. This recreation process relies heavily on the deconstruction of the other's body and mind, as it plays the power hierarchy card against the ill, insane, powerless, and immigrant bodies. Foucault's theories on power; its use by the authorities, the control of the police-state; society, body and soul as reflections of prisons; prisons in the function of correcting; state's power over the individuals and groups in the senses of punishment, health, workforce, economy and the hierarchical watchtower, namely the panopticon are applicable to Bly's narrative in this sense.

Scientific racism and the eugenics movement were known to the Americans at this time, and the highlight on insane inmates of the Blackwell Island Insane Asylum with different national and ethnic backgrounds prove that the “other” was more fragile within the system. I conclude this essay with the idea that the authorities deconstructed both the insane body and the immigrant body, which were seen parallel on levels of incompetence and unwholesomeness, within the panoptical Blackwell’s Island Insane Asylum.

Nellie Bly and *Ten Days in a Mad-house*

Nellie Bly is the young woman whose voluntary incarceration a few months ago made a sensation from Maine to Georgia, and its story was copied in all the papers of the land.

“Women in Journalism”

Born in 1867 to the Cochrane family, Elizabeth Cochrane grew up to be a zealous woman. Her journalism career started when she replied to an article named “What Girls are Good For?” (Rittenhouse 13). After meeting George Madden from the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* “[s]he quickly sold him the idea of doing personal experience stories, flashing the slums, the prisons, the sweatshops of Pittsburgh as bait” in order to “focus on the ills of the social body; to get her facts from first-hand experience; to clothe them in pointed prose” (Ross 203). She wrote her articles and books under the penname Nellie Bly, as she moved with the purpose of revealing what happened within the walls of New York’s one of the most notorious correctional institutions.

The correctional institutions of the United States were not close to offer relief to the growing numbers of inmates at the time. On the contrary, even though authorities tried to find solutions, the rising ratio of poverty and immigration led to overcrowded institutions, which were inadequate in providing service to their inmates. Mental asylums were no exception and according to John Sutton, the numbers of the asylum inmates increased rapidly “from around 40,000 in 1880 to over 263,000 in 1923” (666).¹ The reason for this was the fine line drawn by the authorities between insanity and unconformity to the social norms of the society. As Foucault argues, “the essential madness, and the really dangerous one, was that which rose from the lower depths of society” (Rabinow 150). Poverty and otherness were among the reasons that created this lower class of the society and madness

¹ For more also see, *Madness in American and the Art of Asylum Keeping* (2016) by Nancy Tomes.

started to be associated more with criminality. Moreover, authorities accepted the behaviors of the criminally insane as disturbances that caused disorder in the society. As asylums became institutions that not only cared for the mentally insane but also tried to rehabilitate the criminally insane, they became more similar to prisons in their organization. The growing immigrant population contributed greatly to the numbers of criminally insane within the walls of American asylums. One of the reasons for this growth was the non-conformity of some immigrants to the strictly Puritan American society. This discrepancy together with the poverty of this class of people would later lead to one of the chief reasons of their acceptance as a financial burden on the American society by eugenicists and nativists, who viewed the increase of insanity as “*a corollary of unrestricted, largely European, immigration*” (Lunbeck 122). Bly was interested in the power relations in these institutions and her purpose to reveal the corrupted state of insane asylums was part of a movement called muckraking journalism or investigative journalism of the Progressive Era of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Muckraking journalists aimed to expose the abuses and corruptions in state institutions, politics and business corporations. Even though many muckraking journalists were men of middle or upper-middle class (Titus 11), prominent activist women such as Ida Tarbell and Jane Addams also contributed to the improvement of the society through investigative journalism.² As a woman of this journalism tradition Nellie Bly also worked to show the ills of the Blackwell’s Island Insane Asylum by putting on the disguise of an insane immigrant Cuban woman.

Her adventure on the way to the Blackwell’s Island Insane Asylum starts with Bly’s getting a room at a boarding house for women. She impersonates madness by enlarging her eyes, looking emptily around her, saying that she is afraid of strangers and denying to sleep. Women in the boarding house are sure that something is wrong with her when Bly tells them she cannot remember anything after she had a headache. She is taken in front of the judge, who has the authority to send her—under the alias of Nellie Brown—to the insane asylum. The surgeon at the courtroom looks at her eyes and listens to her heart and pronounces her insane. At first, she is sent to the Bellevue Hospital for further inspection and after

² For more information on these muckraking journalist women please see, “A Notable Pennsylvanian: Ida Minerva Tarbell, 1857-1944” (1999) by Josephine D. Randolph and “Two Leaders, Two Utopias: Jane Addams and Dorothy Day” (2007) by Maurice Hamington.

convincing the doctors there to her insanity, she is sent to the main focus of her investigation: Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum.

When she arrives at the asylum, she is immediately struck by the poor treatment of the patients. She becomes friends with most of the women and finds out that most of them are as sane as she is. Patients suffer from cold common baths, bad food, and from the nurses who physically torture the patients by not letting them drink water or sleep properly during the night. Nellie Bly also narrates the stories of foreign women incarcerated in the asylum. Some of these women cannot speak English and are incarcerated after being denied the right to express themselves. By focusing on the ills of the insane asylum on Blackwell's Island, Bly "*enlarged on the brutal treatment of the patients, the callous nurses, the inedible food, the ice-cold baths from which patients were flung wringing wet into bed, the flirtations between doctors and nurses, the unsanitary conditions and disregard for human decencies*" (Ross 206). She comments on the irony of the asylum, mentioning that it is a "*human rat-trap*" since "*it is easy to get in, but once there it becomes impossible to get out*" (Bly *Ten Days*). However, she gets out and finds her freedom more valuable after her incarceration.

When her story came public, it attracted the attention of the contemporary media, as newspapers found her story remarkable. *The Salt Lake Herald* is one of the newspapers that mentions this "*young lady*" and her suffering since she has "*the intelligence to suffer*" unlike the 'insane' patients in the asylum (4). Nellie Bly's investigation of the Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum brings out many concerns regarding the power relations within the institution. However, this was not only an institutional problem, this was also a problem of immigration and the immigrant's reception in the United States.

The Politics of Incarcerating Foreign Bodies and Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum

This [sterilization] is a practical, merciful, and inevitable solution of the whole problem, and can be applied to an ever widening circle of social discards, beginning always with the criminal, the diseased, and the insane, and extending gradually to types which may be called weaklings rather than defectives, and perhaps ultimately to worthless race types.

Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, p. 51

Madison Grant, an influential eugenicist, describes who has the right to continue their line of succession and who does not based on their racial and social status as well as their mental and physical health conditions. The other, who is evaluated on the level of his liability to crime, insanity, and weaknesses contributed to the racial identity, is targeted under the eugenics movement's sterilization policy. Although whiteness was initially created in contrast to blackness, it was later followed by degrees of whiteness, with the Anglo-American being the "pearly" white, in contrast to the not-so-whiteness of the European immigrants. The not-so-whiteness was the result of their faith, ethnicity or the difficult manual work that was available to them. The social ladder did not go further up for them if they did not alter their whiteness status. In this sense, by creating shades of whiteness, white society worked as a 'correctional facility' to shape the newcomers into the molds of the good citizen. This correctional work started within the smaller units of society, and later became a part of the racial hegemony by confining immigrants to institutions to turn them into American citizens. In that effort, the white Protestant American authorities created insane asylums, orphanages, prisons, poor houses, and orphan trains. These correctional facilities incarcerated/displaced the other and created a citizen out of him by deconstructing the immigrant identity and constructing a new self in relation to the mainstream American values. If not successful, the other was deemed to be a lost cause. At this point, eugenics offered science as a cover for the acts of discrimination and elimination. But if successful, then the society had one more healthy, white, (Protestant) American citizen. As the eugenics movement gained strength, it influenced the nativist ideas on the acceptance of immigrants to the United States. Some immigrants were banned, some were sterilized, and some were 'corrected' through incarceration.

Although Madison Grant and his ideas on the eugenics were effective in the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea regarding the other as a burden to the society was not new. The American officials have already started to limit immigration on the basis of the mental health or morality of the foreigners by 1882 when the *"Congress enacted the first generally exclusive immigration law, which banned as an immigrant 'any convict, lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge' and 'all foreign convicts except those convicted of political offences'"* (Benton 34). Barbara Benton mentions this discriminatory immigration law against the otherized insane and criminal bodies in their process of acceptance into the United States on Ellis Island. The authorities were not only concerned about the increase in immigration but also about the

origins of the newcomers since, “[w]hereas until about twenty years ago our immigrants were drawn from the Anglo-Saxon or Tetric populations of northwestern Europe, they have swarmed over here in rapidly-growing proportions since that time from Mediterranean, Slavic, and oriental sources” (Smithsonian Institution 589). This demonstrated a fearful picture before the eyes of the authorities since the rising number of immigrants was linked to the rising number of criminals. Scott Christianson says, “Whether or not newcomers were actually any more criminal than native borns was doubtful, but American prisons, reformatories, mental asylums, and other social service institutions clearly were disproportionately populated by immigrants and Negroes” (190). Even though the image of the physically and mentally ill immigrant that would lead to the social and economic destruction of the country was mainly a myth, the American nation was still haunted by the defective, criminal, insane body of the immigrant and used its authority to eliminate the bodies considered as burdens.

However, before 1882 United States received mentally ill immigrants and provided them with health care. Carl Wittke mentions that because of the large numbers of Irish immigrants who came to the States following the Irish famine “in the late 1840’s, the New York Board of Commissioners of Emigration selected Ward’s Island for the care of all immigrants having noninfectious disease” (127). But this effort to provide the immigrant with the proper health care was limited with the spatial limitations of the Ward Island and the Blackwell’s Island Insane Asylum. In fact, the Blackwell’s Island Insane Asylum was notorious for its insufficient accommodation and health care for the patients, even before Nellie Bly’s exposé:

The provision for the insane on Ward's and Blackwell's continued very inadequate. The ordinary ratio of nurses to patients was one to 30 and the assistant physicians were, for the most part, wholly inexperienced. They consisted almost entirely of graduate physicians who were paid nothing for their service, and who remained only a short time for the experience to be gained. (Hurd 203).

Although Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum was not able to accommodate many of its patients properly, it had been opened in hopes of relieving the extra number of patients in New York Almshouse³ and the Bellevue Hospital. In fact, Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum was *"the first county asylum to be erected in the state"* (Hurd 115). The hospital became overcrowded with patients after its opening in 1839, and in 1871 male patients were transferred to the Ward's Island Asylum (Hurd 115). Even after the evacuation of male patients, the hospital could not accommodate women patients adequately. Nelly Bly narrates the crowd in the asylum and says, *"according to one of the physicians there are 1600 insane women on Blackwell's Island"* (Bly, *Ten Days*). In 1894, seven years after Nellie Bly's uncovering of the filthy conditions of the asylum, Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum *"was abandoned as unfit for habitation"* (Hurd 207).

The discourse on the incarceration of immigrants start with a reforming and correcting language but moves on *"to more nuanced accounts that critiqued both the consequences and intentions of reform efforts that ended in mass incarceration"* (Ben-Moshe 389). The number of immigrants inside the asylums started to become another concern for the authorities. Hurd gives an insight to the increasing number of the insane asylum inmates by connecting it to the increasing number of immigration rates. His account of events on the federal side of the power relations shows how the United States policed the immigrant body. He says that the Board of Alienists was established in 1904, whose duty was to *"inspect and examine (in conjunction with the federal authorities) all immigrants arriving at the port of New York, and to arrange for the deportation of aliens and non-residents committed to the state hospitals"* (Hurd 130). Immigrants who were considered mentally, physically or morally ill were deported in order to prevent them from becoming a burden to the native-born American stock. As the eugenicist Grant mentions in his 1916 book, it was seen unjust *"to burden the responsible and larger, but still overworked, elements in the community with an ever increasing number of moral perverts, mental defectives, and hereditary cripples."* Immigrants, who were seen as unsuitable to the native-born American community, unassimilable to the mainstream American society, and unprofitable to the United States on economic terms, were deemed as

³ Almshouses or poorhouses were early American institutions that enabled the housing of the mentally ill or able-bodied yet poor American citizens and immigrants. These institutions housed orphans, and the old after they retired from their jobs as well as adults from both sexes. Although they offered health services, housing and food for the poor, the inmates were usually seen as public burdens, which degraded their status as members of the society. These institutions transformed into asylums and hospitals over time. For more please see, *The Poorhouse: America's Forgotten Institutions* (2005) by David Wagner.

disposable bodies. These disposable bodies were eliminated through (voluntary or involuntary) sterilization. Grant says that “[t]he laws of nature require the obliteration of the unfit, and human life is valuable only when it is of use to the community or race.” The value of the immigrant body is thus determined by its ability to contribute to the nation’s good.

A body is resourceful as long as it is apt to serve the good of the majority or the sovereign power. And since individual bodies form the collective body of the nation, it is through the individual bodies the nations try to superiorize the skeleton of the national politics. It is through this form of biopolitics that people are turned into disposable bodies under the power of the ruling sovereignty. In the case of eugenics, the insane, the criminal, and the disabled bodies should be eliminated for the good of the majority, since their ‘disposable’ bodies are nothing but a burden within the capitalist structures of the United States. It is the morphology of their lifeless bodies that “inscribes them in the register of undifferentiated generality: simple relics of an unburied pain, empty, meaningless corporealities, strange deposits plunged into cruel stupor” (Mbembe 35). Just like Achille Mbembe’s lifeless bodies, the bodies mentioned by Grant are dead on the social level. They are forced to disappear from the social scene of the American nation gradually.

The argument on the carceral politics of the sovereign power and the foreign bodies is linked to the power structures of freedom. In this sense, Giorgio Agamben’s arguments on biopolitics and the eugenics massacre of the Jewish and the Gypsies during the Third Reich have connotations with the eugenic power structures of the early twentieth century America.⁴ These people, condemned as defective, void of rights and stripped off their humanity are forced into the realm of ‘unfreed’ people. Conquered, these people become the objects subjected to the experiments regarding humanity as their humanity and their right to live decent human lives are taken away from them in the name of the good of people. These people yield to the power and fall victim to the sovereignty of it. The final contradiction lies in their ‘unfreedom’ as the other is victimized and turned into the homo sacer, whose rights are taken from him reducing him to a “bare life,” under the shadow of denationalization. Incarcerating the mentally, physically and morally ill people to institutions, and forcing them to disappear from the national representation of the everyday life achieve denationalization through incarceration.

⁴ For more information please see, *The Unfit: The History of A Bad Idea* (2001) by Elof Axel Carlson.

In the end, the immigrant's lifeless and sterilized body is denationalized in a gray zone of indifference, since he is not a part of the nation anymore. Agamben's homo sacer is the outcast, it is the dead body that is no longer useful to serve for the good of the sovereign. And the homo sacer becomes the undesired immigrant that is the defective disposable body when appropriated to the American eugenics terms.

The aptitude to become an American citizen was under the surveillance of the eugenics and the whiteness structures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This became such an important part of the national identity creation that the eugenics movement limited and controlled the immigration into the United States. Christian Joppke mentions that "[t]he prominent role of the eugenics experts in the crafting of the 1924 National Origin Quota Act brought to a peak the prominent role that 'science' ... had played all along in the post-1880s restrictionist movement" (40). This was neither the first nor the last time the American government would discriminate people in the name of science and the public benefit.

The power of authorities to incarcerate the foreign body had its legal procedure. According to this procedure, "[a] person alleged to be insane may be committed to an institution by order made by a judge of a court of record of the city or county, or a justice of the Supreme Court of the judicial district, upon a certificate by two qualified medical examiners in lunacy, accompanied by a verified petition" (Hurd 131). This note brings us to Nellie Bly's *Ten Days in a Mad-house*, and to the scene where she pretends to be an insane woman in front of the judge. The interesting part of her story is not only her impersonation of a madwoman as she deceives the judge, police officers, and the doctors; in fact, the part that attracts the most attention is when she pretends to be a Cuban immigrant who went mad.

Incarceration of the Other: *Ten Days in a Mad-house* and The Foreign Body

Questioned, Prescribed For, Locked in a Bare Cell Every Night, Uniformed in Furniture Goods, Bathed by Alien Hands, Washed Regularly Without Her Own Help After Every Meal of Coarse Food—Silly and Uncouth Companions, in Whose Childish Pleasures She Did Not Join—Her Deception Successful—Incidents of Her Adventure and Official Accounts of It

"Playing Mad Woman," Frontpage.

Nellie Bly does not start her investigation with the intention to pretend to be an immigrant. However, the dialogues between her and the police officers, the judge and Mrs. Stanard, the assistant matron of the boarding house, pave the way. Nellie Bly's alienation from the outside world, her constant questioning of the people around her lead her companions to believe she is "a foreigner, an emigrant or something of the sort" (Bly, *Ten Days*). And when she questions whether the other foreigners have lost their truck like her, the police officer answers affirmatively and continues "it takes most of our time to help find them for them" (Bly, *Ten Days*). Apparently, this dialogue plays a role in Nellie Bly's sudden decision to talk with an accent. This causes a chaotic moment for her when the attendants in the courtroom try to situate her accent geographically. They cannot have a verdict; they say it is eastern, western, or southern. One thing, however, becomes clear: Nellie is bound to be an immigrant before the authorities. The judge finds her English perfect but asks her if she is from Cuba. To this Nellie Bly answers in the affirmative and scatters some Spanish words into her sentences to be more credible. However, she is a modest looking white girl and this makes her companions believe "she is a lady." According to Jean Marie Lutes, Bly exploits "the expert tendency to pathologize differences of race and class," (226) as she crosses the line not only between sanity and insanity but also between the native and the immigrant. She further says:

In the process of making her first and most crucial move, the transformation from free woman assumed to be sane to incarcerated woman assumed to be *insane*, she revealed the liability of claiming an ethnic identity in a legal system that purportedly saw beyond such distinctions. During the critical hours when she had to convince the police and the judge to send her to Blackwell's Island, Bly pretended to speak Spanish and called herself Nellie Moreno. Although she passed as an ethnic Other only briefly—once incarcerated, she dropped the pretense and spoke in her obviously American English—she took advantage of the ease with which cultural difference could be encoded as pathological difference. ... Nevertheless, at this decisive juncture, Bly's displaced whiteness served her larger purpose. By distancing herself from her white privilege, she facilitated her own loss of freedom. (Lutes 226-227)

According to this analysis, Bly crosses the color line along with her transgression of the sanity zone. Her white body goes undercover as a Cuban immigrant body and becomes a part of the system that incarcerates the other. The assumption that she

will pass as insane if she performed foreignness suggests that the discrimination against immigrants within the justice and health systems was obvious at the time. This leads her to exploit the system as Lutes explains. But she also exploits the bodily representations of belonging, freedom, health and power within the Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum by deceiving the doctors responsible for examining her 'foreign' and 'insane' body. From the moment Bly's performed insanity shows itself, she is taken out of the white American race, assigned a 'Cuban' identity (not without her help), and confined to the asylum. In this process, she is subjected to discrimination by women in the boarding-house ("*I am afraid to stay with such a crazy being in house. She will murder us all before morning*"), then she is subjected to the harsh treatment of the police officers over her 'insane body' ("*If she don't come along quietly,*" responded one of the men, "*I will drag her through the streets*"). The judge, although he is fond of her lady-like appearance, decides that she is an insane Cuban ("*Ah,*" said the judge, "*on a farm. Do you remember Havana?*"); moreover, her insanity is strengthened by her Cuban ethnicity behind the asylum bars ("*When did you leave Cuba, Nellie?*" "*During the day the pavilion was visited by a number of people who were curious to see the crazy girl from Cuba*") (Bly, *Ten Days*). Nelly's subjugation as an insane woman by her fellow female companions in the boarding-house, the treatment she receives from the police as a female immigrant body that cannot function 'correctly,' and the paternalistic yet derogatory discourse of the judge indicate the existing power relations on the levels of race, gender and class.

The body in the asylum is the homo sacer. It cannot be sacrificed (on a national identity level, the sacrifice attributes to the body's ability to produce, reproduce and eliminate the dangers targeted at the nation's good). The homo sacer is left to the power of authorities, it can be killed and it can be banned. And in the asylum, it can be examined. Foucault mentions that the examination is a combination of "*observing hierarchy*" and "*normalizing judgment*" which makes "*it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish*" (*Discipline and Punish* 184). Nellie Bly becomes the subject of this examination as the doctor claims his authority over her body by ordering her to take her tongue out. And when she does not imply to this command, he asserts his authority simply by saying "*[y]ou must. You are sick, and I am a doctor*" (Bly, *Ten Days*). Now that the hierarchy between the native/doctor/authority and the immigrant/insane/homo sacer is settled, the next step for Nellie Bly is to perform the biopolitics of insanity:

But I put out my tongue, which he looked at in a sagacious manner. Then he felt my pulse and listened to the beating of my heart. I had not the least idea how the heart of an insane person beat, so I held my breath all the while he listened, until, when he quit, I had to give a gasp to regain it. Then he tried the effect of the light on the pupils of my eyes. Holding his hand within a half inch of my face, he told me to look at it, then, jerking it hastily away, he would examine my eyes. I was puzzled to know what insanity was like in the eye, so I thought the best thing under the circumstances was to stare. This I did. (Bly, *Ten Days*)

Her body, which at the moment stands on the border of the native/immigrant line, is examined by the authority and pronounced insane. The next step is documentation where the doctor writes “*a lot of things in a long, slender book*” (Bly, *Ten Days*). According to Foucault, this writing process is a continuation of the power demonstration. He says that “[t]he examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them” (*Discipline and Punish* 189). In other words, Nellie Bly is now officially the other. She is caught within the webs of power as a result of the doctor’s examination and judgment. Foucault notes that the examination of the doctor, in other words his medical gaze is “*no longer the gaze of any observer, but that of a doctor supported and justified by an institution, that of a doctor endowed with the power of decision and intervention*” (*The Birth of* 109). Thus, the gaze the doctor directs on the body of Bly becomes an extension and a corollary of the institution he serves. This gaze is not without any gendered biases as Elizabeth Lunbeck argues for some encoded symptoms were almost necessarily associated with “*gender and sexuality*” by psychiatrists which they “*brought ... to the fore in their determination of hard cases, downplaying the significance of patients’ other behaviors and symptoms*” (148). As a supposedly insane immigrant woman, Bly is directed at the depreciatory medical gaze of the doctors in such a way that they misdiagnose her as insane. Even though their gaze belittles her on the spectrum of gender and race, she is empowered by her own conscious deceit. On the other end of this spectacle, Nellie Bly also acts as the penholder as she documents the inner workings of the institutionalization system. Her binary being is in a liquid form as she becomes and un/becomes the other in this documentation process. It is interesting that her narrative *Ten Days in a Mad-House* gives details of the many immigrant patients, whereas in her short piece published in the Godey’s Lady’s Book the only immigrant she mentions is herself as the “*crazy Cuban girl*”

(Bly, "Among The Mad"). Bly, as the persecutor of power, leaves out the real immigrants out of her written story. She has the authority to re-identify herself, and her writing reflects the documentation of power.

Writing represents power, however, it is not the sole way of building a power hierarchy. According to Foucault, the body and the carceral system are all part of a power hierarchy that reflect on institutional structures. The body and soul of the incarcerated person are situated in a system that is supposed to correct and moralize her. Foucault's work demonstrates that madness and the insane asylums are important in the general sense to understand the dynamics of the authorities' correctional mission. The immigrant bodies in Nellie Bly's narrative face the correctional treatment like other patients in the hospital. They are ordered to physically obey the asylum rules and commanded to behave in a docile manner. For example, one of the doctors pinches a German patient named Louise who refuses to answer his questions. He says that he wants "to teach" her "to obey" (Bly, *Ten Days*). Another German patient Carrie Glass is also the subject of this bio-politic hierarchy. In her case, she is highly aware of the workings of the institution's aim to create docile bodies. In her case, becoming sane means becoming docile as she says, "I am obedient in every respect, and I do everything to prove to them that I am sane" (Bly, *Ten Days*). Docility and usefulness, according to Foucault are part of the prison institution (Rabinow 214). And patients who are rendered insane, but who can be categorized as the 'sane but immigrant' patients of the Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum are aware of this situation.

Foucault says that "[d]iscipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (Rabinow 182). The discipline in Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum works to make the most use of these patients. In fact, Bly mentions that patients do the cleaning in the asylum. At first, Bly thinks the cleanliness is the product of the nurses' work, but then she laughs "at [her] own stupidity to think the nurses would work" (Bly, *Ten Days*). In fact, before Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum became an only women institution, "convicts from the penitentiary on Blackwell's Island were used as attendants so as to save money" (Grob 120). And the patients who were sent to the Ward's Island from the Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum were also supposed to use their labor force to prove their credibility as individuals who would not burden the society. According to Hurd, "it was a rule that before a patient should be discharged he had to demonstrate by his work in one or another of the industries his fitness to

earn his living outside" (206). This is a way, in Foucault's terms, "to set the 'able-bodied' poor to work and transform them into a useful labor force" (Rabinow 276). In this way, the insane and sick body—both native-born and immigrant—would prove its worthiness as a productive member of the American nation on an economic level.

It is obvious that Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum was one of the components of the American society's power structures to shape the immigrant other. Lutes mentions that Blackwell's Asylum "provided cheap custodial care for impoverished mentally ill immigrants" (217). The institution was basically a charity and as the nurses in the asylum say to Bly "[p]eople on charity should not expect anything and should not complain" (Bly, *Ten Days*). This is the insane immigrant's share of the society since she is the outcast, who is subjected to the sympathy of the majority to 'care' for her. In this respect, the ultimate aim of the authorities to create individuals out of the patient/criminal works on a risky surface. If the patient/criminal can be saved from her deteriorating condition, she can become a unit of the society. If she cannot be saved, then she becomes the burden and thus 'deserves' the punishment.

The imprisonment of the immigrant patient to her ethnic identity as well as to her mental situation also shows how the immigrant body becomes the prison in itself. According to Foucault, the soul is the prison of the body, yet at the same time the reverse is true as the body becomes the prison of the soul from time to time. The body is also a means for biopower through which the state can manage economics; thus, the body becomes the subject of health not because of its presence as a being but because of its function as hands. Foucault argues that the authorities of power can keep an eye on its subjects by creating or building systems or mechanisms segregating them from the phenomena of a collective society into separate units of individuals. The results of these can be seen in Foucault's examples: patients with mental illnesses know they are different from other patients; and the warden sets the fear of being watched on prisoners and disables their communication with each other. In Bly's narrative, we see how the insane immigrant body is punished because of its differences from those in authority. It has to be molded to become a docile 'normal' body. Thus, "it is always the body that is at issue—the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission" (Rabinow 172). The docility is especially important since it is expected not only from the insane immigrant body but also from the naturalized

and native-born bodies in the United States. Docility, in this sense, is the utmost submission to the political power of the state.

Language, a production of the body, becomes important in Bly's narrative to understand how the immigrant is forced to be docile. According to Foucault, "*the language of delirium can be answered only by an absence of language*" (Rabinow 152). The disappearance of language he refers to is not specific to the renaissance period. As the nurses and doctors in the Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum continuously reject to listen to the demands of the patients, they refuse to acknowledge that the insane body can produce meaning through language. This becomes more obvious when the patient is not a part of the English-speaking community. Bly narrates the story of a German patient who can only speak in German. Mrs. Louise Shanz is out of the reach of the majority's language realm, which puts her in a condition where she has to suffer for her ethnicity. Bly is also interested in the refusal of the German nurse to speak in her native tongue. She says that "*Miss Grupe proved to be one of those people who are ashamed of their nationality, and she refused, saying she could understand but few words of her mother tongue*" (Bly, *Ten Days*). When the nurse refuses to speak more German, in a protest to the doctor who identifies her as German, Mrs. Shanz loses her chance to make herself clear. She is pronounced insane, and her confinement is a result of her alienation from the English language. Since she is not a part of the English-speaking majority, she is "*led unheard*" (Bly, *Ten Days*). And if the insane body responds back to the authorities, who as a result of their power demand to be the sole questioners within their institutions, she is forced into silence. For instance, when Nellie Bly questions the asylum network and its operation, she "*has to be put in a room alone*" for being "*noisy*" (Bly, *Ten Days*). This incident offers that even if the immigrant body can speak the language of the majority, she is still labeled as insane, and does not hold the power to question the operations of a power structure. She is being molded by the treatment she receives within the asylum:

Foucault points out that juridical systems of power *produce* the subjects they subsequently come to represent. Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms—that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even "protection" of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice. But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them,

formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures. (Butler 2) [emphasis in the original]

Judith Butler suggests that the object that is subjected to the power is created in accordance with the authority's demand. And when the object rejects this idea, she is pronounced criminal, insane, or defective. The insane immigrant body is at the mercy of the sovereign power in a “*more ambiguous terrain in which the physician and the sovereign seem to exchange roles*” (Agamben 143). The power is still practiced over the other's body, however, the perpetrator changes as the space of power demonstration shifts from the social life to the insane asylum.

Conclusion

As I watched the insanity slowly creep over the mind that had appeared to be all right I secretly cursed the doctors, the nurses and all public institutions.

Bly, *Ten Days in a Madhouse*

I started this article to analyze Nellie Bly's *Ten Days in A Mad-House* to understand where the insane immigrant body is situated within the power structure of government and charity institutions in the late nineteenth century United States. The focus on the eugenics movement, its early reflections on the American society and the incarceration of the foreign body play pivotal roles in understanding the position of the immigrant body, which is either insane or is labeled as insane. In order to achieve an understanding of the operations of power which situate Bly and her fellow inmates in the Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum, I provided a short history of the institution and looked at the politics of Nellie Bly's passing as a Cuban woman and its reception in the juridical and health systems. As seen, in the process of correcting the foreign body within these systems, authorities try to break down the individual by labeling it the other and further sub-labeling her body as insane. Foucault's theories on power, biopolitics, and the carceral system as well as Agamben's ideas on the homo sacer are used to question how institutional operations serve the needs of the majority and ostracize the immigrant as the product of worthless and unproductive races.

The operations of power and biopolitics in this text document how Nellie Bly moves across the racial and social borders. Although Bly starts out to tell the story of poor immigrants with no intention of transgressing the racial line, she ends up being labeled as an insane and immigrant body in the end. Her body is not under her command anymore. It is a foreign body whose fate will be decided by the

authorities since the insane immigrant body falls within the institutional realm of their power. And yet, as a member of the white race, Bly has the power and thus the ability to pass as an immigrant. This shows how she makes use of the immigrant body for her own cause by performing how she thought an immigrant from Cuba would behave.

Bly's text is important for both being written by a nineteenth century woman journalist undercover and for being an early text that exposes the workings of the asylum. Her exposé was a success on many levels. First, she was able to transgress the racial line as a white woman passing for a Cuban. Second, she managed to be identified as insane and institutionalized by professional men such as the judge and the doctors. And last but not the least, she was able to prompt social change as her exposé reached the authorities of the New York City that decided to issue more sources to the care of the insane. It must also be remembered that the echoes of her story intrigued the attention of the public to the corrupted state of the asylums. It is this asylum that differentiates the able body from the mentally disabled body, and in some cases silences the other and labels it insane for not complying with the norms of the mainstream society. I believe that these ideas can be applied to other texts from the period to understand how American racial structure works together with the institutionalization of the other. The other could turn into an American as long as she had the power, the economic advantage, and the capacity to assimilate into the mainstream. However, if the other was incapable of these characteristics, then she would be left to the authority's power. Therefore, if the foreign body could be saved (molded according to the standards of the authorities), she could be freed. If not, then she would be considered as a burden to her community, which has the rights and the power to terminate her bare life by unfreeing her.

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