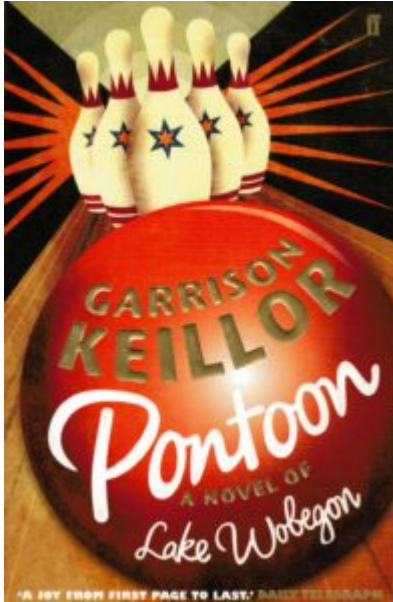# Utopia en omstreken: imaginaire gebieden

Behalve fictieve personen, zoals Anton Steenwijk en Josef K., David Copperfield en Nathan Sid, heeft de literatuur ook fictieve steden en landen opgeleverd. Lewis Carroll liet Alice haar avonturen beleven in Wonderland, Jonathan Swift stuurde Lemuel Gulliver in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) onder meer naar Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Lagado, Glubbdubrib en Houyhnhnmland.

J.R.R. Tolkien creëerde voor de *In de ban van de ring*-cyclus (1954-1955) zelfs een hele mythologie, inclusief landkaarten en taal, rond Middle-earth. Dat leverde welluidende namen op als Esgalduin, Nanduhirion, Angrenost en Nimrodel.

En zoals sommige fictieve personages, zoals de Jan en Erik in het werk van Wolkers, de Gerard in dat van Reve en de Maarten in dat van 't Hart, dicht in de buurt van het levende voorbeeld blijven, zo is in sommige van die fictieve gebieden zonder veel moeite de woonomgeving van de auteur te herkennen.

De Amerikaanse schrijver William Faulkner, geboren in de zuidelijke staat Mississippi, situeert een deel van zijn romans in het niet-bestaande Yoknapatawpha County, een streek in het noorden van Mississippi. En het Lahringen uit Vestdijks Anton Wachter-romans ligt wel erg dicht bij het Harlingen waar de schrijver geboren werd.

Maar een groot deel van die steden, streken en landen zijn speciaal voor het literaire werk bedacht en in het register van niet één atlas terug te vinden. Nou, drie dan: in de Amerikaanse *Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (1980), in Umberto Eco's *De geschiedenis van imaginaire landen en plaatsen* (2013) en in de Atlas van imaginaire landen (2016) van Dominique Lanni.

The Shangri-Las

Het aardige is dat die bedachte plaatsen soms een eigen leven zijn gaan leiden. Een mooi voorbeeld daarvan is Shangri-La, de lusthof in de roman *Lost horizon* (1933) van de Engelse schrijver James Hilton. Shangri-La, dat vermoedelijk ergens in Tibet ligt, is synoniem geworden met 'paradijselijk oord' en liet in die betekenis veel sporen na in de popmuziek. In de jaren vijftig ontstond in Amerika de meisjesgroep The Shangri-Las, die, behalve om hun suikerspinkapsels en zuurstokkleurige strechtbroeken, bekend werden met o.a. *Remember (walking in the sand)* en *I can never go home anymore*. The Kinks hadden in 1969 een hit met *Shangri-La*, de Nederlandse Elvis Presley, Jack Jersey, zette het bijna onuitspreekbare *Sri Lanka, My Shangri-La* op de plaat en in 1988 vertegenwoordigde Gerard Joling ons land op het Eurovisie Songfestival met *Ik wil terug naar Shangri-La*.

En om in de popmuziek te blijven: Xanadu, dat in 1968 de kleurrijke Britse groep Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick & Titch inspireerde tot *The legend of Xanadu* en in 1980 een hit opleverde voor Olivia Newton-John, stamt uit het (onvoltooid gebleven) gedicht 'Kubla Khan' van de Engelse poëet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), waarvan de eerste regels luiden: In Xanadu did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure-dome decree. Het moet waarschijnlijk in China gezocht worden, niet ver van Shangri-La. En ook het enorme landhuis van Charles Foster Kane in de film *Citizen Kane* (1941) van Orson Welles heet Xanadu.

Een vervolg van geheel andere orde kreeg Thule. Dat is de naam die in de klassieke oudheid gegeven werd aan een eiland dat zes dagen zeilen ten noorden van Schotland heette te liggen en dat als het einde van de wereld beschouwd werd. Sommige schrijvers zagen IJsland er voor aan, andere Shetland of zelfs de kust van Noorwegen. Het werd vooral bekend in de uitdrukking Ultima Thule – 'het einde van de wereld' – en komt in die zin al voor bij de Romeinse schrijvers Virgilius en Seneca.

In navolging van chemische elementen als berkelium en ytterbium, die hun naam kregen van de plaats waar ze gevormd werden (respectievelijk Berkeley in Californië en Ytterby in Zweden), dankt thulium zijn naam aan Thule. Het moet het enige chemische element zijn dat naar een niet-bestaande plaats vernoemd is, al gebiedt de volledigheid te wijzen op het element thorium, genoemd naar een fictieve figuur, de Germaanse dondergod Thor.

Het bekendste literaire land is waarschijnlijk *Utopia* (1516), het droomeiland uit het gelijknamige werk van Thomas More waar de ideale maatschappij zetelt. De naam is opgebouwd uit twee Griekse woorden, *ou* (niet) en *topos* (plaats), en kan dus vertaald worden met 'Nergensland'. Het is niet alleen het bekendste, ook het invloedrijkste. Utopia komt ook voor in andere literaire werken – in Rabelais' *Gargantua en Pantagruel* (1532-1564), bijvoorbeeld, waarin de laatste van deze twee reuzen het eiland bezoekt – en heeft een heuse utopische stroming in de literatuur op gang gebracht, met alle namen van dien. Daaronder valt Shangri-La, alsook het Oceana uit James Harringtons *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) en het *Macaria* (letterlijk: Zaligland) van de Duitser Caspar Stiblinus.

Maar er ontstond ook een stroming tegen al dat idealisme, en zo ontstond het begrip 'distopia'.

Zo'n anti-utopia werd onder meer uitgewerkt door Samuel Butler, die zijn visie op de zorgenvrije gemeenschap geeft in *Erewhon* (1872), een anagram van *nowhere*. En ene E. Callenbach publiceerde in 1975 *Ecotopia*, waarin de overindustrialisatie van onze maatschappij wordt bekritiseerd (eco stamt van het Griekse *oikos* – 'huis(gezin), familie' – en komt tegenwoordig veel voor in samenstellingen die op het milieu betrekking hebben, zoals ecosysteem en ecotax).

Ook in de Nederlandse letteren zijn fictieve plaatsen geschapen. De Zwolse chirurgijn Hendrik Smeeks beschreef een imaginaire reis in *Beschryvinge van het Magtig Koninkryk Krinke Kesmes* (1708). Mooi zijn ook de twee namen in Simon Stijls toneelstuk *De Torenbouw van het Vlek Brikkekiks in het landschap Batrachia* (1787), een satire op de aanhouding van prinses Wilhelmina bij Goejanverwellesluis in dat jaar. Batrachia betekent 'Kikkerland' en in die context

is Brikkekiks te interpreteren als kikkergekwaak.

De strijd tussen patriotten en orangisten speelde een rol in *Reize door het Aapenland* (1788), dat op naam staat van J.A. Schasz, M.D. Het is, net als bijvoorbeeld *Gulliver's Travels*, een satirisch imaginair reisverhaal, een genre dat hem blijkbaar goed beviel, want hij schreef ook *Reize door het Wonderland* (1780) en *Reize door het Land der Vrijwillige Slaaven* (1790).

Belcampo geeft een beeld van de wereld in het jaar 12.000 in zijn verhaal Voorland (1935), maar de aardigste in het Nederlands komen van de dichter Jean Pierre Rawie. Die woont in Groningen, maar hij wil daar in de datering van zijn brieven nog wel eens op variëren. In het door Boudewijn Buch samengestelde promotieboekje *Buch Boeket 1* begint een brief van Rawie aan zijn uitgever met 'Gromsk II IX MCMLXXXV'. Later verstuurde hij ook wel brieven vanuit Groomsbury, waarin behalve Groningen ook Bloomsbury doorklinkt, de kunstenaarswijk in Londen waaraan de Bloomsbury-groep rond Virginia en Leonard Woolf en Lytton Strachey haar naam ontleent.

Mijn persoonlijke voorkeur gaat uit naar Lake Wobegon, het bescheiden plaatsje – *smalltown* in het Amerikaans – in de Amerikaanse staat Minnesota waar Garrison Keillor zijn *Lake Wobegon Days* (1985) gesitueerd heeft. Niet alleen omdat ik het persoonlijk bezocht heb (wat bij mijn weten de enige keer geweest is, dat ik in een fictief gebied liep), maar ook omdat er zo'n mooie vertaling van bestaat. In het Wobegon-meer waarnaar het dorp is genoemd, is zonder veel moeite de uitdrukking *wo(e)begone* te herkennen: treurig, somber, naargeestig, getroffen, bezocht.

Omdat Lake Wobegon niet ver onder de grens met het tweetalige Canada ligt, heeft het ook een Franse naam. Onder verwijzing naar Lac Majeur staat het neerslachtige oord ook bekend als Lac Malheur.

—

Robert-Henk Zuidinga (1949) studeerde Nederlandse en Engelse Moderne Letterkunde aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam. Hij schrijft over literatuur, taal- en bij uitzondering – over film.

De drie delen *Dit staat er* bevatten de, volgens zijn eigen omschrijving, journalistieke nalatenschap van Zuidinga. De boeken zijn in eigen beheer uitgegeven. Belangstelling? Stuur een berichtje naar:

Elif Shafak – Zo houd je moed in een tijd van verdeeldheid

Elif Shafak – Ills.: Joseph Sassoon Semah

Hoe kunnen we hoop, vertrouwen en geloof in een betere wereld voeden in een wereld die voelt alsof-ie op instorten staat, waar ontgoocheling en verbijstering heerst en we niet worden gehoord? Door de pandemie maken we nu een betekeniscrisis mee: fundamentele concepten moeten worden geherdefinieerd. De democratie is veel fragieler dan we dachten: ze is een delicaat ecosysteem van checks-and-balances dat voortdurend voeding en verzorging behoeft, aldus Elif

Shafak.

Elif Shafak gelooft in de kracht van verhalen om te laten zien hoe democratie, tolerantie en vooruitgang door schrijven kunnen worden gevoed. Zij is geboren in Frankrijk, groeide op in Turkije, Spanje en de Verenigde Staten, en is nu staatsburger van het Verenigd Koninkrijk, maar leeft vooral in 'Verhalenland'.
Als romanschrijfster voelt ze zich aangetrokken door verhalen en door stiltes. Haar aandacht is vooral gefocust op de 'periferie', de gemarginaliseerde, achtergestelde, rechteloze en gecensureerde stemmen. En op taboes: politieke, culturele en gendertaboes, want als we niet luisteren naar afwijkende meningen, stoppen we met leren.
Groepsdenken of sociale mediabubbels voeden en versterken de herhaling. Daarom moeten we blijven bewegen, intellectuele nomaden worden, tijd doorbrengen aan de randen van de samenleving.

De mensen zijn ontgoocheld doordat hun stem niet wordt gehoord, worden geconfronteerd met een politiek systeem dat bestaat uit marketingteksten, een financiële markt die wordt gedreven door hebzucht en winst, recente gebeurtenissen die niet meer verlopen op de lineaire progressieve manier zoals eerder. Mensen zijn verbijsterd doordat kunstmatige intelligentie en data steeds meer invloed krijgen, zonder dat gewacht wordt totdat het menselijk verstand het kan bevatten. Wat rest is een grote leegte, een onzeker bestaan en een onbekend en onvoorspelbaar begin, waar we helemaal alleen zijn, zonder dat we deel uit maken van een collectief. We zijn ongerust over de toestand van de wereld, en onze plaats daarin, of juist gebrek aan een eigen plaats. We hebben een voortdurende onrust, een existentiële angst, we zijn kwetsbaar. We zijn bezorgd en boos. Hoe kunnen we die individuele en collectieve woede omzetten in een positieve kracht en betrokken zijn? En niet apathisch zijn waardoor we geïsoleerd raken.

Het staat voor Elif Shafak vast dat we niet kunnen terugkeren naar de situatie van voor de pandemie. We hebben de keuze tussen het nationalisme, de 'eigen volk eerst'-benadering of de weg naar internationale communicatie en samenwerking. De keuze is afhankelijk van economische en politieke factoren, maar ook van het debat over identiteit. Hoe we onze identiteit benaderen zal onze volgende stappen bepalen, aldus Shafak. Zij definieert zichzelf als een wereldburger, een universele ziel, burger van de hele mensheid. We moeten allemaal geëngageerde, betrokken burgers worden. Verhalen kunnen ons daarbij helpen, ze leveren een

genuanceerder, reflectievere manier om te beschouwen, ervaren, voelen en herinneren. Ze geven inzicht in de complexiteit en rijkdom van identiteiten, en van de schade die we aanrichten als we die proberen te reduceren tot één enkel definiërend kenmerk. Verhalen hebben een herscheppende kracht om 'mensen samen te brengen, onze cognitieve horizon te verbreden, en langzaam maar zeker meer empathie en wijsheid te ontwikkelen'.

Elif Shafak – *Zo houd je moed in een tijd van verdeeldheid.* Uitgeverij Nieuw Amsterdam, 2020. 96 pag. ISBN9789046828151

Elif Shafak schrijft in het Engels en Turks. Haar werk is in vijftig talen vertaald en won diverse internationale prijzen.

Elif Shafak – The revolutionary power of diverse thought

"From populist demagogues, we will learn the indispensability of democracy," says novelist Elif Shafak. "From isolationists, we will learn the need for global solidarity. And from tribalists, we will learn the beauty of cosmopolitanism" A native of Turkey, Shafak has experienced firsthand the devastation that a loss of diversity can bring — and she knows the revolutionary power of plurality in response to authoritarianism. In this passionate, personal talk, she reminds us that there are no binaries, in politics, emotions and our identities. "One should never, ever remain silent for fear of complexity," Shafak says.

Check out more TED Talks: http://www.ted.com

Linda Bouws – St. Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten

'Limits' Of Imagining The Pandemic Present
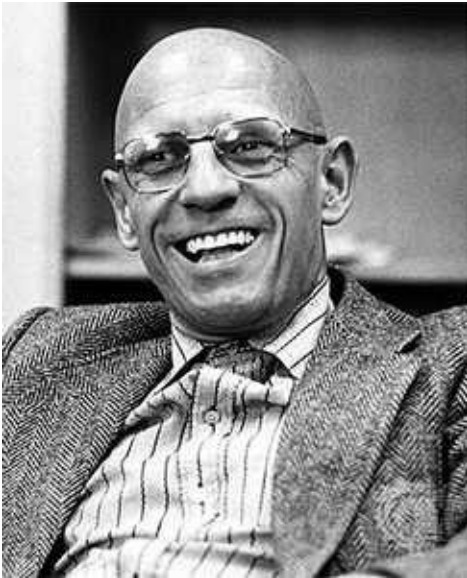
Michel Foucault 1926 – 1984
Photo: wikipedia.org

In 1984, Michel Foucault, the French historian (or) philosopher, associated with the structuralist (or) post-structuralist movement, extensively commented [i] on the German Philosopher Immanuel Kant's '*Was ist Aufklarung?*' (What is Enlightenment?). Thus, two hundred years hence, Foucault knocked at the limits of moments we live through. For him, Kant is responding in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (Berlin monthly, 1784- November), a late enlightenment mouthpiece, on what should be the attitude to present.

The moment we live in was, for Kant, neither a distinct era, not a transition, but rather a grand exit (*Ausgang*). For Kant majority of human beings, in the time he wrote in (1700s end or 1800s beginning as the case may be), carried on their everyday life with the church and monarchy setting the rhythms. The autonomy to break the rhythm or to think about the present, and thus make the exit, was difficult then, as it is now. For Foucault Kant was to work on the 'limits' of the rhythm and the everyday in order to '*Ausgang*' and reflect on what he was part of.

With the coordinates of daily rhythms overwhelmingly set by the virus and its trajectories, it has become even tougher to separate ourselves from the contingent contexts we are thrown into everyday. The possibility of thinking separate from the frames we are set against, and reflecting on our 'makes', will determine not only how we reflect on the times we live in, but also the way we live out.

People across space and time have transformed to cyborgs – the

sciences; technological artifacts; institutional orders; as well as disseminations of knowledge literally imbricate lived lives. Risk societies, urban informalities, everyday precarities, techno-social deployments, or surveillance and pastoral orders have scaled our skins and rewired our bodily rhythms. The cyborg identities in their everyday relationship with other cyborgs, with differential make-ups determine the truth orders that govern.

Foucault comes back to haunt the 'pandemic orders in the making' prompting an engagement with the limits. Nothing short of a critical ontology of the cyborgs we are, deployed and networked across space and time, by the political every day, can achieve this. Only this can translate into a possibility or impossibility to imagine the limits that are imposed on us by the political systems, exaggerated by the pandemic.

The possibility of knocking at the limits for instance, might come at best as a tragic reflection during the physical ejection of the urban migrant labourer in India from the metropolis. This is not quite an exit and neither does one see the space or time to reflect on the exploitative order that had appropriated him/her along with millions of others as urban cyborgs. A Lebanese Druze leader who has seen the end of a world war, been through a three month war, or the civil wars; still might only see at best an end of the world because the pandemic has only added on to the noise of everyday violence and earth shattering explosions. The fortified corona shelters that the bus bays have transformed into in a hyper vigilant South Korea or a health care regime that fell apart on the corporate altars in the United States also differentially reduce the space of reflection or eventual exit. A self righteous regime like the one in Brazil that would rather bank on military men than people of science; or the celebrations of self sufficiency (*atmanirbhar* in the Indian state context) when possibilities of social welfare gets precluded; also talk of the times that give no space for exit-thoughts or possibilities for reflection.

In order to critically reflect on the pandemic everyday and eventually for life to live itself out, there is no other way than exposing the conflicts and contradictions inherent to the orders people live in. There is no other way than to reflect on the 'fixes' put forward as part of the 'presents'. Michel Foucault prompts us to knock at the limits once again. The task for the more privileged in places that still maintain social contracts with populations is to think with Foucauldian 'dispositives'. These are the institutional, administrative, and knowledge

structures that both maintain the systems in place and the homeostasis of the cyborg selves we all are. It is only by thinking through the links between practices, and institutional techniques deployed way before pandemics, but enhanced and perpetuated by the virus; that the cyborgs can get deconstructed across places readying for a political present that is yet to be lived into.

Note
[i] What is Enlightenment? in Rabinow (P.), ed., *The Foucault Reader*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1984:32-50.

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Ardhakathanak: A Commoner's Discovery Of The Mughal Milieu
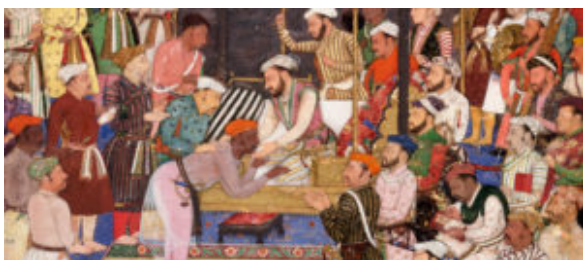
Ills.: Victoria and Albert Museum, London Mughal painting from 1615-1618

Abstract
The *Ardhakathanak* by Banarasidas is often considered the first autobiography in Hindi. Completed in the year 1641, the book provides us with a commoner's understanding of the Mughal world. Often subjected an imperial bias, the book is a wildly neglected source of history. The study attempts to highlight various

societal norms and ethics as evidenced by the Ardhakathanak. It undertakes a thematic division in understanding medieval Indian society, focusing on merchant practices, societal norms and Jain religion. Various aspects of a middle class man's life are unraveled through the course of this study, including education, business decisions, wealth, family, domesticity, religious assimilation, rationality and self-discovery.

The study also embarks on an analysis of the Varanasiya sect of Jain religion briefly. Finally, emerging trends of individuality are highlighted. The study culminates with a brief account of how underutilized this primary source remains despite obvious merits to it.

1. Introduction

The development of the literary genre of autobiography is a fairly ancient one, with St. Augustine's autobiographical work 'Confessions' written in 399 CE. However, the understanding of the term autobiography to be a form of 'self life writing' is a recent phenomenon. The Oxford English Dictionary credits Robert Southy to be the progenitor of autobiography in the year 1809. However we find a reference to autobiography or self-biography being used by William Taylor in the Monthly Review of 1797.[i]The motivations for committing one's life to writing are often religious in nature, to record stages in an individual's life by which they lose their own identity to celebrate God's divine power.[ii] Today, these works have become a prominent source of history and are extensively researched to arrive at a deeper understanding of the period it was written in. The earliest known biographical work that was produced in India is the Harshacharita written by Banabhatta in the 7 th century CE. However, truly autobiographical accounts only appear in India with the advent of Mughals. Among these, Baburnama was the earliest, and records Babur's life between 1483 to 1530.[iii] The autobiographies written during this period were meant to preserve a person's family history and good deeds for posterity. Thus, the representation of the subject is in light of the reader's judgement. Therefore, we may conclude that these writings often lack a humanizing touch that can relate the subject to the reader.

One such piece in the ocean of Mughal writings is Banarasidas's *Ardhakathanak*. It was first discovered by Nagari Pracharini Sabha and published by Dr. Mataprasad Gupta in 1943.[iv]

Banarasidas was a Jain merchant who lived during the Mughal Era in India. The title of his autobiography translates to 'half a tale'. The book was completed in the winter of 1641 in the imperial capital of Agra, when Banarasi was 55 years of age. In Jain philosophy, a full life is considered to be of one hundred and ten years. Thus, the title of Banarasi's book 'Half a Tale.' Although, the tale began to be the story of half a life, Banarasi met his demise only two years after the completion of his book, implying that the story covered his entire life. Written in the language of the Indian heartland, Braj Bhasha. Ardhakathanak is considered to be the first autobiography in Hindi.[v] Much to the contrary to other Mughal works, Banarasidas's tone throughout the book is that of unabashed candor. Over the course of the book, Banarasi establishes a rapport with the reader and slowly but surely becomes a friend. By the time, we reach Banarasi's close of life, a feeling of a long and fruitful companionship lingers on with the reader. We know Banarasi's secrets, sorrows and soaring moments. Unlike other autobiographical works of the contemporary period the emphasis is not on making a perfect man devoid of any flaws, fit to govern the territory of India, but to lay bare before the reader the heart and soul of subject, good or bad.

It is evident from the content of the book and style of writing that Banarasi did not expect his autobiography to be read nearly 400 years later. In fact, there was an understanding that it would only be read by limited audience of friends and kinsmen.[vi] In Banarasi's own words, the only reason he ventured into the business of recording his life, is 'let me tell you all my story'.

A Jain from the noble Shrimal family,
That prince among men, that man called Banarasi,
He thought to himself, let me tell my story to all [vii]

As is evident from the pretense set above, Banarasi's account of his life was a commoner's perspective of the Mughal Era. He was unconcerned with the political happenings of the Empire and did not occupy himself with it. But what was important to Banarasi, and thus what makes its way into his book are matters of business, religious practices, customs and the changing ideas that manifested into his own life. Although, Ardhakathanak can rival any other source of Mughal history in terms of the information it provides us. It does not supplement the information presented with quantifiable data, as is seen in works like Akbarnama. All the same, works like Ardhakathnaka can be monumental in filling the gaps between the 'imperial-sanctioned' view of history that is prevalent towards

more subaltern approaches that weigh the subjects of the Empire directly into account. Furthermore, being an account that is written not for a political patron but oneself, it can overcome one of the major drawbacks associated with royal sanctioned works. Banarasidas represents not what others would want to see, but he saw himself, without fear of censure. It also becomes one of the few sources through which we can take the bottom-up approach of reconstructing history instead of the common top down approach. Ardhakathanak follows a chronological writing style beginning from a brief history up to the 55 th year of Banarasi's life. Another interesting aspect of this account is that all events in his life are described along with the precise time of their occurrence helping us reconstruct a more organized form of Mughal history from a middle class merchant's eyes.

2. Merchant Life in Northern India
Banarasidas's Ardhakathanak is a major source for understanding mercantile practices and ethics in Northern India during the medieval period. Banarasi, right at the outset informs us that he is a Jain of the noble Shrimal family.[viii] Despite his Rajput lineage, the family took to a Bania life after conversion to Jainism. It was his grandfather Muldas, who first started a business.
Muldas Biholia, pursuing a bania's way of life
became steward to a Mughal officer, and went away to Malwa [ix]

Businesses were usually dominated by the Hindu and Jain communities. In order to maintain this hegemony over the market, children were instilled with a sense of business tactics and ethics from an early age. It would not be wrong to assume that the kind of education being provided was tailored to meet future work requirements depending on the community one belonged to. Education began at the age of eight, and usually lasted for four years but could be completed earlier as well. Banarasi mentions that after his father completed his schooling, he could assess the quality of gold and silver, tell counterfeit coins from real ones and he could balance account books along with a basic understanding of Sanskrit language. Although, we can conclude that a higher premium was placed on practical learning as compared to theoretical knowledge. This becomes evident from the fact, that Kharagsen, Banarasi's father, started a small business of his own as soon as he finished school.
When eight years old the boy became, he was sent to school.
At school he learnt quickly and soon became skilled at assaying gold and silver

He understood how to keep the books and write debits and credits correctly.
In his grandfather's shop, he began learning the business of dealing in gold and silver.[x]

We also find information pertaining to the various kinds of markets that were in place. The general market was referred to as the bazaar. We also find evidence of other specialised markets such as mandis, where grains were sold; *nakhsas*, markets in Agra that sold goods including cotton and cattle; *katras*, enclosed markets usually found in large cities. Mentions of *hats* and and *faris* are also found. These were daily markets and were often places where children went to practice trade.[ix] Banarasi also goes as far as to provide us with the number of sarais, bazars and mandis in Jaunpur to be 52. Furthermore, storage hubs were available, where one could store goods at the payment of a fee.
Within the city were fifty-two sarais; Fifty-two parganas surrounded it.
In the city were fifty-two marketplaces, And fifty-two great mandis. [xii]

We also find mentions of 36 pauni or shudra subcaste that offered their services in the markets. However, contemporaries like Abd ur-Rahim Khankhanan mention even more in his poem 'Nagar Shobha.'[xiii] Here one observation must be made, the prevalence of various markets in a single city necessitates a huge number of shopkeepers, traders and moneylenders within the market for its upkeep. One possible reason to explain this can be the meagre amount of capital required to open a business owing to the cheapness of goods. We find evidence of Banarasi restarting his business with two hundred rupees only.
Her mother replied, 'don't lose heart, I have two hundred rupees
Which I shall give you in secret, so that he can go back to Agra'. [xiv]

We find detailed information about the business of jewellers from Banarasi's account. The lure of business probably stemmed from the fact that one could make huge profits in this business. The items traded included rajat (silver), sauvann (gold), hira (diamond), lal (ruby), moti (pearl), manik, chuni and mani (precious stones).[xv] During the time, there was a common tendency to hoard wealth in underground safes. In extension to this, men in businesses did not disclose how much wealth they possessed. Frugality was considered an important trait for businesses, and money was only spent on lavish affairs like marriages.[xvi]

From the above account we can assume that trade was flourishing during the

seventeenth century. Moreover, it was a profitable business. Thus, it is certain that various rules and regulations would have been put into place to ensure the proper functioning of the markets. Loan facility with interest was available as is evidenced by the presence of moneylenders. However, the repayment was usually manifold times the principal amount, not due to extortion by the moneylenders but out of obligation for lending under dire circumstances.[xvii]

We also find evidence of partnerships being entered into for business purposes. Although partnerships were more prevalent within the same caste, those outside were not prohibited either. Kharagsen also entered into a partnership with Muldas, an Agarwal, in his early days in Jaunpur.

Ramdas, a wealthy bania, an Agrawal of good temper,
Had entered into partnership with Kharagsen, looking upon him as a friend.
It was a union based on affection, trust and understanding [xviii]

The partnership was a highly organised form of business. Both the partners had equal share in the profits and losses, and proper accounts for all transactions were maintained. Furthermore, both partners had one copy of the accounts. The dissolution of the partnership could only be initiated when both the partners were present and in agreement. All prior credits and loans had to be paid off before dissolution. We also find evidence of a mediator to find solution to disputes.

It was Samvat 1670, when the necessary paperwork was completed.
Banarasi parted with Dharamdas and ended their partnership. [xix]

All decisions regarding the business practices and well being of the community were taken by a council. This council can be dubbed as the 'business council'. It consisted of representatives belonging to a particular trade. They conferred among themselves and decided upon plans of action whenever an adversity befell them. For instance, when Nawab Qilich flogged all the jewellers in Jaunpur, the council decided to leave the town.

Upon returning, they conferred among themselves and decided to run away,
Taking with them their personal belongings, after all who would walk into the jaws of death? [xx]

Finally, one of the most important unwritten rules of the Banias was their secrecy. A bania would never divulge his business secrets to anyone lest they take advantage of this. This also becomes evident from Banarasi's account of the nine subjects that must not be talked about including age, wealth, affairs of the

household, deeds of charity, glory, infamy, measures taken for health, escapades and plans for future.

He established a successful business, this is a secret matter which must not be told.
One's age, income and household matters, acts of charity, honour and dishonour,
the medicines one takes, sexual escapades and future plans,
are nine matters that must not be revealed. [xxi]

The merchants of Northern India belonged to a distinct section of commoners in the Mughal society and often possessed large quantities of wealth. This, in turn, threatened the power dynamics of the Mughal countryside. Suffice to say, Mughal administrators often tried to establish their control over the merchants and extorted money out of them. One instance where this becomes increasingly evident is when Qilich Khan, the city's governor, put all the jewellers of the town in jail and demanded a huge amount from them. When the jewellers refused, he flogged them with thorny whips till they were dead.

One day he arrested all jewellers and threw them in prisons.
He asked for huge amounts of wealth, that the jewellers did not have.
He chained them and lined them up like thieves,
And flogged them with thorny whipped till they almost died. [xxii]

Roads were infested with robbers and dacoits. Valuable material often had to be carried hidden in underwear or around waistband. Merchants sometimes also made use of disguise to fool robbers. Other problems also included weather inclements and overcrowded inns.[xxiii]

Customs, Traditions and Changing Notions
The social settings as highlighted in Ardhakathanak are distinct from any other source that we come across during this period. The merit of Ardhakathanak being that it is a householder's account, and we are able to witness customs and practices at the grassroot level. In the early medieval period, occupation based groups had crystallized and caste lines were becoming more fluid among the business communities. However, caste continued to play an important role in the life of a commoner. The importance of this hierarchised division can also be inferred from Banarasi's account. Like we saw earlier, Banarasidas was a Jain Shrimal, he firmly establishes himself to be of Rajput descent. Although Rajputs were Kshatriyas and were prescribed to indulge in administrative or war activities, Banarasi's family had a jewellery business. Two explanations can be

offered for this, either the author lied about his ancestry which was prevalent among lower castes to elevate their status[xxiv] or since his family were converts to Jainism, and the precepts of Jainism prohibited harm to any living creature they couldn't practice agriculture or indulge in war.[xxv] Other instances that hints towards the rigidity of caste is the insistence of Banarasi's family on giving up learning. They believed it to be the profession of a poor Brahmans.

Learning is meant for brahmins and bards, The sons of merchants sit in the marketplace.

Those who spend all their time in learning go hungry. Listen, son, to what your elders tell you.[xxvi]

Despite these admonitions from his family, Banarasi continues to pursue learning. Later he achieves the true goal of his life and also authors numerous books. From this account, we can infer that it was possible to change one's profession irrespective of class. However, we must also note that Banarasi was already a Kshatriya who pursued a Brahman's profession. This can indicate that mobility was mostly possible only for the privileged castes. Furthermore, one could only jump from one rung to the next.

Another important social aspect of middle class life that we witness is the importance of family in one's private and public life. The family dynamics make an important part of Banarasidas's book. Familial obligation makes its way into Banarasi's account in many instances. One example of the same is when Kharagsen's father died, he and his mother were evicted from their house. So, they made their way to the house of Madan Singh, Kharagsen's maternal grandfather. Madan Singh accepted them as their own daughter and son, he also provided them with immense riches and comfort.

Daughter, think of it no more. Joy and sorrow are as transient like shadows.

He embraced them and gave them fine clothes and jewels to wear.

They lived in peace and contentment, unaffected by the passage of time.

Three years went by in this manner, in harmony, in affection, happiness and peace. [xxvii]

We find another instance where familial obligation had to be met. Here Kharagsen entered into a partnership with Sundardas, after he and his wife died. Kharagsen took it upon himself to get his daughter married in a grand fashion. This was perhaps a show of gratitude towards Sundardas for being a fatherly figure.

Sundardas's daughter was unmarried, Kharagsen got her married with great ceremony.
He have her both honour and gifts, golds and riches too. [xxviii]

We also find evidence of involvement of the elders in the personal matters of family members. They often act as a moral compass and advise the members on the desired course of action. This also hints at how important the family is in a householder's life. Further, we can also infer that the family, including distant relatives, functioned as a single social unit.

Banarasi returned to Jaunpur city. The members of his family sat him down
And the elders lectured him on the error of his ways. [xxix]

From the above, it is evident that a huge premium was placed on family life. Thus, the age of marriage for both men and women was quite low. We come across a reference to Banarasi getting married at the age of nine, for women this age might have been even lesser.

Meanwhile, Banarasi turned nine years of age.
In the town of Khairabad, lived Tambi Parbat and his son Kalyanmal,
Who had one daughter.
He married Banarasi with her, with a tilak on his forehead. [xxx]

Domesticity is an essential pillar in any householder's life. Thus, it becomes a topic of prime concern in our understanding of Ardhakathanak. Provided that feminist studies are trying to recover the role of women in public spheres, it is also equally important to recover role of men in emotional intimate spheres that are denied to men in a patriarchal structure.[xxxi] Although, Banarasi was married thrice in his lifetime, his account is strikingly quiet about his wives. The only description we get is of Banarasi's first wife, when she provides him with emotional support after a business failure. One possible reason for this quietude, it the notion that personal matters must only be discussed outside the public sphere at night. Within the patriarchal framework, men are often denied the pleasure of expression. They are seen as unemotional and rational, standing in stark contrast to traits attached to females. Throughout the story, we do come across instances when Banarasi has indulged in emotional excesses upon hearing news. One such instance is when Banarasi hears the news of the death of his son and wife, and his engagement to his wife's sister in one go. We see Banarasi overcome with grief and a sense of happiness, unable to process this emotion, he breaks into a crying fit with his friend Narottamdas.

She had given birth to a third son, and attained both happiness and sorrow.
Fifteen days after his birth, mother and son both died.
Banarasi's wife had a sister, to her a marriage proposal was then sent,
Kharagsen accepted this proposal at an auspicious hour. Reading both the news together,
Banarasi and his friend fell into a crying a fit,
and with much effort he pulled himself together. [xxxii]

Finally, we will look at the portrayal of women in Banarasi's account and analyse the spaces that were made available to women. The very first observation that we must make, is that men continued to have control over women even in the realm of domestic decision making. Here we must note, the gendered division of spaces where women are limited to the domestic household and men have access to public spaces. This becomes evident from one instance when Banarasi was seeking shelter during rain. A woman offered him a place to rest, however her husband admonished her and threw Banarasi out.
It was a dark night, in the winter month of Agahan.
A woman offered him shelter, but her husband picked up a stout stick. [xxxiii]

Although the general condition of women was that of meek subjects, we find instances when they appear as formidable characters in the story. This can hint towards a possible change in currents and upward mobility in the status of women. One such instance is that of Banarasi's grandmother who makes her way to maternal house bereft of a husband and all her wealth. This also stands in stark contrast to the general outlook of women being seen as weak and easily overcome by emotion.
For the home of Madan Singh, jeweller, Kharagsen and his mother searched, asking people for directions,
Till at last, Destiny determined by their karma, Brought them to his house. [xxxiv]

The movement from domain of erotic love to the comforts of family life was of course available to men and not to women.[xxxv] This is evident from the fact that Banarasi after having an extra-marital affair could still go back to his wife. That being said, we must not

mistake this to be a situation where the wife had no control. In the same instance, Banarasi's in laws refused to send their daughter back with Banarasi on account of his affair. Thus, we cannot perceive women to be powerless figures within the

household. In addition, it can also be concluded that extra-marital affairs were not perceived in a positive light within the society. As we pointed out earlier, Banarasi's elders admonished him and suggested he go fetch his wife from her home.

Banarasi went to Jaunpur, to get his wife back.
But her parents refused to send her back.
Banarasi then fell on his father's feet and cried,
His mother beat her chest seeing her son so distressed.
Kharagsen, ashamed of his son, called him many names.
Banarasi wept and wept, he could not say a word. [xxxvi]

Women also had access to personal wealth and property. They could even undertake small business ventures. We find reference to Banarasi's wife lending him 200 rupees to restart his business. Furthermore, upon Sundardas's death, his daughter inherited all his wealth. These instances hint at economic involvement of women at some level, alternatively it could also mean that women handled finances within the household and had a degree of authority over how it was used.

For Sunadardas's property, he followed the ruling of the panchayat.
He gave everything to his sister, keeping nothing for himself. [xxxvii]

4. Religiosity and Rationale

Throughout Banarasidas's account we find examples of religious expression. Suffice to say, religious identity was an essential part of one's being and played an important role in determining the lifestyle of a person. This is evident from Banarasi's identification of himself as a Jain, devotee of Parshav and Suparshav at the very beginning.[xxxviii] This can also be indicative of a progressive religious policy that was enacted by the Mughals, particularly Akbar. The fact that the emperor did not segregate the people into 'true' and 'false' believers of God and accepted all religions as valid pathways to God, was bound to please the Jain community. This mutual respect is also visible in Banarasi's account of Akbar's death when the entire city was in a state of mourning. We also come across certain tenets of Jain philosophy such as the conception of death as the ultimate end for everyone who existed in the material realm[xxxix], the presence of multiple realities that one achieves after death [xl], eight virtues of a Jain [xli] and the philosophy of relativity of reality i.e. the non- absolute nature of existence.[xlii] Another peculiar teaching we come across in this aspect is the vow that Rai Dhanna took to never build a house, despite being a rich diwan in Bengal.

He practised the Jain rites of prosadh and pratikraman
And had taken a vow never to build a new house. [xliii]

Here we must consider how religious teachings may have had an impact on how business was conducted. There is a general understanding that religious tenets impinged on trade, however it is a wise merchant who refrains from building a house.[xliv] From the above instance we can suggest that Jain teachings had evolved over time to include the virtue of frugality, provided that much of the Jain community indulged in business activities. This can also be corroborated from the eight virtues of a Jain that include abstinence from alcohol, honey, meat, the five forbidden fruits and not eating after dark among others.

Banarasi's account of Jain practices becomes even more important to us when we place it in historical context of the growing influence of Hinduism. This process has often been referred to as the 'Hinduisation' of Jainism.[xlv] We find many instances that suggest Banarasi was caught in the middle of this process. We find recurring mentions of pilgrimages to holy sites that were likely organised by affluent men.[xlvi] Furthermore, we also find instances of fasts, vows and applying of *teeka* (vermillion) before a journey which are predominantly Hindu concepts. Another instance in this regard is the worship of Sati Aut and Lakshmi. Banarasidas's family prior to Banarasi's birth visited the temple of Sati Aut, hoping for a son. A similar trip was made after his birth, asking for a long life for Banarasi. The myth of Sati, as a virtuous wife, who sacrificed herself at her husband's insult can be found in Puranic Hindu traditions. Additionally, we also come across instances of Lakshmi being worshipped before starting a business venture in the account.[xlvii] Although, Jainism does not have a concept of caste based division, we see that every character mentioned in Banarasi's account is introduced as a member of a particular caste. Thus, it is evident that caste-based identities had gained traction even within the Jain fold. Perhaps, the best depiction of this process is visible in a pilgrimage Banarasidas himself undertook, where he first took a dip in the Ganga and then offered his prayers to Parshav and Suparshav in a temple. This instance is extremely telling, as we can actively witness the process of assimilation.
Upon reaching Kashi, he first took a dip in Ganga.
Then he worshipped Parshav and Suparshav, with devotion in his heart. [xlviii]

It is evident then, that a process of Hinduisation was active during the 17th century. This was bound to produce a certain degree of discontent among

the practicing Jains like Banarasi. Banarasidas's account is an illuminating account of a person's discovery of self through religion. It is brought to our notice that Banarasi was a Jain Shwetambar, however through the course of his journey he has a stint with Shiv Bhakti before finally returning to the Jain fold again. We find many instances that underline this brewing discontent within the protagonist. The very first time that we encounter a dissatisfied Banarasi is after a sanyasi cons him, distraught about his own gullibility Banarasi seeks the help of Bhanchand, his religious guru. Bhanchand explains to Banarasi that such godmen and their tricks are false and illusory, and one must not get occupied with them. This is perhaps the beginning of Banarasi's quest for the ultimate truth.

He told Bhanchand of his dilemma. When Bhanchand explained that-
such matters are false and illusory, Banarasi realized the truth.[xlix]

We find many such instances that indicate towards Banarasi's saturation with religion as he knew it. This is evident in the way various rituals are described in the text. At one point after Banarasi offers prayers to Shiva by blowing a conch shell, he describes himself as a shell too. Here, he implies the superfluous nature of such ritualistic worship.

Shivdev in the form of a shell, And the great shell Banarasi,
Both came together, The Lord and his servant, alike. [l]

Yet another instance highlights Banarasi's conception of worship to be transactional in nature, where worship is only offered in expectations of a reward. Additionally, various fasts and vows are observed as penance for having strayed away from the Jain path to God. After the conclusion of Banarasi's short period of Hindu worship, he decided to give up all his vices and observed the fourteen vows of Jainism and offered prayers twice every day.[li]

Finally, we can see the story coming to an obvious conclusion with Banarasi discovering Adhyatma through Arathmal Dhor. We can find a change in Banarasi's understanding of religion. He says that he no longer believed in rites and rituals, and scorned image worship.

He also gave up his clothes. This is also highlighted at the end of Banarasi's account where he identifies himself as Banarasidas who is an Adhyatmi and a contended man, as opposed to the beginning of his text where he calls himself a worshipper of Parshav and Suparshav.

Residing in Agra. A Shrimal of the Jain faith,
Banarasi Biholia Is an Adhyatmi, and a contented man. [lii]

During this time, he wrote various treatises such as the Gyan Pacchissi, Dhyan Battissi and a translation of the Samaysar Natika. It was during period that he fully understood the meaning of worship. He soon became a prominent figure among the Adhyatmis. In fact, we find mentions of a sub sect called the 'Banarasiyas' or the 'Varanasiyas'[liii], who were followers of Banarasi. His doctrine involved questioning one's faith to come to terms with it and giving up all forms of ritualistic worship. It was a general understanding that the relationship between a devotee and God cannot be mediated and a true devotee achieved fulfilment by himself. The sect was popular among both Shvetambars and Digambars (two schools of Jainism), however the radical nature of this doctrine attracted a lot of opposition. Meghavijay's Yuktiprabodh begins with a critique of the Varanasiyas accusing them of being heretics.[liv] He believed that the Varanasiyas did not even stay true to their Digambar scriptures. The Samaysar Natika, however, also acts as a compilation of Banarasi's ideas and views on worship. This text underlines Banarasi's doctrine of self-fulfilment distinct from Digambar scriptures. Thus, we can classify the Varanasiyas as Neo-Digambarites. Despite the presence of such a rich body of literature, the Varanasiyas did not survive for long after Banarasi's death and the movement only gained traction in the 17th century.

Here we can witness a pattern emerging in terms of religious reformations. The medieval period is replete with instances of movements that aim to purify religions of official intervention by the priestly class. We can cite examples of the Reformation in Europe, that was triggered by priestly excesses, or the Bhakti Movement in early medieval India. We can argue that a general understanding was reached during this period that one's religion is private and should remain outside the ambit of regulation. A greater emphasis was also placed on inclusion of sections of society that were earlier prohibited from access to certain religions by anchoring new doctrines around self-effort. This hints at a broader historical process that had its roots in the socio-cultural and economic underpinnings of the medieval world. Although, the reformers also wanted to cleanse the religions and revert them to their classical forms, the real meaning of these changes was to adjust the religions to the reality of the medieval world.[lv]

5. Conclusion
The Ardhakathanak upon first reading may not appear to be a very intriguing tale. However, as we delve deeper into the world presented to us through Banrasi's

writing, we encounter many complexities of human nature and society. At the outset, it looks like a story of a simple man, but it is indeed an account of a devotee's religious pursuit. Here, we should look back to one of the first premises we established, the purpose of writing an autobiography is often religious. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this text is its astonishing ability to collapse the centuries, and to make 17th-century experiences seem not merely vivid but also entirely understandable to the reader of today. If the Ardhakathanak is a unique witness to a particular time in the history of India and the world, it is equally a remarkable statement about the timelessness of human experience, as felt in such moments as the cloying taste of remorse, the beauty and strength of friendship, the frustrating difficulty of making one's way in life, and the unbearable—yet somehow borne—tragedy of parental bereavement.[lvi]

We also come across the development of 'individuality' as a trait. This is evidenced from the numerous autobiographies that are produced during this period. We find an emphasis on the 'cult of individual', that is commonplace today. This particular cult of individual, however, is not based on a seemingly exalted definition of a perfect man but it hinges on being relatable. This is evidenced by a list that Banarasi presents at the close of his book. He highlights his vices and virtues as they were when he completed the book, diminishing the concept of an ideal human. The development of such autobiographical texts marks the coming of modernity to the Indian subcontinent. A similar trend is also seen in religious reformation that hinged on individuality and private worship. Thus, Banarasi's life story illustrates important changes in medieval Indian society and culture, of which the most important were a growing interest in personality, in the development of individual aspects of literature and culture, and the individualisation of creative activities and culture itself. We can infer Banarasi too had a hint of vanity to be able to present his story to the world. The Indian novel has always had a symbiotic relationship with its own modernity. They are reflections of the environments that they are produced in and the social relations that the protagonist has with the world.

It is abundantly clear at this stage that Banarasidas's Ardhakathanak holds a mirror to the backdrop that it is situated in. We have also established the validity of the source for understanding the Mughal milieu by providing glimpses into the socio-cultural and economic context of that time. The text describes these situations not as a stranger, but someone who is very well situated within them.

Thus, we can suggest that the information that does comes across in the text is a peek into the insider's world. This peek is free of bias and elucidates in a manner that is true to the core. The instances we find where Banarasi refuses to divulge certain information can also be explained, when Banarasi wrote the Ardhakathanak, he knew that it would be read by his friends and associates, people he came into contact with daily. Revealing the secrets of his business success or confessing to the details of an indiscreet or unwise act, may not, in such circumstances, have been the wisest thing to do.[lvii]

The text can be an extremely rich source not only for historiographical contributions, but also in the field of literature and the arts. Despite this, Ardhakathanak remains an extremely under-utilised source. In fact, Dr. RC Sharma dubs it to be a 'neglected source of Mughal history'. We can thus conclude, that an entire body of research can be conducted on Banarasi's life along with the supplementary literature that he produced in his life such as the Samaysar Natika to unveil further intricacies of the Adhyatmi lifestyle in the medieval period along with the development of Hindi literature and its interaction with Persian cultures. Banarasidas too leaves us with a similar remark. At this juncture, I am obliged to caution, we are all now a part of Banarasi's cult of individual.

He has told us his entire tale in the doha and chaupai metres, In six hundred and seventy-five stanzas.
Those who recite it, hear it, read it, To them, his good wishes. [lviii]

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Angela Saini – Superieur. De terugkeer van de Rassentheorie

Angela Saini Ills.: Joseph Sassoon Semah

Superieur van de wetenschapsjournalist Angela Saini is een verslag van het uitgebreide onderzoek naar de biologische feiten rondom het begrip ras.
Bestaat er een verband tussen ras en IQ? Welk ras is het beste? Zijn wij één mensensoort of niet? Wat kan het moderne wetenschappelijke bewijsmateriaal ons echt vertellen over de menselijke verschillen, en wat betekenen die vervolgens?

Deze vragen zijn allerminst gedateerd. De rassentheorie beleeft een zorgwekkende comeback, in wetenschap en politiek. Angela Saini onderzoekt in *Superieur* pseudowetenschappelijk beweringen en theorieën over ras, en toont aan waarom ze onhoudbaar zijn. Angela Saini komt tot de conclusie dat de biologie deze vraag niet kan beantwoorden. Als we de betekenis van ras willen begrijpen, moeten wij begrijpen hoe macht werkt. Een onderzoek van de Verlichting via het negentiende-eeuwse imperialisme en de twintigste-eeuwse eugenetica naar de revival van de rassentheorie in de eenentwintigste eeuw.

Saini toont in *Superieur* aan hoe macht het idee van ras telkens weer opnieuw vormgeeft, hoe macht de wetenschappelijke feiten beïnvloedt. De betekenis houdt verband met de tijd.
Lang hebben witte mensen van Europese afkomst zich aan de top van de machtshiërarchie bevonden en bouwden hun wetenschappelijk verhaal over de menselijke soort rond dit geloof. Maar geen enkele regio of volk heeft recht op een claim op superioriteit.

'Ras is het tegenargument. Ras komt in de kern van de zaak neer op het geloof dat we van geboorte anders zijn, diep in ons lichaam, misschien zelfs qua karakter en intellect, en in onze uiterlijke verschijning.' Het is het idee dat bepaalde groepen mensen bepaalde aangeboren kwaliteiten hebben. Ras, gevormd door macht, heeft een eigen kracht verkregen. Witheid werd de zichtbare maatstaf van de menselijke moraliteit. Sinds de Verlichting hadden veel Europese denkers zich verenigd rond het idee dat de mensheid één was, dat we dezelfde gemeenschappelijke vermogens deelden. Ook al was er een rassenhiërarchie, ook al waren er mindere mensen en betere mensen, we waren allemaal nog steeds menselijk. In de volgende eeuw vroeg men zich weer af, of we echt wel tot hetzelfde soort behoorden: want waarom zagen wij er niet hetzelfde uit en gedroegen we ons niet op dezelfde manier? Het is geen toeval dat de moderne ideeën over ras zijn gevormd tijdens de hoogtijdagen van het Europese kolonialisme, toen de machthebbers overtuigd waren van hun eigen superioriteit. In de VS werd dezelfde verwrongen logica gebruikt om de slavernij te rechtvaardigen. En de wetenschap voorzag het racisme van intellectueel gezag.

De rassentheorie heeft zich altijd op het kruispunt van wetenschap en politiek opgehouden, en van wetenschap en economie. Ras was niet alleen een middel om fysieke verschillen te classificeren, het was ook een manier om de menselijke vooruitgang te meten, en om te kunnen oordelen over de capaciteiten en rechten van anderen, aldus Saini. Ook Hitlers ideologie van rassenhygiëne had geen kans van slagen zonder wetenschappers, zij zorgden voor het theoretisch kader en droegen bij aan het klaren van de klus zelf. Degenen wier ideeën het regime goed te pas kwamen werden gepromoot en gevierd.

In 1950 formuleerde UNESCO, vlak na de Tweede Wereldoorlog, zijn eerste verklaring over ras, waarin de eenheid tussen mensen werd benadrukt in een gezamenlijke inspanning om een einde te maken aan wat wordt gezien als het gevolg van een 'fundamenteel anti-rationeel denksysteem.' Alle mensen behoren tot dezelfde soort 'Homo sapiens'. Het grootste deel van de zichtbare diversiteit is cultureel van aard. Een cruciaal moment in de geschiedenis. Racisme was niet langer aanvaardbaar. Wetenschappers en antropologen gingen grotendeels achter UNESCO staan.

We denken dat de verschrikkingen van de Holocaust en eerdere genocides, de slavernij en het kolonialisme tot een andere tijd behoren. Dat eugenetica een vies woord is. Saini definieert eugenetica als is een berekende manier van denken over het menselijk leven; mensen worden gereduceerd tot louter delen van een geheel, die hun ras omlaag- of omhoogtrekken. Bijna alles wat we zijn is al beslist voordat we geboren zijn. Maar er zijn weer nieuw wegen gevonden om raciale verschillen te onderzoeken, en dat sommige rassen iets beter waren dan de andere. Na de Tweede Wereldoorlog hebben intellectuele racisten nieuwe netwerken opgezet met het doel racisme weer respectabel te maken. De eugenetici en rassentheorie waren niet verdwenen met de ondergang van het naziregime. Ras werd herpositioneerd voor de eenentwintigste eeuw. Ze noemt als een van de voorbeelden de Indiase regering, die in 2018 een commissie in het leven had geroepen om de geschiedenis te herschrijven. Een mythische versie van de geschiedenis zou worden gepropageerd waar in Indiase dominante geloof, het hindoeïsme, in het hele Indiase verleden centraal zou worden gesteld.

De hindoe-superioriteit zou sommige Indiërs de kans bieden hun zelfrespect terug te winnen, collectieve trots te laten gelden, en een nieuw gevoel van nationale identiteit bouwen.

We blijven steeds maar terugkomen op ras omdat we er vertrouwd mee zijn. Onze moderne ideeën over ras zijn nauw verbonden met hoe we eruitzien. In biologische termen lijken echter de verschillen niet verder te gaan dan de huid. Het is een vergissing te denken dat de interne verschillen even groot zijn als de externe verschillen lijken. De opkomst van nationalisme en racisme heeft velen van ons verrast. Identiteitspolitiek heeft velen in de greep. Het doel is hetzelfde: het benadrukken van de verschillen ten bate van politiek gewin.

Zij doet geen beroep een gedeelde menselijkheid. Alles om maar 'superieur' te zijn.

Angela Saini – Superieur. De terugkeer van de Rassentheorie. Uitgeverij Ten Have, Amsterdam, 2020. ISBN 9789025907174

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If Trump Had Followed Vietnam's Lead On COVID, US Would Have Fewer Than 100 Dead

Prof. Robert Pollin

As the coronavirus pandemic rages on, exposing to the fullest the glaring weakness of our inequitable health system, and as the unemployment situation goes largely unaddressed, it's becoming more than obvious that the U.S. is in dire need of fixing. An advanced social welfare state, with a full employment agenda, is the way out, argues world-renowned progressive economist Robert Pollin in this exclusive interview with *Truthout*. Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and co-author (with Noam Chomsky and me) of the forthcoming book *The Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet.*

C.J. Polychroniou: Bob, the coronavirus crisis is wreaking havoc on the economy,

but it has also revealed how poorly equipped the United States is in dealing with major economic crises. In fact, as economist Joseph Stiglitz has pointed out, "We built an economy with no shock absorbers." With that in mind, and with millions of Americans unemployed and even struggling to meet basic needs, can you offer us a straightforward assessment of the Trump administration's economic response to the coronavirus crisis?

Robert Pollin: The short answer is unequivocal: The Trump administration's response has been nothing short of disastrous. Let's begin with figures on lives that have been needlessly lost in the U.S. due to Trump's toxic combination of indifference, hostility to science, and racism. As of August 17, we are approaching 170,000 deaths from COVID in the U.S., more than triple the total U.S. death toll from fighting in Vietnam. We have no evidence that the death rate will be declining significantly anytime soon. This level of U.S. deaths from COVID amounts to 514 per 1 million people. By comparison, Canada's death rate is less than half that of the U.S., at around 239 deaths per million, even while Canada itself is also a relatively poor performer. Germany's death rate, at 110 per million, is 80 percent lower than the U.S., but Germany is still only a middling performer. Among the strong performers, the death rates are 15 per million in Australia, 9 per million in Japan, 6 per million in South Korea and 3 per million in China, even though the virus first emerged in China. If the U.S. had managed the COVID pandemic at the level of, say, Australia, fewer than 5,000 people would have died as of today as opposed to nearly 170,000.

Vietnam is the most extraordinary case. It has experienced a total of 22 deaths in a country of 95 million people, which amounts to a death rate of 0.25 per million. This is for a country in which the average per capita income is about 3 percent of that in the U.S. It is also a country, of course, that U.S. imperialists tried to destroy a generation ago. If the U.S. had handled COVID at Vietnam's level of competence over the past eight months, then fewer than 100 U.S. residents in total would be dead today from the pandemic.

In terms of managing the pandemic-induced economic collapse, the massive $2 trillion (10 percent of U.S. GDP) stimulus program that Congress passed and Trump signed in March, the CARES Act, did provide substantial support for unemployed workers. Fifty-six million people — 35 percent of the entire U.S. labor force — filed unemployment claims between March and August. For the most part, they all received $600 per week in supplemental support, which more than

doubled what most would have received otherwise.

The CARES Act did also deliver huge bailouts for big corporations and Wall Street. Adding everything up, it was clear even at the time of passage that the CARES Act was not close to meeting the magnitude of the oncoming crisis. Among other features, it provided only minimal support for hospitals on the front lines fighting the pandemic, and even less support for state and local governments. The Upjohn Institute economist Timothy Bartik estimates that state and local governments are staring at upward of [$1 trillion in budget shortfalls](#) through the end of 2021, equal to between 20-25 percent of their entire budgets. If these budget gaps are not filled in short order, we will begin to see mass layoffs of nurses, teachers, school custodians and firefighters. Of course, these budget cuts will only spread and deepen the ongoing economic crisis.

The Democratic majority in the House of Representatives did pass a second, and even larger, $3 trillion stimulus measure, the HEROES Act, back in May. It included $1 trillion in support for state and local governments. But Trump and the Senate Republican majority have blocked action on this for the past three months. Meanwhile, 16 million workers have now lost their $600 per week in supplemental benefits and state and local governments are teetering on collapse. Trump appears to want to make unemployed workers and public sector programs starve, perhaps so he can appear to swoop in and bail them out right before November's election. Trump has held out a "compromise" proposal with Democrats. This would feature a payroll tax cut that would permanently decimate Social Security and Medicare. Trump also wants any new stimulus program to also incorporate his current top priority, which is to [destroy the U.S. Postal Service](#) in time to prevent people from voting against him through mail balloting.

The U.S. and Europe have addressed coronavirus-induced unemployment in fundamentally different ways, with the European approach seeking to maintain a stable work environment through subsidies to companies and by effectively nationalizing payrolls, while the U.S. approach seeks to foster a flexible labor market, and in fact, encourage workers, as Ivanka Trump put it, to "[find something new](#)" because old jobs are not coming back. The end result is that while unemployment levels have skyrocketed in the U.S. due to the coronavirus pandemic, many European countries have seen an increase of less than 1 percentage point in the jobless rate. Isn't this strong enough reason why the U.S.

needs a European-style social-welfare state?

Back in April, Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal of Washington, a leader of the House Progressive Caucus, introduced the Paycheck Guarantee Act. Under this proposal, the federal government would provide grants to all private- and public-sector employers of all sizes to enable them to maintain their operations and keep all of their workers on payroll, despite the falloff in revenues these entities will have experienced resulting from the pandemic and lockdown. Through this program, there would not have been significant increases in unemployment. Workers would also not have lost their employer-based health care coverage. This plan was similar in design and scope to policies that were in place in [several European economies](#), including Germany, the U.K., Denmark and France.

Four months later, the results of the failure of the U.S. to pass the Jayapal proposal are before us. As of the most recent figures of this past June and July, U.S. unemployment was at 10.2 percent, while the rates for countries that had Jayapal-type programs in place included the U.K. at 3.9 percent, Germany at 4.2 percent, Denmark at 5.8 percent and France with the highest rate, at 7.7 percent. The [average](#) for the full European Union was 6.2 percent. For the U.S. economy, the difference between having an unemployment rate of 10.2 percent versus 6.2 percent translates into 6.4 million people without work — i.e. more people than the entire populations of Los Angeles and Chicago combined. In addition, a minimum of 15 million people — including unemployed workers and their family members — lost their employer-sponsored health insurance as U.S. unemployment rose.

So yes, certainly, on average, Europe has handled the unemployment crisis much better than the U.S. But this is not the time to be making sweeping endorsements of recent policies [and] actions in Europe. In terms of managing the COVID crisis, the U.K., France, Italy, Spain and even Sweden have death rates comparable to that in the U.S. Unemployment is 15.6 percent in Spain under a Socialist government, and is at 9.2 percent in Sweden under the Social Democrats.

In fact, European policymakers have been undermining their welfare state policies for 40 years now, since the ascendance of neoliberalism, beginning with the election of Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. in 1979. It is a valuable exercise for us to envision what the late, great economist Robert Heilbroner used to call "slightly imaginary Sweden." But in doing so, we need to recognize that

egalitarian policies in Sweden today bear only a weak resemblance to the [robust welfare state](#) that operated 40 years ago.

According to many health experts, coronavirus may never go away even when vaccines arrive, and the coronavirus recession may indeed become a long depression. In such a case, how can we best combat cyclical unemployment and ensure that there is no precipitous decline in the standard of living for working-class and middle-class Americans?

I am certainly no expert for assessing how long it is likely to take to bring COVID-19 under control in the U.S., or assessing the likelihood that it could remain as a public health threat indefinitely. But in the event that we are faced with a virus that we cannot adequately control, even through universal vaccinations, then I would say it is time to start learning from Australia, Japan, South Korea, China, and — in a great historic irony — maybe especially Vietnam about how to create a public health system that minimizes the spread of the illness. Step one would be to establish Medicare for All, so that every U.S. resident has access to good-quality health care, without having to fear financial ruin should they get sick with COVID or anything else. Creating something resembling a minimally effective public health system through Medicare for All would, in turn, enable us in the U.S. to advance a sustainable recovery on the foundation of a Green New Deal.

Over the longer-term horizon, the Green New Deal can equally serve as the foundation for building a full employment economy. As a technical matter, it is not hard to figure out a policy framework that can deliver full employment. The Western European countries, after all, ran near-full employment economies from roughly the end of World War II to the mid-1970s. Indeed, the main accomplishment of neoliberalism in Europe, starting with Margaret Thatcher, was to break the back of this then-dominant full employment policy framework. To sustain full employment over the long-term, we first and foremost need government policies committed to maintaining levels of public investment that will be sufficient to create an abundance of decent jobs at all levels of society. It is also obvious that, at this historical juncture, we desperately need large-scale public investments for at least a generation to build a green economy. As such, the full employment policy framework merges fully with the matter of saving the planet.

Should the Biden-Harris ticket win in November, do you expect that we will see fundamental changes in government response to the quadruple crises of health, climate change, racial injustice and a ravaged economy?

It is no secret that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris are both corporate- and Wall Street-friendly Democrats. If we are going to wait for them to enact fundamental changes in U.S. government policies, it is going to be an awfully long wait. But it is also clear that the Democratic Party can be pushed to the left — or, to put it more accurately — the Democrats can be pushed to support, among other things, a public health system that can save lives and deliver quality health care at much lower costs than we now pay, and a Green New Deal program that can prevent a climate catastrophe while also serving as the foundation of a full employment economy. Stamping out racism and sexism will also have to be central to any such agenda. Making progress in fighting racism and sexism will, in turn, also be greatly strengthened within a broad agenda advancing equality and ecological policy.

We know that the Democrats can be pushed in this direction by comparing the official platform they are enacting this week relative to what they passed in 2016. The current platform is far more progressive than the 2016 version under Hillary Clinton. It's true that such platforms are almost entirely ignored the day after they become ratified at the party's conventions, if not sooner. But that brings us to the real question, which is: Who is capable of effectively pushing the Democratic Party to embrace the truly progressive features of the party platform? It will have to be the range of organizations and people that have been committed to such projects for a long time — including grassroots groups, such as the Labor Network for Sustainability, Jobs with Justice, and many more, as well as progressive groups, such as Progressive Democrats of America and the House Progressive Caucus. If we are going to succeed in building a transformative political project emerging out of our current historic moment of multiple and severe crises, grassroots and progressive groups are the ones who will make it happen — certainly not Joe Biden or Kamala Harris.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

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