Conclusion
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A detailed analysis of the selected texts of Toni Morrison, Amy Tan and Abdulrazak Gurnah, from the angle of subalternity and agency, proved illuminating in many ways. It was found through the struggles of the various characters who tried to recuperate and reform their damaged subjectivities, that agency is ultimately a complex goal to reach. The very resources that are required to restore subjectivity are depleted by oppression. As pointed out in the various chapters in this dissertation, the subaltern gains agency through specific linguistic, cultural, social, and mnemonic functions. The analysis of the selected texts shows that in addition to the colonial discourse and oppressive practices, there exist counter hegemonic discourses that tend to strengthen the subaltern and help her in gaining agency. The study brings to the fore the idea that agency is not gained by bloodshed and revolt alone. Rather, it can often be achieved in subtle ways. Agency manifests itself in diverse phenomena such as national freedom struggles, taking up journeys of self realization and self actualization, outright rebellion, assimilation into and accommodation with one’s condition, or even minor forms of everyday resistance that break through the normative standards set by figures of authority. These struggles can be both collective, as well as individual. The common strand in these struggles is that they tend to change something in the oppressive structures in which the subjects live. During this study several doorways opened up in the understanding of agency, most important among these being memory and solidarity.

Theoretical foundations of some important thinkers, who have made remarkable contributions in understanding the workings of oppression and agency, have helped in undertaking a nuanced study of the selecte authors and their texts. An understanding of the positions of these thinkers meant that journeys through them were undertaken freely for preparing an ordered ground for this study. Insights from Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak helped in understanding the functioning of power. Frantz Fanon, Jean Paul Sartre and Louis Althusser’s stances on subjectivity enriched the analysis in multiple ways, particularly by throwing light on how identities are formed, maintained and how they become
troubled in certain circumstances. This prepared a fertile ground for a multidimensional analysis of the texts. These theoretical formulations show some convergence. Power, ideology, subalternity, subjectivity, trauma, memory, solidarity and agency are related. There exist inflows between these aspects of existence.

Morrison taps the rhythms of a seemingly asymmetric life. She sets out to make it easier to tread the treacherous ground of the history of slavery. Her narrative style is almost unusual. Her narrative voice is plain, but her novels on the whole irrupt on the reader’s consciousness because of the trauma incrusted in textual folds. There remains a vast expanse of the unknown, unsaid and unremembered in her texts. Also there are multiform revelations on slavery – the master/slave relation, agency, and ideas of humanity. Slavery in Beloved is a nightmare of sorts but is not stereotypical. Morrison engages in recording its workings. Her works counter the deleterious impact of slavery on memory and records it as a despicable fact of American history. Her themes are centred on the trauma of slavery (Beloved), the confusion faced by the first slaves and their utilization as a resource (A Mercy), the lack of self worth and feelings of insecurity (The Bluest Eye), criminalization of the mind (Tar Baby and Jazz), the effect of slavery on men and their attempts to reassert their masculinity (Song of Solomon) and how oppression generates women who deviate from the norm (Sula). In A Mercy she goes back to a time when slavery had not become explicitly atrocious. While Beloved is a text that reveals the abhorrent aspects of slavery, A Mercy traces the beginnings of slavery and gestures towards alternate paths that African American life could have taken. Just like Jacob, a white, becomes a caring master to Florens -- the slave deserted by her own mother – America could have found the inclination to become a surrogate parent to its African population. Morrison brings into relief through her works, not wishful thinking, but the multitudinous facets of humanity. When asked about her motivations to write, Morrison states that she writes what she wants to read but has not yet been written. Her writing, then, is a record of what has not been spoken thus far.

Morrison breaks away from the stereotypical images of whites and Africans alike. Whereas, there can be humane slave masters like Garner and Jacob, there are power hungry and controlling Africans like Blacksmith. It is not always the master who is oppressive, rather, it is certain human impulses and acts that should be read as being domineering like the behaviour of Blacksmith who is otherwise an African.
Morrison speaks to the reader as a human and not merely as woman of colour. Morrison’s traversal as an author, from *Beloved* (1987) to *A Mercy* (2008) is illustrative of how her understanding of the workings of oppression, subjectivity and agency becomes more nuanced. *Beloved* is a stark representation of the traumas of slave existence, the malignity of certain individuals, the overtly repressive apparatuses of the state and the binaric Western culture. *A Mercy* takes a more mature stance towards slavery. As a text, it is a milder representation of slavery as compared to *Beloved*; its focus is more on hegemonic and ideological control than on direct suppression, and it is more a book about humans than slaves. The focus of this text is not merely on the practices of slavery that are detrimental to subjectivity, rather it focuses on the miracles and positive aspects of life.

Amy Tan also deals with oppression of women especially in diaspora. Tan incorporates in her writing a deep understanding of family ties, particularly the mother-daughter bond. In both her novels taken up for the present study, the mother-daughter bond seems to be of greater concern to her rather than the progression of the narrative. The daughters must venture into their mothers’ past by accepting their Chinese heritage. On the contrary, in Morrison’s novels the characters find it difficult to reconcile themselves with their traumatic pasts. The past is so painful that a return becomes psychologically unviable. Her characters carry psychological scars that cannot be readily healed. They have to live with them and even as they become agents they cannot completely evade and overcome the traumas borne. In Tan’s novels, on the other hand, the protagonists have familial support and their relations are not disrupted by trauma. On the contrary, Morrison’s characters are often weighed down by trauma and are either disunited from family or are rendered incapable of bonding. Characters like Florens and Denver do turn to community for dealing with trauma but these ties of solidarity are transient. Unlike Tan’s main characters, Morrison’s must draw upon their own inner resources to counter subalternity. As is the case with Morrison’s works, Tan’s novels too have a strong feminist viewpoint. *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* explores patriarchal structuring and maneuvering of women’s lives. There is, however, no solid patriarchal figure present. The patriarch in Tan’s novels is not a definite human figure but remains an airy apparition that comes into the text as merely a force. Most of the characters in her novels are women. And they showcase, what may be called a maternal sorority. The mother-daughter bond so
foregrounded is not as simple as this term tends to suggest. It harbours its own problems and is not a stable and steady bond. Tan does not focus on clearly fighting off patriarchy and through it, ending women’s victimization in its wake.

Gurnah’s works also engage with oppression in colonized and diasporic spaces. Characters like Rehana, Rashid, Amin, and Yusuf travel alone, sometimes with impoverished resources of experience to draw on. The motif of journey is very important in Gurnah’s *Desertion* and *Paradise*. The characters undertake literal, metaphorical, or mental journeys to unentangle the complications of life. The three novelists engage with varying motifs and reach several insights into subalternity, subjectivity and agency. Gurnah’s understanding of colonization is not one-sided. He records in his texts, how the colonial intervention was sectarian in that there was no one overarching colonizer, rather colonization operated in multiple ways. Colonization is not limited to European intervention only, and is also a consequence of the disparities based on culture, economy, race, gender, etc. In *Paradise*, there are layers of colonizers and there can also occur an exchange of positions between the colonizer and colonized. Thus there are always traces of agency even in a colonized position. In *Desertion*, Rehana’s disregard for social structures and establishing her own system of living and perceiving makes her an agent. The social fabric nevertheless, is not an easy one to transcend. A realization is reached that the very morphology of society must be reconfigured for liberation to come about.

Characters in Morrison’s novels have jagged ties to their past, those in Tan’s are confused by their double heritage, and in Gurnah’s, the protagonists face their singular existence in the universe and try to infuse their lives with meaning by evaluating their experiences. All the three authors engage in a form of micro recording of ordinary lives. They find traces of the exceptional and heroic in them. For instance, Yusuf in *Paradise* has ordinary beginnings and even later remains economically wanting. His heroism, however is defined by his propensity to exit these defining social structures. It is defined not by power but by the strength of his character, mental abilities, observations and intuitions into life. It is these factors which turn out to be truly revelatory of what can define agents.

During the course of the present study, it also came to light that subalternity, rather than being a monolithic formation or having a linear progression and stages,
was too complex to be put into a single notional fit. Also, since subalternity manifests itself in varying ways in subjects and communities, a study of their particular struggles was very important in understanding what subalternity entails. Subalternity leaves deep impacts upon subjectivity through processes of inferiorization, hegemony, and by promoting creation of discourses and discursive knowledge systems, and leading to a psychological depletion of the oppressed in the process. However, despite many incapacitations, subalternity also subsumes agency as its positive, proactive component.

It also came to light that subjectivity is often experienced through threats by some overt or inherent force. One thinks about the self when the environment challenges it. Reaching one’s subjectivity is necessarily problematic in a world where one is bound by certain ideological frameworks which control one’s life.

Simply carrying one’s past without evaluation of one’s heritage does not lead to agency. The past must be consciously understood to lead the subject to a healthy creation and expression of subjectivity.

Agents operate within a space and at the same time mould it. They work on it and not just through it. Individual actions come about through inhabiting a particular space and their interactions with others in this space. These interactions may be facilitating and smooth or debilitating and jarring. When debilitating space generates positive action or reiteration of the self, agents go on to emerge. Individuals become agents because their freedom is threatened and because they are subjects in some way. Often the experiences of subalternity are shared by communities. Such communities must come together to fight their common oppressors. Agency is something that comes through individual struggles against oppression but the spaces of different agents do intersect and their collective actions go a long way in achieving agency.

The present project is not an ultimate, final and conclusive work. Though subalternity and agency were studied through the three authors, two being women and all three being postcolonial, there remain several other authors from various continents and groups, whose work can be studied, to arrive at a better understanding of the whole gamut of subaltern positions. This thesis takes into account several theories related to subalternity but it is not an all-encompassing one, given the varied valences that the condition and experience of subalternity incorporate. Aspects that
impact subalternity and subjectivity such as language, corporeal oppression, visual culture created around oppression, the role of mythologies and collective memories in understanding suppression and discursive conditioning of the subject, the psychological understanding of trauma, and the relation of freedom and agency are some of the factors that need be further examined at length.

Studies related to subjectivity will persist for a long time to come. New issues related to subjectivity continue to arise given the changing social, economic, cultural and political situations in the world. The recent elections in the Unite States, the Brexit or the rise of the ultra right in the world that poses new challenges to the marginalized and oppressive subjects

Certain aspects of the selected novels have not been probed since they lie outside of the scope of this dissertation. An important element in the novels of Morrison, Tan and Gurnah is the space in which the stories are set. This includes the geographical, political, environmental and historical spaces that must be probe into to understand the condition of subalternity better. A study of space can be a good field for further study of these novels. How the authors translate the real space in their novels into the backdrop of stories, how the characters relate to space, how space is either enabling to subjectivity or detrimental to it, what the relations between the various forms of space are, and what is the relation between community and space are some of the questions that have not been incorporated into this study because they lie outside the scope of this dissertation.

Since oppression is a phenomenon that is manifest almost everywhere in the world in some form or the other, this work is a modest attempt to understand the workings of oppression and agency.