Conflict and Recognition in Munier Choudhury's *Kobor*

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Abstract

The emergence of Bangladesh as a nation is a culmination of long drawn out struggles faced by the Bengalis of the region, which has been portrayed in a vast body of Bengali literature. The West Pakistani suppression of young Bangla speaking voices in 1952 is resisted back through powerful and symbolic returns of the dead in the play *Kobor (Grave)* by Munier Choudhury, which was first written and produced in jail in 1953 in the context of the Language Movement of 1952. This paper explores *Kobor* to address the conflicts, power dynamics and resolution of conflicts that have been at the centre of Bengali identity formation and recognition during Pakistani rule. Conflict theory examines tensions that arise due to cultural, political and racial differences and the subsequent intensity of conflicts that concomitantly increases with the degree of unity in the resistant groups. A critical analysis of *Kobor* from the perspectives of conflict theory reveals inter-state ideological conflicts which were fuelled by the cultural, linguistic, political and other socioeconomic differences and disparities between the two wings of Pakistan.

Keywords: Ideological conflicts and recognition, identity, East and West Pakistan, *Kobor*, grave (yard)

The University of Dhaka has always provided its students and teachers like Munier Choudhury an ideological hub to mould the identity of this region's inhabitants over the decades. The voices of Bangla speaking population, who had wanted to assert their distinctive identities under colonial and Pakistani rule, were repeatedly drowned by autocratic regimes. These shackles were finally broken during the historic Language Movement in 1952, led by the students of the University of Dhaka along with other students, men and women of the region. The Language Movement in East Pakistan proved a strong and bold indictment of the impositions of language and other cultural and political forces by the quasi-colonial West Pakistani overlords. During the movement, Bangla speaking East Pakistanis emerged as a new power who were rebellious, uncompromising and passionate about their identity.

According to Moore (2000), whenever there are ideological differences, there is an "oscillation between the demand for specific recognition and incorporation into a collaborative milieu within which the demand for recognition can be made and acted upon" (p. 1130). The martyrs of the Language Movement wanted their voices to be heard and a collaborative platform to build and recognize their demands. Choudhury produced his iconic play *Kobor* (1953) in the context of the movement resisting the unjust killing of the Bengali speaking people for the demand of their linguistic rights.

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In this paper, we evaluate *Kobor* from the theoretical perspectives of conflict and conflict resolutions, as the play holds a crucial role in portraying the diverse multicultural and secular spirit of liberation in then East Pakistan. In the post-millennial age, it is significant to acknowledge that the identity of Bangladesh has undergone a constant reweaving of narration by scholars predominantly due to multifaceted socio-economic and political conflicts. This paper explores the socio-political and deeper psychological constructions embedded in the theme and structure of the play. All the quotations in this paper from Munier Choudhury's *Kobor* are translated from Bangla by the authors.

Conflict theory

'Conflict theory' was first coined by German philosopher Karl Marx in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in 1859. He showed that in a materialistic concept of society, there was an integral relationship between production and economic structure of society. According to Marx, a society is in a constant state of conflict due to competition of limited resources. He asserted that "capitalism would produce its own gravediggers by creating the conditions under which class consciousness and a failing economy would come into existence. In this juncture between structure and class-based group experience, the working class revolution would take place" (cited in Dahrendorf, 2006, p. 211). Marx also stated that social institutions "like government, education, and religion reflect this competition in their inherent inequalities and help maintain the unequal social structure" (Openstax, 2017, p. 16). A basic premise of Marx's conflict theory contends that individuals with power and wealth (bourgeoisie) suppress the poor and powerless (the proletariat) predominantly for their own economic gains.

Later, sociologists like Max Weber (1864-1920) extended Marx's ideology and asserted that "in addition to economic inequalities, inequalities of political power and social structure cause conflict" (OpenStax, 2017, p. 16). Weber pointed out that different individual groups are affected differently based on education, race, and gender because of "power and the ways in which it is distributed" and contributed to the creation of social order (cited in Hamon, 2016, p. 1). In brief, conflict theory is based on social hierarchy, domination and power. Defining the scope of conflicts is somewhat complicated due to its binary nature. Gartzke and Gleditsch (2006) illustrate from different studies on identity conflicts about how conflicts may result in "psychological distrust or enmity" communication gaps leading to "international misunderstandings and violence", "transnational tensions" and "contempt" between and towards the other (p. 53).

However, while conflicts create divisions, they also help to unify a large group of like-minded individuals, empowering them with a commanding voice. According to Simmel (cited in Fought, 1985), "a mass arises when there is an exclusive concern with the shared characteristics of its individual components" (p. 159). He believes that conflicts can make a society more stable, since the intensity of conflict depends on the level of solidarity within the opposing groups. Conflicts arise due to inequalities in class, race and culture. The resolution of conflicts attempts to address the structural issues causing inequality. Sometimes, after conflicts arise, groups work to "create internal solidarity, centralize power, and reduce dissent" (OpenStax, 2017, p. 17). Conflicts also make a group achieve recognition of their own identity.

Recognition theory has been used over the ages to understand the psychological mechanisms of social and political resistance. Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807/2018), states that resistance fuels the need for recognition and identity and that "it is through a life and death struggle that each proves its worth to itself, and that both prove their worth to each other" (p. 111). He viewed recognition as the tool by which our existence is generated. Bertram and Celikates (2013) define recognition as "both the condition of the development and of the performance of the individual's capacity to form a practical identity" (p. 3). When groups become aware of their identity and demand recognition, "they must also be capable of continually actualizing it in their actions" (Bertram & Celikates 2013, p. 3). Honneth (1992/1996, cited in Bertram & Celikates, 2013) believes that recognition is an acknowledgement of the other and of the "characteristics that he or she holds as valuable" (p. 3). Smith (1997) also states that our group identification occurs if only there is another group "to identify ourselves against" (p. 201). In other words, recognition of multiple voices has to be acknowledged. Moore (2000) builds on the concept of recognition and states that "multiculturalism is often taken as a demand for the recognition of the specificity that presumes the national community it affects to reject" (p. 1131).

The rise of Bangladesh as an independent nation was rooted in 'linguistic nationalism' (Alam, 2021) which was also guided by the diverse conflicts between the two wings of Pakistan and a strong massive resistance from the eastern part. The multifaceted conflicts between East and West Pakistan and the identity formation of a Bangla speaking group are well portrayed in the play *Kobor* which was written a year after the 1952 language movement to commemorate the martyrs and which has now become an iconic document of the linguistic nationalism. In this paper, we critically analyse the divergent social, economic and political conflicts between the eastern and the western provinces of Pakistan which are ingrained into the theme and structure of the play.

Historical and political backgrounds of Bangladesh

Bangladesh had been always transferred from one hand to another which resulted in its frequent name change. From the fourth to the tenth century, the region, later known as Bengal, was ruled by the Mauryas, Guptas and the Palas, causing significant migration of Buddhists into this region. Two centuries of Hindu rule and substantial inflow of Buddhist settlers in this region were followed by three more centuries of Muslim rule established by Bakhtiyar Khilji. After the rule of the Sultan and the Mughals, in 1707, Bengal became a central hub of British colonization.

Before the partition of India in 1947, Bengal during the Raj included East Bengal, what is now the independent country Bangladesh, and West Bengal of India. With the end of British colonial rule in 1947, when India and Pakistan secured their independence, East Bengal joined Pakistan, because they shared the same religion, Islam, on the scale of majority. Now Pakistan, as an independent country, consisted of two states: East Pakistan (previously East Bengal) and West Pakistan (previously the state of Pakistan). Soon after the formation of the new nation, however, the two states experienced various types of conflicts including linguistic, cultural, geographical and

socioeconomic, which culminated in a series of movements in East Pakistan and eventually accelerated the wheel of its liberation in 1971. Islam (1978, p. 147) observes that a "plethora of political, ideological, constitutional and economic problems had been progressively burgeoning since Pakistan emerged" which "virtually plagued" its two states.

First of all, the most immediate conflicts were created when the East Bengal residents, who had just been divided after a long history of subjugation to British imperialism, found their linguistic identity at stake from the very beginning of the establishment of Pakistan. They were shocked at West Pakistan's attempts to introduce Arabic scripts for Bangla to avoid "Sankscritization of the language" (p. 146) and by the declaration of Urdu as the only state language (Islam, 1978). Bengali has a thousand years of history (Shahed, 1993) with Sanskrit based scripts and lexicon whereas Urdu, which is also an old language, was based on Persian Arabic scripts (Islam, 1978). Therefore, the imposition of Urdu took the form of cultural oppression or aggression to East Pakistan. Dr. Shahidullah (1947, cited in Islam, 1978), a prominent Bengali linguist from Dhaka University, opined that "[i]f Urdu...instead of Bengali is used in our law courts and universities, that would be tantamount to political slavery" (p. 142).

Secondly, the religious temperament of the two states was very different. Since ancient times, the identity of Bengal had been constructed out of the influences of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and in later years, Christianity. Therefore, as opposed to West Pakistan, East Pakistan embraced more cultural diversity. According to Bhardwaj (2010), the culture in Bengal is a result of evolution of "syncretic values that emphasized religious inclusion" (p. 6) and also "the result of a longstanding tolerance among the people of this deltaic region in relation to a wide range of influences that included Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Sufism and Tantrik cultures, each of which had been accommodated within indigenous tribal cultures" (p. 6). Therefore, unlike West Pakistan, East Pakistan had a distinct secular identity.

Thirdly, the geographical gulf of 1,600 kilometres between the two wings (Jahan, 2012), separated by India in the middle, put East Pakistan in a more disadvantaged state in political and economic terms. Lambert (1959) writes, "East Bengal lay almost in a state of siege and West Pakistan, a thousand miles away, could substitute neither markets nor sources of supply" (p. 50). West Pakistan continued to hold the dominant power in political representation and imposed policies and laws on East Pakistan regardless of the latter's consent or necessity. Eventually, when political and language rights were denied to East Pakistan, the latter experienced severe feelings of humiliation and distrust, which led to disillusionment and identity conflicts. East Pakistan could see very well how they had not yet secured freedom, but were transferred from one foreign ruling community such as the British to another, who were local and Asian Muslim brothers, yet with the same colour of the imperialists.

These conflicts led to an identity crisis in East Pakistan which eventually culminated in the Language Movement of 1952. As Lambert (1959) observes,

> The language issue, more than any other, symbolized the 'imperialism' of the western sector. It is interesting to speculate whether Bengali regionalism would have reached its present heights [in the late 1950s] if both Bengali and Urdu had been made state languages from the very beginning. (p. 56)

When Urdu was forced upon them as the state language, it catapulted Bengalis to demand recognition and assert their identities. Munier Choudhury's *Kobor* is a testament to the group identification of the rebels and martyrs of the Language Movement of 1952. During this movement, the students of East Pakistan raised their voices to preserve their right to practice their own language, Bangla.

Choudhury, a student of the University of Dhaka, was an integral part of the movement. Born in 1925, Choudhury received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Department of English, University of Dhaka in 1946 and 1947 respectively. Imbued with a deep-rooted sense of the self, Choudhury protested social injustices imposed by West Pakistan. On February 21, 1952, he actively participated in the Language Movement and protested against the killing of students by the police. Consequently, he was imprisoned for two years. This was a significant period of his life because he wrote the play *Kobor* while in prison in 1953 in order to symbolically commemorate the martyrs of the movement and protest against West Pakistan's denial of East Pakistan's identity recognition. Embroiled by the passionate zeal to voice the demands of his fellow countrymen, to establish the Bengali identity in his land, his play demanded recognition of their right to freedom. While in prison, in 1954, he sat for another Master's degree in Bangla and stood first class first. A few years later he received his third master's degree in Linguistics from Harvard University. His spirit was indomitable and fearless, mentored and guided by the activists and students roaming in the corridors of the academic buildings of the University of Dhaka.

The University of Dhaka and Bengali identity

The creation of Bangladesh parallels the creation of Dhaka University which was also a result of conflict and resolution itself. During the British proposal of the Bengal Partition of 1905-1911, two groups emerged within the colonized. West Bengal was vehemently opposed to the partition, while East Bengal welcomed the idea, anticipating a potentially positive change that would increase economic and political representation for Muslims (Christiansen, 2019). When the Partition was annulled, the British rulers, to compensate for the loss of potential power of East Bengal, resolved the issue of disgruntled East Bengalis and promised to establish "an educational institution to rival that of the great universities of Kolkata, and to base it in Dhaka" (Christiansen, 2019, p. 79). In 1920, The Dacca University Act was passed in the Indian Legislative Council and approved by the Governor General on March 23, 1920. The University of Dhaka (known as University of Dacca then) was finally established and according to Rahim (1981), from 1921 to 1947, the "aims and ideals of the University were translated into action and there was an internal development of the University" (p. 59). During this period, the teachers and students began to make substantial contributions in research - paving the way to the establishment of new departments.

Among the twelve teaching departments with which the University of Dhaka first opened its doors, was the Department of English. After 1947 and after the huge exodus of teachers from Dhaka to Calcutta, new recruits joined the faculty of the University of Dhaka. Led by luminary Heads of the English Department like Dr. Itrat Hossain Zuberi (1951-1953), Miss A. G. Stock (1947-1951), and Mr. J. S. Turner (1954-1957), the

students of the English Department played a pivotal role in asserting a unified nationalistic identity of their country. Munier Choudhury, a student of the Department of English during the 1950s, was also driven by political and social activism. On 30 January 1952, when Urdu was declared the state language of Pakistan, the Action Committee of students organized a strike on 21 February 1952. Most of the students in this group were Dhaka University students (Rahim, 1981).

One of the tenets of conflict theory is that a shift in power dynamic between groups often is abrupt and takes the form of revolutions. Munier Choudhury was a witness, a participant and a victim of oppression of the 1952 Language Movement. Rahim (1981) states, "The whole people of East Bengal were identified with the Language Movement and it fostered the growth of Bengali nationalism" (p. 177). Echoing this statement, Hussein (2013) illustrates that the "most important factor in Bangladesh's nation-state consolidation was a nationalism based on common language and ethnicity" (p. 38).

Choudhury's *Kobor*, therefore, is more than just a play. It is a historical testament to the constant dose of conflicts that led to the constitutional declaration of Bangla as a state language along with Urdu in 1956 (Hai, 1971/2019) and finally the formation of Bangladesh as an independent country in 1971. Alam (2021) points out that the 1952 Language Movement marked "the beginning of the end of Pakistan. Bengali continued to root itself as the state language of the eastern province of Pakistan; by the end of 1971 it would be the only national language of Bangladesh" (para. 3).

Conflict and recognition in *Kobor*

In analysing *Kobor*, it is necessary to acknowledge Turner's (1982) thesis that the clashes between 'indetermination' (the wish) and the 'modes of determination' (the structure which tries to make the society a harmonious whole), arises in conflicted societies and these clashes address disparities in hierarchical structure and social injustice. A similar clash has taken place in Bangladesh for centuries. In *Kobor*, this phenomenon is illustrated in the apparent sense (macro) and also in the deeper psychological dimensions (micro).

Kobor is a very short play which maintains the unities of action, place and time suggested centuries ago by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. The unities were structurally necessary for the play because it was both produced and performed first in a prison where the playwright and the actors were serving terms as political prisoners. Due to the limited resources available in prison, the play needed to be short and focused and a one action play, almost modelled like the Greek dramas, so that it could be acted out quickly and effectively. For the same reason, it was located in the same time and place or setting so that the performance would not require much change and movement. Throughout the play, there is a thick black curtain to make a partition between the stage and the green room. Behind the curtains, not visible to the audience, the players would rest when not acting, put on the required make up, and so on.

The plot centres around the incident of burying the corpses of the East Pakistani young people shot dead by the police during their protest on February 21, 1952. The playwright chose a graveyard for the setting of the play where the dead are hastily buried

to hide them from public view. The whole plot takes place in the last few hours of the night. By the end of the play, dawn starts breaking. The Bengali title of the play 'Kobor' means 'grave' or 'graveyard', connoting death, darkness and thus, complements the setting, mood and tone of the play.

There are only three major characters – the political Leader, Inspector Hafiz, and Fakir. The character of the Guard serves as a minor character. Additionally, there are corpses, some on stage and the rest off stage. Each character is distinguished by their names, costumes, roles, language and mission. Unlike the Leader and the Inspector who visibly exercise political power, all other characters, siding with the movement, or at least remaining inarticulate, hold minor social status and rank. For example, the Guard is always addressed as a guard and never given a name. He converses with others in his regional dialect. He seems scared and somewhat lost because of the setting and incidents happening around him; nevertheless, he remains obedient and loyal to the system. He never questions the brutal shooting of young protesters or their secret burial. The Guard's dialect, rank, and obedience mark him as a lower class East Pakistani, who does not or cannot articulate his thoughts about political oppression. The Leader is aware of the difference between his status and the Guard's status. As soon as he asserts his supremacy over the Guard's, he believes that he is strengthening his own identity. From the theoretical viewpoint of conflicts and identity, this phenomenon can be interpreted as what Hicks (2001) described as "desire to start the process of knowing - by which we locate ourselves" (p. 36). Although the Guard has relinquished his identity so that he can survive among the powerful oppressive rulers, like the political Leader, he does not seem to have any regrets or frustrations. His character stands in stark contrast to Fakir who apparently seems to be mentally deranged and hence, called a madman by others. Choudhury masterfully shows the difference in social awareness and consciousness through the characters of the Guard and Fakir.

The play begins with the Leader making queries about the progress of the burial of the dead students. His subordinate, Hafiz, assures him that everything is going smoothly except for the local madman, Fakir, who has interrupted the workers making the graves. On hearing about Fakir, the Leader becomes angry and anxious. The Leader's obsessive preoccupation with alcohol in the graveyard illustrates this anxiety. The whole scene is fraught with tension due to the covert nature with which the bodies of the martyrs are buried in the dark graveyard. The Leader's nervousness can be felt every time he jumps up in fear when the Guard or Hafiz talks to him.

> Please don't yell so loudly! Yes, it is true that I have been fearless in the last four or five years. But ... still ... this is a graveyard, not an open field! If you talk so loudly, so suddenly, my chest hurts. (Choudhury, 2018, p. 49)

So, the plot takes place due to an evident psychological conflict in the minds of the politically empowered characters, between the Leader representing the oppressive regime and the student protesters representing subalterns. The Leader has absolutely no regrets for the killing of these young people. At the same time, he wants his subordinate, Inspector Hafiz, to hurriedly finish the job because he is anxious. Hicks (2001) observes that "we do not want to prevent differences but we do want to prevent destructive conflict" (p. 35). The student protests are symbolic of destructive conflict in the eyes of

the Leader. The Leader is an example of how one in power acknowledges the hierarchical status which separates him from the rest. However, when he anticipates a possible confrontation or discovery by the student rebels, he feigns illness.

A psychological analysis of the Leader's reactions and anxieties illustrates the uncertainty of that period of history in East Pakistan. Hicks (2001) states that the uncertainty "feels uncomfortable and, at the deepest level, life-threatening. One measure of maturity is the ability to tolerate uncertainty and diversity, to accept differences, and embrace contradictions and paradox" (p. 36). The Inspector is a character through which the playwright very cleverly manifests the entrapment felt by Bengalis. When the Inspector informs the Leader that, to save time, the gravediggers were told to dig a mass grave instead of individual graves for each body, the Leader appreciatively calls him a resourceful officer. On hearing this comment, the Inspector slyly responds and says:

> Meherbani Sir. We petty officers did not get anything after Pakistan was created. We were not socially accepted under the British rule. Unfortunately, despite fighting earnestly to support Pakistan, we are facing the same situation even today. If people like you don't favour us, how can we hope to survive? We don't have any political affiliations Sir. The government means everything to us. We do as they wish. (Choudhury, 2018, p. 51)

The Inspector is attempting to assign meaning to his existence in an extremely difficult situation. Hicks (2001) believes that "establishing and maintaining our knowing is the basic and most profound element of consciousness…Moment to moment, we are necessarily involved in establishing and maintaining the card house of our identity and our understanding of the world" (p. 36). The Inspector, who is seemingly a sycophant, also struggles with his own questions of identity and recognition. He is maintaining his identity by building his card house. If that house of cards is destroyed, he will be unable to function psychologically and socially or survive physically (Hicks, 2001).

Unlike the Guard, Fakir and the spirits of the dead are not submissive. They are not ruthless or selfish either. They speak standard Bangla and assert their social status, voice and roles. They create fear, mystery, and suspense in the minds of the Leader and the Inspector. The Leader is a hypocrite who does not want to confess his true feelings while the Inspector is more shrewd, pretentious and cruel. While Fakir refuses to surrender his voice, the Inspector sacrifices his own voice for survival in adverse situations.

The use of the dead bodies with visual and olfactory images deviates from ordinary human experiences and has strong effects on the audience's emotions, feelings and cognition. Since death is usually associated with dark and grim images, providing vivid sensual imageries allows the audience to interact with the state of the death itself. An unpleasant idea like death becomes accepted in mainstream cognitive thought processes. In *Kobor*, a Bangla speaking audience can empathize and identify with the characters and the events. According to Hicks (2001), there is a relationship between conflict and reality identity. People naturally assume that what they see is true and real. Since reality is perceived as "confirmable" and "predictable", the idea that the objects we see are inaccurate and incomplete, can deeply unsettle the mind (Hicks, 2001, p.36). The physical and psychological survival of the Leader in *Kobor* depends on his ability to

assign meaning to the objects and events around him, from his own perspective. When the ghosts appear, they challenge the Leader's perception of reality and truth. Hicks (2001) states:

> It is this inner experience, usually unconscious, that is often a prime cause of our passionate and even violent response to disagreements and one of the reasons we tend to demonize the "other" who is different from us and who disagree with us. (p. 36)

Fakir and the ghosts, on the other hand, believe in an alternate reality. Fakir notices the foul odour, coming out of the living bodies of the Leader and the Inspector, not of the dead bodies who were shot dead and smeared in blood. The Leader cannot bear Fakir's boldness. Despite knowing the fact that the madman has no political or economic power, the Leader feels threatened and starts to lose self-control. He wants to bury Fakir alive. When Fakir tells the Leader and Inspector Hafiz that they do not know the difference between the dead and the living, he reveals the spirit of the protesters of the Language Movement. The seemingly mad Fakir says:

> I have seen them very carefully. They're not dead. They will not die. They'll never die. They'll not lie down in the graves. They will rise up. (Choudhury, 2018, p. 55)

In these lines, the differences in ideology and beliefs of the oppressors and the oppressed are beautifully illustrated. It may be noted that these lines establish the struggle for recognition of the Bengali masses. McFarland (2004), in assessing the role of resistance in social drama, opines that acts of resistance are "potential turning points in social situations where the social order gets deconstructed, debated and reformed" (p. 1251). *Kobor*, as a play, successfully highlights the fractured and simultaneously reformed identity of the Bengali protesters through the character of Fakir. Bertram and Celikates (2013) assert that masses need to transform their ideological stance into actions in order to achieve recognition. The student activists, who inspired the *Muktibahini*, the freedom fighters, later during the War of Liberation in 1971, paved the way for acting on their beliefs. The Fakir, the voice of conscience in the play, further says:

> I know the smell of dead bodies. But these bodies do not smell the same. I smell medicines, gas and gunpowder. These bodies will not stay in the grave. Even if you bury them 25 or 30 feet under the ground, they won't remain there. They will break out of their graves and rise up. (Choudhury, 2018, p. 55)

In conflict theory, resolution of conflicts plays a significant role. Fakir is trying to present the strength and force of the voices of the students. He says that he is calling them up from the grave and leaving (Choudhury, 2018). He plays the role of a mediator in this play. According to Hicks (2001), mediation theory assumes that each party sees only part of the picture. In *Kobor*, we find that the Leader and the Inspector see the Language Movement from a different perspective from that of the ghosts. Secondly, mediators ask the parties to "relinquish their perception of the other as the enemy" (Hicks, 2001, p. 39). Thirdly, mediators try to convince the parties to actively listen to each other. In *Kobor*, Fakir's repeated references to the dead rising up from the graves attempt to highlight the undying spirit of the Language Movement. His words make the Leader uncomfortable, specifically, because the Leader is forced to acknowledge the simultaneous presence of an opposing ideology. During mediation of conflicts, there is a lot of tension in various approaches taken by the mediator. Tension is also evident in the

deep consciousness of the parties involved (Hicks, 2001). In the identity-based conflict in *Kobor,* Fakir is neither rebellious nor subservient. He insists he knows the smell of dead bodies and repeatedly points out that these dead bodies are different. He gives subtle hints to build up his final conviction that the dead will rise from their grave and that their voices will be heard. Surrounded by the spirits of the martyred students, Fakir becomes almost prophetic.

The repetition of the imagery of the corpses rising up from the grave creates a powerful impact on the minds of the characters and the readers/audience as well. It illustrates Choudhury's desire to receive recognition of the differences and conflicts between the two opposing forces of the society. The appearance of the ghosts, therefore, can also be attributed to the reassertion of cultural diversity, representing an alternative discourse, an alternative non-conformist ideology ready "to voice otherwise unspeakable truths" (Clery, 1999 in Smajić, 2009, p. 3), truths supposedly denied or suppressed in the realist mode. In the guise of fantasy, the ghosts of *Kobor* appear to remind the Leader and the audience of the suppressed voices and their power as a group. The socio-political conflicts, which arose due to the suppression of the Bangla speaking East Pakistanis, gained recognition through the use of supernatural appearances of the ghosts.

On the other hand, "strong emotional ties" between the living person and the deceased cause the former often to visualize the apparitions of the latter, as it was found in a 1956 study by Hart and his fellow researchers (cited in Stevenson, 1982, p. 351). In the case of *Kobor*, however, if any emotions should be counted to explain why the apparitions of the deceased Bengali students and workers appear to the sight of the Leader and the Inspector, it is injustice, conflicts and a lack of recognition of the identity of the other, the East Pakistanis, by the living agents who caused and humiliated the former's sacrifice for sustaining their group identity. If any strong emotions worked in the Leader's mind, it was surely hatred and complete disapproval of the true cause of the sacrifice of Bengali speaking people for their age-old linguistic identity. The Muslim brotherhood, a strong emotional bond built on religious grounds, which led to the formation of the new nation, Pakistan, following the decolonization from British power, was intentionally violated, thus, leading to conflicts at economic, political, moral and linguistic levels. This is why neither the Leader nor the Inspector ever regrets their actions or empathizes with the deceased. The Leader even wants to bury Fakir alive, only because the latter dares to celebrate Bengali group identity and question the Leader's, in other words, West Pakistani's, attitudes and actions.

Munier Choudhury brings in the dead with horrific visual effects only to "gesture to draw the percipient's attention to, say, the site of a wound on the agent's body" (Stevenson, 1982, p. 353), which is seen but forcefully denied by both the Leader and the Inspector. Since Choudhury was well conversant with Western traditions in fiction, he infused the concept of the Western death into the cultural narrative of Bengali people. American playwright Irwin Shaw, in his play *Bury the Dead* (1936), which has structural as well as thematic resemblance with *Kobor*, also used dead bodies of six soldiers who died in a war but rose up from their grave and refused to be reburied. Evans (1951) notes that the refusal of the dead to be reburied in anti-war plays conveys the "powerful

suggestion that outraged nature will tolerate war [and killing] no longer" (p. 485). More particularly, it suggests that hegemonized power must provoke ideological conflicts and that suppression of voices is impossible.

Fairclough (2003) argues that texts are "social events" which have immediate and long term causal effects – the former includes changes in "our beliefs, our attitudes, values and so forth" (p. 8), while the latter includes people's formation of their identities and development of ideologies. Both effects are evident in *Kobor*. The ideological conflicts of identity and power structures depicted in the play portray a universal phenomenon in the context of any political or colonial environment. The title, the characters, the events and the setting of the play *Kobor* have immediate effect on Bengali speaking audiences well informed of the history of oppression. For a long term impact, the play has continued to document the linguistic, political and economic conflicts between the two wings of Pakistan.

Conclusion

The play *Kobor* by Munier Choudhury was examined in this paper from a theoretical perspective of conflicts and recognition suggested by Marx, Weber and Hegel in the 19th century. *Kobor* appreciates the strength of the unyielding power which emerges as a consequence of being marginalized in all possible terms including economic, political, religious and linguistic.

In the case of post-divided India, the inter-state conflicts in Pakistan were bound to happen because of Pakistani ruling body's consistent denial of the fair share to the Bengali in East Pakistan and a recognition of their identity. While the conflicts gave rise to inter-state tensions, violence and contempt, the resolution contributed to communal solidarity and integration among Bengalis. The linguistic imposition of Urdu shortly after their independence from British imperialism created huge shock and anguish.

The title of the play, *Kobor*, stands out by symbolically setting its mood and tone to emphasize the dark, bleak and grave history of the Language Movement. It was not a movement to merely defy the rulers and keep them under pressure, but a necessity to articulate a national identity, featuring linguistic, political and cultural uniqueness. *Kobor* critiques how the experiences of inequalities made Bengalis united, aware and vocal.

Indeed, all the political movements that happened till the War of Liberation in 1971 in East Pakistan were fuelled and triggered by the inspiration and the conflict resolutions of the 1952 movement for national recognition. The ideological impacts and importance of the play *Kobor* and its playwright have continued to establish Fakir's prophetic utterance "They won't rest in grave. They must return. Their voices will return" (Choudhury, p. 70). The play also suggests that even if a few individuals such as the Guard and the Inspector remain unaffected and voiceless by the conflicts and the deaths, a strong character like Fakir, who questions the unjust inequalities and deaths, is enough to destabilize the establishment.

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