



Transcreating Carceral Subjugation, Ethnic Erasure and the Limits of Human Subjectivity on Screen: An Enquiry into the Prison Narratives of *Schindler's List* and *Orange Is The New Black*

Payel Ghosh, Research Scholar, Department of English,
Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University, West Bengal, India.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9021-9967>

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Abstract:

*Amid different forms of adaptation, film adaptation occupies a significant place in contemporary creative industries. The process of transferring a literary work onto the big screen can be viewed in translational terms and adaptation can be regarded as a creative process like translation. In translation Studies, adaptation is often viewed as a set of translative interventions which gives birth to a text that is not generally accepted as a translation but still represents a source text to some extent. So, adaptation is posited with the techniques of translation which ultimately aims at relevance rather than accuracy. In that sense, adaptation can be viewed as a creative translation where the message of the source text gets filtered through the creative vista of the adapter. As a translational process, adaptation depends on the sociocultural context in which it takes place and stimulates new readings of the source text. Thereby, it reverberates with the notions of rewriting, reinterpretation and recontextualization. Therefore, adaptation operates by Lefevere's idea of refraction where Lefevere points out that the adaptation of a work of literature works to influence how the audience reads the work. Lefevere points out that translation is a rewriting of a source text and it carries a work of literature over from one system into another. This paper attempts to focus on ethnic erasure, female captivity and female carceral subjugation, respectively in the two trans-creative texts- *Schindler's List* and *Orange is the New Black*. Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) is one of the most popular epic drama movies of World War II ever produced. The screenplay of this movie is adapted from the novel *Schindler's Ark* written by Thomas Keneally. *Schindler's List* has an uncommon story, it is a historical movie about historical events. The horror of the ethnic cleansing which is reflected in *Schindler's List* is one of the appealing aspects that is interesting to be studied. In this proposed study, I would also like to talk about the female victims during the period of Holocaust. Next, *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2019), a comedic drama with seven seasons, is one of the most-watched original series on Netflix. Based on Piper Kerman's memoir, *Orange is the New Black: My Years in a Women's Prison*, the show follows the main character Piper Chapman as she serves time in Litchfield Penitentiary, a women's federal prison. OITNB highlights how women in prison experience the foundations of the criminal justice system: policing, arrest, prosecution and sentencing that disproportionately target poor communities and communities of colour. Prison for most of us is an unknown experience and anything we know is mainly through representations in media. This show sheds light on the lives of the female jailbirds and their experiences in prison. So, this paper will try to delineate the lives of the women who are victims of ethnic erasure and also the female inmates who are in prison experiencing the pangs of incarceration.*

Keywords: Carceral Subjugation, Ethnic Erasure, Film Adaptation, Prison Narratives, Female Jail Birds.



Introduction

Adaptation occupies a remarkable position in the contemporary creative industries. While a literary work is transferred onto the big screen, it involves translative interventions. As a creative process, translation and film adaptation bear some similarities. Patrick Cattrysse points out that film adaptation and translation work within the realm of polysystem and both include their involvement in socio-cultural context. (Cattrysse 47-49). Film adaptation also follows the rules of translation and it also has its source text. So, adaptation is also considered as a translation technique and its pivotal concern is to gain relevance rather than the exactness. It involves the creative genius of the translator who reinterprets the source text on different platforms. Moreover, adaptation as a translational process, also depends on the sociocultural context in which it is produced. It offers new readings of the source text and thereby it enhances and enriches the adapted version. Therefore, adaptation clubs together the idea of reinterpretation and recontextualization. Here, we can incorporate Lefevre's idea of 'refraction'. Lefevre defines refraction as "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work" (Lefevre 205). The same logic can be applied to film adaptation as it 'refracts' a literary work onto different platform and involves reinterpretation of the source text. Film adaptation transfers the narrative from the literary system over to the film system. So, film adaptation serves the source text to the audience in a different way with new meanings. This present study deals with the two trans-creative adaptations, one is *Schindler's List* and another is the series *Orange is the New Black*. It tries to explore the horrors of ethnic cleansing and the female captivity and suffering in the film *Schindler's List* and the exploitation and carceral subjugation of the female inmates in *OITNB*.

Ethnic Erasure and Female Captivity in *Schindler's List*:

Memories of the Holocaust continue to be profoundly disturbing and disruptive. Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* is undoubtedly the most successful film about the Holocaust. Spielberg's directional techniques give the impression of telling a true, authentic story. The film is shot almost in black-and-white (except for the beginning, ending and some selective scenes) and this monochromatic thing makes it a documentary-like film and gives it a historical quality. Spielberg was keenly aware of this fact and he said to his cast that he was not making a film, he was making a document. Here, he amalgamates history and memory, imaginary and the real and this makes *Schindler's List* a representative of the Holocaust myth and emotionally effective at the same time.

The American historical drama film, *Schindler's List* is based on the life of a German business tycoon and a member of the Nazi party, Oskar Schindler, who saved more than 1100 Jews during the Holocaust by employing them in his factory. The entire film is set in an eerie black-and-white setting with a handful of colour scenes. The black-and-white setting sets the depressing mood of the film. The dead body of the little girl in the red coat causes Schindler to realize the extent of the atrocity inflicted on the Jews. The red coat is symbolic of the blood that was shed during the Holocaust. The little girl in the red coat conveys how the innocent people were carefully slaughtered.

Spielberg's *Schindler's List* discloses a narrative thread in which man is at the centre of the story that results in the reduction of women into passive and weaker sex. The present paper tries to show how Spielberg memorializes the Holocaust and how his representations visualize the captivity and suffering of women in general. War and political conflict destroy lives, families, economy but throughout history, women have become the targets in wartime and are exposed to violence, especially sexual violence in bondage or coercive detention. The



film portrays the women who have been transformed into imprisoned objects of the Nazi government. So, during its course of memorialization of the Holocaust, the film eroticizes Nazi atrocities and violence against women. The film with its privileged male gaze upon the eroticized and brutalized female body falls into the category of the Nazisploitation genre. Most of the portrayals of women in Holocaust films primarily evoke marginalization. This erotic aesthetic reflects the intertwined nature of Nazism and patriarchy. In most cases, women are portrayed as passive, tragic victims defined by their relation to men as wives, lovers, and mothers. Women in Holocaust films behave primarily in a heightened emotional manner and/or are ignorant towards the political complexity. Spielberg's *Schindler's List* reveals a narrative thread in which the man's perspective functions at the core of the story in a way that results in a reduction of the portrayed women to passive, weaker and often more emotional one-dimensional characters. Here, there is no portrayal of autonomous female sexuality and women instead are sexualized through men's glances and actions. The audience, here, gets glimpses of the exploitation of women through a plethora of female characters, like the women in the camp, the maid Helen Hirsch, the engineer Diana Reiter, Amon Goeth's mistress and women in the gas chamber.

This process of objectification is illustrated in a sequence, where the commandant of the Plaszow Labor Camp, Amon Goeth aims his rifle at his naked mistress while she lies on his bed. This scene identifies masculinity with killing. The rifle here represents the penis. Goeth does not shoot her but rather moves to the bathroom and urinates. This scene equalizes the act of shooting, fornication, and urination. It asserts an equivalence among Jews, his mistress, and the toilet. The camera here represents both the power of the gun and of the phallus as a symbol of the colonization of body and mind.

Women become the playthings in Amon's hand. He kills them as his fulfilment. From his balcony, he shoots the women though they have not done anything wrong. *Schindler* once in the film says that Amon kills the women who mean nothing to him. He orders to shoot the engineer when she detects faults in the blueprint of the construction and argues over it. Amon cannot undergo the thing that a woman can suggest to the man what to do. By killing her, he satisfies his male ego. But later we see that he orders the workers to follow the things as suggested by the female engineer. In a sequence, we visualize the arrival of the list makers and doctors at Plaszow. The Jewish men and women are ushered out of their beds and stripped of their clothes. The camera provides a close-up of someone placing a record on a machine and setting a speaker next to it. Music blasts from the speaker while the Jews are told to run in circles in front of the officials. Those who are deemed unhealthy and not fit to work are pulled aside to be sent to Auschwitz. The women are running naked and there is a visible sign of terror and suspense in their look. But the officers are laughing at this eroticization of the female body. This may provoke sympathy in the audience but at the same time, the camera produces voyeuristic pleasure by focusing on the naked sexual organs of the female.

There is another sequence, in which female characters are led into a shower room with the foreknowledge that they are to be gassed. The audience has the experience of peering through a peephole at a group of naked women. The women shriek and huddle together. But instead of gas, the water comes out of the pipe. This can be used as a pornographic scene both for its depiction of terrified, naked Jewish women and for the use of the gas chamber to provoke the viewer's sense of suspense. It is another occasion where the camera eroticizes the Jewish female body. The audience is here distanced and the peephole enables the audience's scopophilic pleasure at the spectacle of human suffering. The



peephole serves to separate the audience from the victimized women and thus from direct participation in their eroticized humiliation. This reminds us of Mulvey's notion of women's exhibitionist role, as an object to be looked at and displayed. Mulvey uses the term 'male gaze' to refer to the way in films women are sexually objectified by the controlling power of male looks. Her essay tries to dismantle the traditional patriarchal codes embedded in Hollywood cinema of the 1970s which reduce women to passive objects of desire. Hollywood cinema manipulates the audience's gaze and satisfies their repressed desire by depicting women as objects of sexual fantasy. She also argues that masculinity is used as the narrative perspective in classical Hollywood cinema and it is the reflection of the unequal power relation between men and women- "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact..." (Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema 6).

The film offers a spectacle where Goeth beats his maid, Helen. To explain this torture of Helen by Amon, we can apply here the voyeuristic and fetishistic mechanism of Mulvey. While voyeurism serves as a reminder that a woman lacks a phallus, 'fetishistic scopophilia' renounces the castration anxiety. Here, Mulvey states, "fetishism...is born out of a refusal to see, a refusal to know, and a refusal to accept the difference that the female body symbolizes" (Mulvey, Pandora: Topographies of the Mask and Curiosity52). The attraction/repulsion dichotomy appears in this film also. We witness Amon Goeth's struggle with his attraction to the product of his abjection: his Jewish housemaid Helen. The audience witnesses the erotic depiction of violence against women in a scene where Goeth punishes Helen for his attraction to her. His violent outburst is the result of the tension he feels between his sexual desire for Helen and his knowledge of Rassenschande, the Nazi's racial defilement laws. These prohibited sexual relations between Germans and Jews to avoid contamination of the Aryan bloodline. The sequence begins with Helen emerging from the bath. She is wearing a nightdress and her erect nipples can be seen through the thin fabric. Helen's near-naked body is the object of both Goeth and the camera. Amon circles her and she trembles with fear. He even doubts whether Helen is a human or not and he also comments that she is not a person in the strictest sense of the word. He asks her many questions but she remains silent. He touches her breast. Disgusted by his response to the erotic draw of this sub-human, he brutally assaults her. The women in the film exist as a locus of male struggle and desire. The film reproduces the stereotypical image of the Jewish woman as an alluring dark beauty. Within Nazi propaganda, the Jews are portrayed as a temptress who tricked Aryan men into committing the crime of Rassenschande. This not only presents her as a dangerous woman but also suggests her sexual agency. Thus, this seduction-turned-torture scene destabilizes Goeth's hypermasculinized depiction of masculinity.

Orange is the New Black and Female Carceral Subjugation:

The acclaimed Netflix original series, *Orange is the New Black* is adapted from Piper Kerman's 2010 memoir *Orange is the New Black: My Years in a Women's Prison*. This show received 13 Emmy nominations in 2014 and won the award for "Outstanding Casting for a Comedy Series". The show got much accolades for its varied range of portrayals like, racial segregation, transphobia, sexual diversity, prison conditions and many more. *OITNB* enables the viewers to peep into the lives of the female prisoners of Litchfield Penitentiary. Litchfield functions as a microcosm of the PIC (prison industrial complex) and it highlights how women



in prison experience the criminal justice system. Prison for most of us is an unknown experience and anything we know is mostly through representations in various media. The hidden environment of prison is made visible to us mainly through prison narratives and prison visuals. So, the prison films and narratives contribute to shaping the audience's attitude about prison and prisoners. The present study attempts to delineate the female jailbirds and their suffering and carceral subjugation in the *OITNB*.

The show opens with a statement by the protagonist Piper Chapman- “I am here because I am no different from anybody else I here. I made bad choices. I committed a crime and being in here is no one’s fault but my own” (“WAC Pac” 00:6:16- 00:7:01). In an interview with NPR’s *Fresh Air*, Kohan accepts that she uses Piper as her ‘Trojan horse’ and states- “You’re not going to go into a network and sell a show on reality fascinating tales of black women and Latino women and old women and criminals. But if you take this white girl, this sort of fish out of water, and you follow her in, you can then expand your world and tell all those other stories. But it’s hard sell to just go in and try to sell those stories initially’ (Gross, 2013). Kohan presents Piper as a ‘nice, white lady’ who is sent to prison for her involvement in drug smuggling a decade before her imprisonment. Her past deed is recognized as a ‘bad choice’, as a result of her involvement with people different from her, namely her girlfriend, Alex Vause. Her status as a good girl tries to visualise her struggle in her attempt to fit herself in the new hostile environment. Though the season opens with the story of Piper, gradually it peeps into the lives of other female inmates. With the progression of the narrative, the audience becomes familiar with the female inmates in Litchfield and Piper’s story gradually becomes the secondary one. *OITNB* explores prison as a space of psychodrama. The prisoners are now separated from society and prison becomes the new microcosm. Now, they try their best to be accustomed to the ways of prison life. During this process of adjustment, the prisoners explore and re-configure themselves in many ways. It is often seen that some behaviours may not be visible in society but they may appear in prison life and it may also become vice-versa. Through this journey, they get to know about their unknown hidden self.

The director uses the flashback technique to uncover the prisoners’ lives before imprisonment. The flashbacks also reveal the people outside of Litchfield who are struggling hard to maintain their connection with the imprisoned women inside. Initially, many of the female characters may appear disgusting but their backstories make them convenient. By adding the backstories, the flashbacks represent an inmate in total and elicit empathy for the woman in Litchfield. Backstories offer insight into the lives of the characters and the spectators can connect themselves with the characters. Through the flashbacks, we come across the past life of Suzanne and the racialized power dynamics in her family. Her white family treats her only as an annoyance upon the arrival of their long-wanted biological child. Also, in prison, she is very helpless and lonely because except for Taystee everyone considers Suzanne insane and this evokes sympathy for Suzanne from the part of the audience. Initially, Big Boo appears very annoying but the flashbacks of her troubled childhood make her a convincing one. The rape scene of Pensatucky by the prison guard digs back into her experience of poverty and her abuse in the hands of boys, men and her mother and thus reveals the pains of imprisonment. Thus, the flashbacks make the female inmates more humane and nuanced.

Litchfield prison categorizes women as White, Black, Hispanic, Golden Girls and others. Asians Muslims and Latins are portrayed as poor, criminals and maids trying to smuggle into the USA. Racial segregation is very much visible from the very beginning of



the series. When Piper is introduced in her cellblock, fellow inmate Lorna offers her a toothbrush and Lorna says that they look for their people, the white people. Then Gina introduces Piper in the cafeteria as a nice white lady. When Red, the prison cook offers the white women cups of yoghurt, Piper asks what she has to give her for yoghurt and Red says that Piper is one of them and it is a gift from Red. In the visitation room, Piper says to her mother that she has made bad choices and is suffering for that but Piper's mother protests this and says- "sweetheart, you're nothing like any of these women... Darling, you're a debutante" ("WAC pack" 00:8:03- 00:11:00). In season four, Piper assembles a group of people to discuss making Litchfield a safe place for the inmates but it is seen that those who are attending the meeting are white people. This group later subverts the ideology of the group and turns into a white supremacist group and the group starts chanting "white lives matter". The way the White women represent themselves as white is defined by Frye as "whiteness" and she states- "I do not think whiteness is just middle-class-ness misnamed. I think of whiteness as a way of being which extends across ethnic, cultural, and class categories and occurs in ethnic, cultural, and class varieties- varieties which may tend to blend toward a norm set by the elite groups within a race" (Frye 159). Racial segregation increases in Litchfield with the increase of prison inmates. When the affluent TV personality Judy King enters the prison, she is provided with special food, books, separate room and the Yoga Jones is selected as her roommate as Jones is a white one. During a crossfire, the black girl, Poussey gets killed by a correctional officer but her death goes unnoticed. So, Litchfield represents whiteness as a privileged status.

The series also includes the trans rights movement through the character of Sophia Burset (played by activist Laverne Cox). Sophia faces demarcation and ill-treatment as she is a trans. Some of the inmates laugh at her over the fact in which cell Sophia will be placed as she is neither a man nor a woman. Her hormonal drugs are stopped and she is put to SHU for no reason. Sophia is double marginalized as she is a trans-black inmate. Laverne Cox calls that this show can be regarded as a platform for trans rights activism. The show visualizes the lives of the female inmates and their suffering, and oppression in the hands of the prison authority. The female prisoners' experience in prison becomes evident in the statement of Tasha Jefferson- "We are stuck in hell trying to survive. Years and years of abuse at the hands of guards and the prison system that looks the other way...I'm seeing that the real sad part is I'm not special. I'm one of millions of people just like me. Millions" ("Gordons" 26:33- 28:54). The female inmate's body becomes the site where the prison authority exercises its power. The body that is caught up behind bars is subject to power relations. The knowledge of the body creates a mastery over it. Power and knowledge are related. The techniques applied to the prisoners and our attitude to them show how power operates in society. The knowledge possessed by prison authority creates a certain 'technology of power'. Foucault points out that "power produces knowledge... power and knowledge directly imply one another, there is no power relations without the corrective constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relation" (Foucault, 27). The art of punishment depends on the fact that punishment must decrease the desire for crime. The body is a target of power, the docile body is subjected and transformed. The prison authority tries to make the inmates disciplined and in this process, the inmates undergo a varied range of experiences.

Conclusion

To sum up, it can be proposed that film adaptation contains in itself some of the features of translation and adaptation can be viewed as creative translation as it filters the



message of the source text and aims at relevance rather than accuracy. Therefore, it incorporates the notions of reinterpretation, rewriting and recontextualization. It suffices with the new readings of the source text and thereby, it enriches the source text. This paper incorporates two film adaptations intending to portray ethnic erasure, female captivity, exploitation, marginalization and carceral subjugation.

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