ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Humanitarian Quandary: Mourning, Violence and Precarity in Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood*

Deepika R Nair
Department of English,
Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham,
Amritapuri,
India.
Sreya R Nair
Department of English,
Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham,
Amritapuri,
India.
&
Dr. Indu B
Department of English,
Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham,
Amritapuri,
India.
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12671269

Article History: Submitted-30/05/2024, Revised-20/06/2024, Accepted-23/06/2024, Published-30/06/2024.

Abstract:

This article investigates a humanitarian quandary portrayed in Easterine Kire's historical novel, *Bitter Wormwood*. It aims to analyse the influence of suppressed mourning on the motivations and behaviours of the characters depicted in the novel and how it contributes to the perpetuation of violence, exploring the impact of silenced grief and the intergenerational transmission of precariousness. The paper examines the longstanding issue between India and the state of Nagaland, which has not been resolved even decades after the nation's independence.The article seeks to illuminate the contested ethical relationship between the mainland and the periphery by drawing on Judith Butler's view of precarious lives. By exploring the connection between suppressed mourning and violence, we gain a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of the perpetual cycle of precarity and the potential for healing.

Keywords: Indo-Naga conflict, Precarity, Precariousness, Relationality, Mourning, Violence, Vulnerability.

Throughout the past, India has been experiencing internal turmoil concerning the autonomy of marginalised populations who are often excluded from national affairs except during elections or instances of political unrest in their regions. Nagaland is a notable example, as the state has seen multiple movements, advocating for separation from the Republic of India. The Nagas, an indigenous community in North East India, first came under foreign rule when the British colonised their territory in the 19th century. Following India's independence from British colonial rule, Nagaland came under Indian governance and has grappled with issues concerning self-determination and sovereignty through various separatist movements and calls for freedom from the Indian government (Kikhi, 2009). Easterine Kire, a well-known writer from Nagaland, brings a unique perspective to her historical fiction. Her literature delves into the extensive cultural legacy, history, and present-day concerns of the Naga community, showcasing her profound understanding and personal connection to the subject matter. Kire's decision to craft historical fiction demonstrates her dedication and commitment to chronicle the rich and complex history of Naga culture. Kire provides readers with a grasp of the complexities of Naga society and the effects of colonialism, conflict, and societal upheaval on the region by skillfully incorporating historical events and figures into her novels. The novel *Bitter Wormwood* by Easterine Kire begins with Mose, witnessing a violent outbreak in Nagaland in 2007, delving into Mose's life story through a flashback. Born in a paradisiacal village, Mose encounters the arrival of the Indian army and the devastating conflict that shatters his world. He experiences the loss of loved ones and becomes embroiled in the Naga struggle for independence, facing a recurring cycle of violence. The novel delves into Mose's desire to relive past times while reflecting on the prolonged conflict that affects humanity and people's yearning for freedom from oppression. The analysis of repressed sorrow in Easterine Kire's Bitter Wormwood will be examined using the theoretical framework presented in Judith Butler's Precarious Life: Powers of Mourning and Violence. The work reflects Butler's response to the post-9/11 attack and the ongoing policies of sustained warfare, advocating for a deeper understanding of how mourning and violence can potentially foster unity and the pursuit of global justice. The theoretical framework employed in this study centres on chapters two and five. The framework centres around Butler's notions of the interconnectedness of vulnerability, loss,

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

and violence, representing how individual characters' experiences with suppressed mourning in "Bitter Wormwood" shape their motivations and actions, contributing to the cycle of precarity within the narrative. Additionally, Easterine Kire’s *Bitter Wormwood* will be analysed to show how silenced grief and exposure to vulnerability and loss seek to mitigate via violence, ensuring a perpetual cycle of precarity. The methodology adopted involves a qualitative analysis of *Precarious Life: Powers of Mourning and Violence* by Judith Butler with Easterine Kire’s *Bitter Wormwood*. A detailed analysis of *Bitter Wormwood* is carried out to explore themes of suppressed mourning, violence, and precarity. Following this, essential ideas from Butler's work are utilised to interpret and place Kire's story within a broader context. A comparative approach explores how Kire's depiction resonates with or differs from Butler's concepts concerning repressed mourning, violence, and the endless cycle of precarity.

Human inability to openly grieve due to societal pressures or persistent conflict results in an elevated state of vulnerability. Butler argues that unprocessed grief festers into anger and despair, perpetuating a cycle of precarity, making individuals trapped in it more susceptible to violence. By drawing connections between suppressed mourning and human behaviour, the claim is made that acknowledging and processing grief is a crucial step towards breaking free from this cycle. Only by confronting the scars of loss can individuals and communities chart a path toward peace and healing.

In 1950, Mose witnessed the Indian Army trucks pull into their hometown. He saw India's massive army violently suppressing the non-violent protests led by the Naga National Council – “for the first time in Mose's life, he felt fearful of the future" (Kire 55). Throughout his life, he has witnessed numerous assaults of violence and fatalities in his village. The village assembly's effort to collect the thumbprints of every supporter of a free Nagaland and deliver the plebiscite to the prime minister worsened the already dire situation in the region – “Curfew became the order of the day" (Kire 56). The 1952 election in Nagaland faced resistance from the Nagas, and a second election included a significant military presence and coercion of villagers to deposit their votes at gunpoint.

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

His initial response to the loss of his grandmother was grief and disbelief, followed by blind rage. Unable to act for justice, he slips into physical responses like numbness or aggression as a defence against overwhelming pain. Fueled by a desire for revenge, Mose avoided dealing with his sorrow entirely. This is where the concept of "banish melancholy" (Butler 29) comes into play. Butler criticises the idea of denying sadness or mourning and argues that attempting to eliminate melancholy does not effectively address one's grief but rather strengthens it. Radio broadcasts and media coverage commonly provide a space for communal mourning, recognise shared losses, and promote community solidarity. The absence of attention to the suffering of the Naga people suggests a disregard for their experiences and anguish. This silence deprives Mose and his peers of recognition and impedes their capacity to cope with emotions without an avenue to express their grief.

Vilau and Khrienuo's experiences portray how society's actions can impact the individual psyche. Traits like sovereignty, resilience, courage, violence, and revenge characterised Mose's society and shaped the expectations placed on its members. Living amidst constant conflict and sorrow, Khrienuo carries the burden of unexpressed grief. Societal norms expect older women to remain emotionally controlled, leading her to conceal her profound sorrow at losing her only son while portraying unwavering strength. Her advice to Vilau, her grieving daughter-in-law, emphasises resilience: "If life is hard to you, you simply harden yourself so its griefs are easier to bear. That is the only way to meet it" (Kire 22). Family is of utmost importance to Khrienuo. She suppresses her grief to maintain normalcy and strength for Mose. When Vilau falls apart after her husband's death, Khrienuo takes on the responsibility of caring for Mose. Khrienuo embodies consistent strength and bravery within a cultural context that emphasises stoicism and resilience in the face of adversity, leading individuals to internalise their pain instead of openly expressing it, asserting the lack of complete autonomy concerning one's body, which is a socially constructed entity, shaped within the framework of societal impact and connections. Khrienuo lays the groundwork for Mose's yearning for freedom and willingness to fight by asserting that Nagas are distinct from India and should not be forced to assimilate.

Vilau mourns her husband for an extended period, receiving support from Khrienuo and the community. However, Khrienuo's tragic demise leaves Vilau without a pillar of support. The

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

fear and pressure to be resilient due to surrounding conflict hinder her ability to express her emotions. Societal expectations exacerbate her emotional turmoil, potentially manifesting physical decline and premature ageing. Mose's decision to join the resistance deepens her sense of isolation and vulnerability, highlighting the detrimental effects of unresolved grief on mental as well as physical well-being.

Experiences of grief and loss unveil the primal need for dependency and connectivity with others. This primal need is influenced when an individual experiences a setback, especially if it is a loss of a relationship that makes them what they are and provides them with a sense of belonging. This confusion makes them undergo an emotional and mental metamorphosis, which takes the form of a hasty decision, resorting to extreme measures to ease their suffering and pain brought on by the loss.

Mose struggles with internalising his suffering, which leads to feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame. He questions if he can keep his mother and others safe and feels pressured by societal expectations. Butler contends that identity is not fixed but rather subject to change. Challenging circumstances disrupt our sense of self, despite our attempts to preserve it. Enduring numerous losses and demands simultaneously, Mose experiences a shift in his perception of self that transitions his grief into rage, strengthening his resolve to join the Underground. According to Butler, individual autonomy is impossible; the body is not solely a private entity; it has a public dimension. It is subject to the scrutiny of others, open to touch, violence, and societal influence.

Moses's clan is being subjected to similar dispossession. The Indian army destroyed several Ao and Sema tribes, raped women, and slaughtered gaonburas and innocent individuals. Despite the Naga Council and Freedom movement's efforts for peaceful dissolution from India, their attempts yielded no results. Instead, their efforts resulted in unintended consequences whose victims were innocent Nagas. The extremity of their suppressed narratives and silenced grief not only added to their dehumanised existence but, furthermore, played a significant role in orchestrating the violence. The insurgent Naga Army – Underground was formed to put resistance against the Indian Army. However, the latter resorted to killing Naga soldiers and their relatives to instil fear and prevent others from joining the Undergrounds. With the emergence of the

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

Undergrounds, nationalism and military brotherhood shored up, exposing the human effects of violence.

Educated and uneducated young men in their twenties secretly joined the Underground because of the shootings and injustice. The abuse against the Nagas sparked widespread public outrage as they watched the slain bodies of their clan members being mocked and displayed in public. They were gripped by fear and a sense of helplessness. The absence of news coverage of the unconscionable events in Nagaland contributed to the state's isolation from mainland India, to which it was forcibly attached. This detachment from reality contributed to the perpetuation of violence.

Nagaland is often depicted as the land of warriors. However, this portrayal is a misrepresentation influenced by colonial perceptions of 'feuding communities', where men are mistakenly characterized by their purported love for war. Kire challenges the colonial perception in *Bitter Wormwood* and offers the view of pre-colonial Naga folklore and narratives. She represents the Nagas' identity as rooted in their warrior culture, rejecting the myth of feuding communities. Nevertheless, the Indo-Naga conflict began with peaceful resistance to Indian occupation before escalating to a full-scale violent war. The Naga Nation Council (NNC) was founded in 1946 to establish Independence for Nagaland. The failure of peace talks and heightened military oppression consequently led to the emergence of the Naga Army – Underground – launching an armed resistance against the Indian Army, which lasted for decades, resulting in numerous deaths and the displacement of thousands.

Sircar's nuanced study discloses the Nagas' use of military and indigenous narratives, influenced by their experience with the Japanese invasion during World War II along with the British. They use this military knowledge to craft the basis for forming their political identity in opposition to the Indian state and they make use of the secessionist movement to claim independence. Their military identity juxtaposes their indigenous identity, which aligns with the Herderian notion of individuals being united by a common culture. This intertwining of military and indigenous strategies of the Nagas aided them in asserting their political identity and claim for independence from India.

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

Building on Sircar's point, Mose and Neituo share a strong bond shaped by their experiences as Nagas. Neituo's decision to join the Underground was motivated by friendship and witnessing the suffering inflicted on his people by the Army, reflecting his loyalty to Mose and commitment to their community's fight for justice and freedom. Witnessing constant suffering in Nagaland left Neituo grappling with deep grief and anger, while Mose's tragedy may have resonated with Neituo's repressed feelings, offering an outlet for his emotions.

The Indian Army's aggression was dismissed due to the dehumanised status of the Nagas, propelling the sanctioning of their violent response and their assertion for independence. Inevitably, the derealisation of the Nagas played a pivotal role in reinforcing violence executed by the Indian army. At the same time, Nagas' resorting to violence is a response to an act of repulsion and recognition. The absence of gratification of primal needs for grief and loss caused a reaction wherein the bereaved and marginalised opted for violence as a defence mechanic reaction.

The lack of justice, double standards by the state, the failure of resistance to peace, and the aggression faced by the Nagas from the Army resulted in a cycle of violence. Violence manifested as a recourse to last resort in their attempts to be heard and seen. The culmination of their military and indigenous narratives in the novel set off a period of unrest that marked the beginning of a decades-long cycle of precarity, trapping the Nagas in a perpetual cycle of fear, mourning and violence.

Facilitating as a catalyst, suppressed mourning contributes to perpetuating this cycle by denying the 'unreal' Nagas any opportunity to process and mourn their grief fully. This suppression leads to the depoliticising of their experiences of grief and the recognition of relational bonds and ethical responsibilities. The denial results in the dehumanisation of specific lives and the persistence of silenced grief, reinforcing vulnerability and the onset of the precarious cycle of unacknowledged losses within the socio-political milieu.

The recollection of a young boy's vow to avenge the murder of his brother, as his cultural obligation, etched in Mose's memory; the village men mobilising to search for the missing men and women; the untimely demise of Mose's grandmother, Khirenuo, instigated Mose to resort to

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

violence. The distressed condition of the vulnerable and the marginalised communities compels them to engage in violence. Their suppressed grieving further reinforces their community's perpetuation of an endless cycle of precarity. These events highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of conflict, where cultural, social, and historical factors intertwine, leading to cycles of violence and insecurity, emphasising Levinas' idea that "the humanity of man – rupture of being" (Butler 132) reveals that violence is a core human vulnerability that leaves them powerless and at the whim of others' desires. This state of vulnerability comprises socio-political environments wherein violence is normalised and options for self-defence are limited.

Butler's emphasis on 'mourning' in Precarious Lives offers a nuanced understanding towards mourning the lost lives because of violence. She considered it mandatory to realise the pain and sensitivity of oneself and others to achieve healing. Analysing Mose as the Other, through her interpretation of Levinas' concept of 'face', the boy responded to the claims of his clan's suffering, specifically towards the unjust death of his grandmother. As the Other, Mose cannot reject the call of the 'face' of these claims, which asks him to stop the chaos and disorientation of their community. The face represents a complete state of "precariousness and defencelessness" (Butler 134). Such a state of 'face' represented by the dire state of his nation and the familial loss urgers the Mose, the Other, with a temptation to kill or to call peace. Nonetheless, he cannot let the 'face' continue to suffer, which would make him an accomplice in their suffering.

Men as young and younger than Mose stand on the precipice, choosing between ethical responsibility and the primal need to resolve the unrest through violence. Violence becomes a more straightforward answer to their troubles as the sheer vulnerability of the 'face' of the Other triggers a murderous temptation. In the initial months after his grandmother's death, Mose struggles with the ambiguity of his ethics and moral authority; unable to mourn owing to the disoriented circumstances, surrounded by murder, torture, and rape, he decides to join the insurgent army, to end the unrest and establish peace, an ethical struggle between self-preservation and awareness of their vulnerability.

Life in Underground is cognitively demanding and psychologically taxing time for Mose. Being in hiding and lacking the upper hand in the Indo-Naga conflict, the normalcy of their lives

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

was lost. Mose realised the risk he and his family took after joining the Underground. If caught, the Indian Army would not just torture him, but they would also kill his family. The members of the Underground were to lose all connection during this time; throughout his time in the Underground, he only got to speak with his mother once. Much of his time was consumed by rigorous and hardcore training, and they felt helpless when they heard reports of the death count and instances of rape.". Their missions were to raid the police posts and Indian Army patrol camps to collect ammunition. Their strategy was always to be on the defensive, as attacking would mean their enemy torturing the villagers. Despite their disadvantage, their bond towards their ancestral land and their determination kept them going.

While making claims upon the Other to save them, 'face' gives them a "divine prohibition against killing" (Butler 135). Butler's theorisation of the concept of face, asserts that humans' first instinct is to kill under the precinct of danger because "I must defend myself to preserve my life" (Butler 136). This contradicts Levinas, who strictly rejects murder in the name of self-preservation. Nonetheless, she claims this instinct to be a defence mechanism born out of ethical anxiety:

> "Frightened for his own life, but anxious he might have to kill". There is fear for one's own survival, and there is anxiety about hurting the Other, and these two impulses are at war with each other, like siblings fighting. But they are at war with each other on order *not* to be at war (136-138).

All these characteristics are exhibited by Mose and many of those who are part of the Underground. The ambiguity they experience is not only individualistic but rather collective. Mose wars against his enemies and becomes a witness to eliminating spies. He and Nietou are utterly overwhelmed and find it challenging to comprehend and process what they are experiencing. These experiences make them both rethink their choices of joining the Underground. They joined the Underground to put rest to the unrest. However, the violence they witness and the need to terminate spies spark ambiguity in their minds. They must let go of their self-preservation instincts and vulnerabilities as the Other to respond to the call of the face. However, their experiences cause them to reevaluate their decisions thus far. Both realise, "It's a vicious cycle

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

that keeps repeating itself. The cycle of abuse. Those who are abused repeat their abuse on others" (Kire 173).

Acquiring agency, identity, and perspective is crucial for non-violent reactions; this draws parallels between individual psyche and community politics. Neilhounuo's decision to join the Underground is her discretion. Her decision to stay with the resistance, leaving her ailing father behind, highlights the conflict between personal needs and collective struggle. Her commitment to the cause showcases her strength and priority towards the liberation of her people. Personal experiences influence various interpretations of vulnerability. "When a vulnerability is recognised, that recognition has the power to change the meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself" (Butler 43). When Mose joins the underground, he prioritises retribution and his people over his family due to his perception of vulnerability. After learning about his sick mother and starting a family of his own, he becomes unwilling to risk harm coming towards them at any cost. Ultimately, he faces threats from his own people, representing another form of vulnerability altogether.

Mose has familial ties with Vilau and Khrienuo, while Neitou shares a public space with them. They both connect with Neilhounuo due to their shared experiences in the Underground. Despite personal experiences of loss, all Nagas are bound by a shared suffering influenced by their cultural and regional background. Butler's concept of relationality attributes to the interconnectedness of all Naga lives: "If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the "we" is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue against; or, rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation" (22-23).

Being relational means being fundamentally open to others and exposed to their influence and impact. This leads to precariousness in individuals, an inherent vulnerability exacerbated by specific social and political arrangements that result in a lack of social safety net, leaving individuals and collective with limited access to resources and support systems. The correlation between precariousness and suppressed mourning originates from the experiences of loss and its repercussions on the individual and the collective.

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

Neibou witnessed the brutality of the Indian military and experienced the devastating effects of factionalism within the Naga community. Despite numerous challenges, he managed to complete his education. He moved to Delhi for higher studies, where he encountered racism from fellow students and stood up against insults towards Northeast women, resulting in a physical altercation. Neibou's empathy for suffering Northeasterners in mainland India stems from relationality, highlighting the double burden of facing violence within his community and racism outside of it. Neibou lives in continual fear of discrimination, leading to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and hopelessness. The absence of legal recourse and negative media representation exacerbates his sense of vulnerability and isolation. Neibou represents the burden of intergenerational trauma through these experiences.

Butler posits that socio-political and economic structures deem some losses more mournable than others Certain lives receive high protection while others do not. Butler emphasises how racial differences intersect with culturally constructed notions of "normal" or "acceptable" human identities. Butler notes a lack of mourning for the losses experienced by the marginalised - the Nagas due to cultural differences from the mainland, and Kire references large-scale rape against Northeast women in Delhi during Neibou's time there: "Today it is a rape; another day it is a stabbing; how are we expected to believe that we are Indians when all this racism goes on? We are last served in a restaurant and cheated by taxis, autos, and rickshaw pullers. Why do they treat us differently from other Indians?" (Kire 208).

Although the circumstances of Mose and Niebou cannot be compared, the matter of contemplation cannot be ignored. Mose's circumstances prevent him from expressing his grief upon the death of his grandmother, and in the moment of rage and sorrow, he decides to join the Underground. The unaddressed pain and frustration manifested as violence because of his de-realised existence. Neibou was given the space to address his grief and mourn his loss, which allowed him to make ethically and morally responsible decisions. His conversation with Himat, an ex-serviceman who was posted in Nagaland in 1961, conveyed that soldiers in the Naga war zone were as young as Neibou himself. They had to war against their people, the Nagas, who were, after all, Indians. The death of fellow soldiers drove them to madness, which is probably why they lost their humanity and committed military atrocities.

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

Kire, providing a dual perspective on the Indo-Naga conflict, confirms that violence played both the role of perpetrator and victim. In the times of the conflict, the death rate of both the Indian soldiers and the Naga insurgents were similar. The distrust and the affliction of violence caused both sides to lose their humanity and blinded them to the horrors they were committing. Unfortunately, both of them were warring against each other for the exact cause – peace. However, aggression blinds everyone and everything. The lack of distrust led to the regression of discourse for the Nagas. Their failure to recognise vulnerability continued the war for decades. Even after the Peace Mission was signed, vulnerability never left Nagaland. It was passed down to the subsequent generation in a manner akin to the bequeathal of an inheritance.

Butler argues that successful mourning leads to profound and unpredictable changes in an individual. The "transformative effect of loss" described by Butler "cannot be charted or planned" (Butler 21). Mose's response to loss gradually leads him from violence to rationality. At the same time, Neibou undergoes a swift transformation from grief and desire for revenge to choosing reason over violence when realising that repaying violence with violence is futile and would only lead to more loss and bloodshed. The unpredictable emotional "waves" prompt these spontaneous decisions. Neibou chooses peace over violence, becoming a symbol of strength and hope, showing a way to break the cycle of violence and build a better future for his community. He believes that the Nagas should no longer allow themselves to be defined and restricted by this conflict, as it only complicates their lives unnecessarily. After Mose's death, tensions ran high within the clan as members began planning revenge; however, Neibou sought intervention from the village council. Although initially inclined towards seeking revenge, his grandfather taught him that engaging in war is about self-protection rather than imposing one's will on others.

Unexpressed sadness can worsen vulnerability under challenging circumstances, significantly when mourning is suppressed due to experiences of violence or societal expectations. This suppression hinders individuals' ability to communicate their grief openly and leads to repressed emotions like rage and hopelessness. Dealing with personal loss within a climate of fear forces people to make tough choices. Recognising the impact of unacknowledged grief on motivations and behaviours is crucial for disrupting this cycle and fostering security and stability. Butler's concept of vulnerability becomes essential here - acknowledging vulnerability in the face

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

of loss opens up to healing and connection, breaking free from the cycle of violence toward a more secure future.

Mose chooses peace, but peace does not choose him. He continues to live a precarious life and is tragically shot by one of the faction members. Despite his choices, he lived a life unable to escape from the cycle of precarity. The Nagas have lived in precarious conditions for many years. Unintentionally, they pass down the instability from generation to generation: Neibou's experiences in Delhi speak volumes about the lack of awareness regarding the Indo-Naga conflict. The death of Mose leaves a heavy impact on his ethical responsibility to avenge his grandfather's death or to forget and forgive. Ultimately, Neibou chooses peace, believing that they have let the conflict define them: "we have been colonised by it and its demands on us" (Kire 236).

Niebou recognises his vulnerability, which gives him the confidence to talk about the reality of the Indo-Naga conflict and the current circumstances of his hometown, Kohima. By revealing his vulnerability, he enables his friends and family to empathise with him and recognise his limitations. He comes to terms with the fact that he cannot take the law into his own hands to avenge his grandfather's murder. On the other hand, unrecognised vulnerability has the exact opposite effect. The factions in Nagaland provide a perfect example of such circumstances. The violence adopted by the factions not only broke the unity among the Naga tribes but also created a drift between India and Nagaland. Butler criticises the United States' approach to the War on Terror in Precarious Lives. According to her, the violence feared by the US is the very violence it generates through its declaration of war. It characterises its response to terrorism as a "paranoid victim" (Butler 150) mentality. By doing so, the US perpetuates a cycle of violence and lack of security. In the context of *Bitter Wormwood*, this syndrome in no way realises their experiences but only questions their methods of resorting to violence in the name of vengeance and lack of justice. As demonstrated by Niebou, taking a step back from immediate retaliation and considering alternative strategies may prove more effective in achieving justice and long-term stability.

Niebou's experiences showcase a glimmer of hope for breaking free from the perpetual cycle of precarity. His experiences provide a strong foundation for ethical reflection, leading to feelings of humility, vulnerability, impressionability, and dependence, which in turn deepen our understanding of ethics.. Through his exposure in Delhi and hearing the Indian perspective on the

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

Indo-Naga conflict, Niebou finds a platform to express his silenced grief, pain, frustration, and wrath, giving way to releasing his intergenerational trauma by discerning the need to find human solutions to issues that are "engendered by political conflicts" (Kire 209).

The phenomenon of precariousness causes a persistent sense of unease and discontent. It produces anxiety and fear about both the present and the future, which unsettles those experiencing it.. The precariat, a social class lacking a social safety net and experiencing uncertainty about the future, struggles differently than any other class. They lose all their fundamental rights- civil, cultural, economic, and social, which demand immediate attention and action to secure them from further disenfranchisement. It is not only essential but also urgent to protect the precariat through policies that prevent their dehumanization.

Suppressed mourning and violence trigger the unbreakable cycle of precarity, which is a double-edged sword. If suppressed mourning and silenced grief are not healed or addressed, they can lead to violent retaliation and a series of repercussions. If they are not resolved quickly, they may spiral out of control, leading to circumstances like those of the factions in the novel, who battle with their ethics while justifying war and inflicting violence on ordinary people. These repercussions also lead to racial and linguistic discrimination, where Nagaland is seen as the periphery and India as the mainland. Resulting in the Nagas being "Indian but not Indian enough."

The power of ethical reflection can profoundly impact shaping one's understanding of complex issues. It is necessary to recognise that suppressed mourning and suffering are not the only factors that lead to violence. It is often the result of dire circumstances of living between terrible conditions and enduring severe injuries, which create a sense of despair and perpetuation of a precarious cycle. Addressing these root issues is a solution towards breaking this cycle that leads to violence and the onset of the precarious cycle.

Exploration of *Bitter Wormwood* through the Butlerian theory of precarity and precariousness fosters empathy and understanding. It raises awareness of the psychological scars of dehumanisation and violence fuelling a perpetual cycle of precarity. Providing humanitarian solutions, this study has opened the door for further exploration of analysis of the characters in the

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

novel for a deeper understanding of performativity and precarity through the dynamics of gender, power and ethical responsibility. Studying similar texts will provide more political and economic solutions for future recognition and care to replace exclusion and violence. Within this study, we have adhered to safety guidelines by avoiding unethical and socially inappropriate language. It eschews insensitivity and controversy and strives to be informative and thought-provoking; it does not condone or justify violence, hate speech, or discrimination.

Works Cited:

Butler, Judith. Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence. Verso, 2004.

Easterine Kire. Bitter Wormwood. Zubaan, 2012.

"KEEPER of STORIES: Critical Readings of Easterine Kire's Novels Edited by KB Vieo Pou." MorungExpress, morungexpress.com/keeper-of-stories-critical-readings-of-easterine-kires-novels-edited-by-kb-vieo-pou.

Kikhi, Kedilezo. "What Ails the North-East? Challenges and Responses." Sociological Bulletin, vol. 58, no. 3, Sept. 2009, pp. 90–110, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920090303. Accessed 10 Jan. 2024.

"Nagas in India." Minority Rights Group, minorityrights.org/communities/nagas/.

Sircar, Sushmita. "Military Cosmopolitanism and Romantic Indigeneity: Crafting Claims to Statehood in Kiran Desai's the Inheritance of Loss and Easterine Kire's Bitter Wormwood." The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 29 Jan. 2020, p. 002198941989730, https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989419897306. Accessed 3 Jan. 2024.

Phillips, Katherine. The India-Naga Conflict: A Long- Standing War with Few Prospects of Imminent Solution. 2004, www.humanrightsinitiative.org/publications/nl/articles/india/summer2004.pdf.

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030