

“Every Way I Turn, I Run into Dead Ends”:

A Necropolitical Reading of *The Girl on the Train* (2016) by Paula Hawkins

Abstract

The present study analyzes the key necropolitical thematic subjects in *The Girl on the Train* (originally published in 2015) by Paula Hawkins, focusing on the main character Rachel Watson’s emotional, psychological, and social deterioration. The problem of Rachel’s societal and personal disempowerment is framed through the concept of necropolitics, which highlights how systems of power enforce social and civic death in the form of living death. To address this issue critically, the paper proceeds by examining Rachel’s fractured mental state, social exclusion, and experiences of marginalization through four dimensions of necropolitical control: incarceration, homelessness, no ventilation, and malnutrition. Employing the theoretical framework of Achille Mbembe, this reading explores how Rachel’s psychological imprisonment, emotional displacement, stifling circumstances, and neglect manifest these necropolitical elements. The analysis further sheds light on how Rachel’s alcoholism, failed marriage, and self and social alienation reflect broader institutional oppressions rooted in patriarchy. The study also elaborates on how societal expectations and bureaucratic control mechanisms contribute to Rachel’s social death. In conclusion, the essay asserts that *The Girl on the Train* offers a compelling depiction of necropolitical marginalization, particularly as it affects women constrained by societal norms and personal trauma. Finally, the findings challenge the idea that the living-dead body is ultimately a passive, immovable, and domestic one and suggest that necropolitical forces impact not only the disenfranchised but also those seemingly in positions of power. The analysis further shows how having an immature superego and overactive id help Rachel be heard by the necropowers.

Keywords: Achille Mbembe, disempowerment, marginalization, necropolitics, social death, *The Girl on the Train*

Introduction

In Paula Hawkins's 2015 psychological thriller *The Girl on the Train*, the protagonist Rachel Watson is a deeply flawed and emotionally unstable woman struggling with alcoholism, grief, and the fallout from her failed marriage to Tom Watson. Living in Ashbury and commuting daily to London, Rachel spends her train journeys fixated on the houses by the tracks, particularly one she imagines belongs to an ideal couple, "Jason and Jess" (Hawkins 19). Later, she learns their real names are Scott and Megan Hipwell, whose lives contrast sharply with her own shattered existence. When Megan goes missing, Rachel becomes entangled in the mystery, driven by guilt, curiosity, and a need for redemption. Despite her unreliable memory, fragmented recollections, and self-deception, Rachel is compelled to uncover the truth about Megan's disappearance, believing she witnessed something crucial during one of her drunken blackouts. Her investigation not only reveals Megan's tragic fate but also forces Rachel to confront her own damaged psyche and the harsh realities of her life.

The novel employs a non-linear narrative, alternating between the perspectives of Rachel, Megan, and Anna—Tom's current wife—highlighting thematic subjects of memory, truth, and the façades people maintain. Rachel's turbulent journey exposes her doubts about herself and others, revealing the intricate interplay between perception and reality. Her obsession with Scott and Megan, initially a projection of her aspirations for an ideal life, ultimately leads her to uncover the dark truths hidden behind seemingly perfect lives.

Rachel clearly battles with social and personal disempowerment, which mirrors bigger systemic difficulties such as marginalization, alienation, and domination at the hands of forces that make her die both mentally and physically. These encounters are indicative of more general problems with control and power that sustain oppressive and dehumanizing cycles. What is this highly systematized power that seeks to impose obedience on her and reduce her to nothingness, and how does it do so in the enmity-filled society in which she lives? To critically analyze these dynamics, this study employs the concept of "necropolitics," as introduced by Joseph-Achille Mbembe, which elucidates the manner in which authority imposes "social and civic death" through "necropower" as a form of control that is rooted in the opposition between "the living and the dead" (79). This power to cause death is inextricably linked to the concept of the death zone that exists within the realm of reality.

These viewpoints considered, how does Rachel's journey illustrate the mechanisms of necropolitical control, and how does she resist these forces to regain agency? To date, the concept of necropolitics in *The Girl on the Train* has not been interpreted. The objective of the present study is to examine how Rachel moves toward resisting the necropolitical dictation of who is to live or to die by achieving the power to resist the repressive means of power that aim at keeping her delusional, entrapped, drunk, and ghost-like.

The Margins of Power: Contextualizing Rachel's Social Death

So far, *The Girl on the Train* has been the subject of several studies which offer latent insights into its necropolitical themes. Western values like "democracy, enlightenment, rationality, universal human rights, and gender equality" are represented as weaker and useless in transforming society due to the overpowering hold of patriarchy, as Rudra Bahadur Adhikari asserts (7). This view is consistent with a necropolitical reading in which patriarchy and other social institutions are part of the systemic marginalization and disempowerment of people. Throughout the novel, Rachel's experiences with psychological oppression, alienation, and social death show how these high values are unable to shield her from the oppressive powers of a necropolitical society as she experiences internal exile. The novel shows how patriarchal authority stifles these principles' ability to bring about significant change, perpetuating the oppressive cycle in subjugating Rachel's life to the power of death, keeping her alive in what Mbembe calls "*a state of injury*" (75; emphasis in the original).

David Crawley accurately notes that "Rachel's lived experience is one of diminished space and power. The area to which her living has been confined physically is paralleled psychologically by a reduced sense of agency" (18). This reading fits with a necropolitical reading because it talks about being locked up, not having a place to live, and not having any airflow. In her mind, Rachel is imprisoned, her existence is defined by a lack of agency and control, and her physical imprisonment in her cramped, tiny apartment, along with her daily train travel, are reflections of this. In a liminal state of social exclusion and displacement, she embodies the concept of homelessness, as evidenced by this diminished space. In a necropolitical sense, it is quite similar to being confined in the organized, institutional "zones of abandonment" (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 1). Apart from that, the idea of no ventilation is also

apparent in Rachel's oppressive life, where she feels both physically and figuratively caged and unable to breathe. Thus, her perception of diminished space and authority embodies the core of necropolitical marginalization. Being positioned as such prompts her to seriously consider breaking out from what Rosie Clare Couch refers to as Rachel's "fixity of womanhood," "normative romance," (37) and domesticity, allowing her to effectively lead Tom to his demise. Furthermore, examining the representation of Rachel's mind style, drawing on cognitive grammar, Marcello Giovanelli demonstrates how Rachel, as a result of getting sober, starts re-constructing her identity and memory by stylistically addressing Megan "that woman" instead of "a woman" as an example (49).

Hend Samy Mohamed Gamal El-Din describes Rachel as a "Tom-made psycho" who keeps her trapped in a cycle of "oppression, negligence, self-blaming, and self-rejection" (93). This reading illustrates how outside forces, particularly her ex-husband's manipulation and betrayals, control and diminish Rachel's life. Her ongoing psychological tyranny and self-neglect are a reflection of the necropolitical notion of societal death, pretty much like being in a state of death in life. Rachel's internalization of guilt and rejection emphasizes the importance of social and relational forces in preserving her disempowered status.

Fetri Reni and Imelda Syam, who have examined Rachel and Tom as psychoanalytically opposed characters, assert that while both Rachel and Tom are controlled by their ids, their superegos are different. Rachel's is small and completely dominated by her id because she ignores the opinions of others, which is what makes her depressed, while Tom's is large because he is so concerned about his social image that, ironically, he kills Megan to preserve it (42). While their reading aims to examine Rachel's superego's minor effect negatively, the current necropolitical study analyzes it as one of the freeing mechanisms that hinders the external forces' ability to affect Rachel and accelerate her death. A fundamental thematic subject that is generally quite consistent with the influence of the superego is the concept of shame. Maysaa H. Jaber studies how Rachel turns her shame and alcoholism into resilience after she loses everything she once had (69). From a necropolitical standpoint, losing everything, both physically and emotionally, equates to being rendered dead by the necropowers (Mbembe 92). This places Rachel in a state of death in life, which paradoxically and actively allows her to set aside all her feelings of shame because she has nothing left to be ashamed of. This aligns with the importance

of the advantage she gained from losing her superego, which is a necrotool to keep a body immovable.

As Bimal Kishore Shrivastwa points out, selfish Tom is living “in an illusion” (19). This suggests that, albeit in a different way, he is also a victim of a necropolitical society. This viewpoint emphasizes that even individuals who appear to be more closely aligned with hegemonic power structures, such as Tom, who is perpetually dissatisfied, are not wholly immune to the consequences of systemic oppression. While Tom may be further distant from what Mbembe calls the zone of “slow death” (126) and not the primary target for cancellation within such a society, he remains vulnerable to the ubiquitous illusions and control mechanisms that constitute necropolitics. After all, the killer of the dead is just another dead body who is not yet recognized as one (Mbembe 91). Everybody feels the effects of this, even those who appear to be in relatively powerful positions and others who are openly disadvantaged.

Mapping Necropolitical Forces

Mbembe’s approach to necropolitics challenges and expands on Michel Foucault’s biopolitics. In particular, Mbembe takes into account Foucault’s view of the body as a manufacturing tool (66). The theory states that different social institutions encourage an abstract view of body through their support of capitalist systems, which supposedly make people more obedient: the body is designed to produce and labor, not to perform cognitive functions. In this context, the idea of death is wide and is concerned with the dialectic between the physical and virtual.

A necropolitical reading attempts to realize the forces in the text that aim at making bodies die. Thus, following Mbembe’s necropolitical framework, the present study undertakes a thorough examination of *The Girl on the Train*, with a primary focus on Rachel. It uses a descriptive, qualitative, and literary-based research approach to collect and analyze data from both primary and secondary sources. The term “necropolitics,” as Mbembe understands it, describes the processes by which political authority imposes social and civic death and regulates mortality (32). It is implied by social death that people or, to be more specific, marginalized groups are systematically excluded and dehumanized. Here are the main suppressive aspects associated with necropolitics as types of social death, according to Andrea M. López. These four critical concepts will not only direct the organization of the methodological framework but will

also function as the argumentative subsections of the analysis. In order to show how Rachel's social and psychological decline corresponds with these repressive mechanisms, the "analysis" section will carefully examine each category, which stands for a separate but interrelated aspect of necropolitical control.

Incarceration: Liminal Cells of Power

Necropolitics is the state's power over the bodies of its citizens, and incarceration is a prime illustration of it. It entails the loss of identity and autonomy as inmates are frequently dehumanized, have their personal liberties taken away from them, and are constantly under observation. Numerous people are sent to prisons, which are places where there is a high prevalence of psychological and physical violence, which causes severe trauma and difficulties with mental health (Ringer 125). Not only that but being jailed causes people to be exiled from their communities, which breaks social ties and confirms their outsider position. As a result, throughout the post-incarceration period, people frequently experience continued discrimination, fewer job chances, and social shame, all of which contribute to their continued social death.

Homelessness: Displacement and Isolation

Being uprooted serves as an example of how society may isolate people to the point of social death when they are denied access to basic necessities such as shelter. People who are homeless are invisible in public conversation and policy because they are frequently rejected or overlooked by society as drug users (López 5). With little to no governmental protection, these bodies are more vulnerable to sexual assault, theft, and physical attack. In addition, serious health problems and a shortened life expectancy result from a lack of access to secure housing, hygienic amenities, and healthcare (Mbembe 101). The deliberate exclusion of homeless persons from political, social, and economic spheres contributes to their perception of social outcasts.

No Ventilation: The Choked Existence

Literally and metaphorically, a lack of proper and adequate ventilation can refer to circumstances in which individuals are denied access to necessities of life; for example, inadequate ventilation in jails, factories, or slums can denote negligence and a disdain for human life and welfare. In addition to respiratory troubles, inadequate ventilation can also cause various health concerns, particularly in crowded and poorly kept spaces (Kirk 6). Lack of airflow can be used as a form of punishment and control, like in solitary confinement cells or sweatshops, where people are forced

to work in conditions that are painful in order to stay in charge. Communities already at a social and physical disadvantage are frequently located in places where air pollution and other environmental dangers are common.

Malnutrition: The Hunger of the Marginalized

Inadequate diet has a direct impact on people's capacity to lead healthy lives and engage in society. It frequently arises from structural injustice and neglect, in which underprivileged groups are deprived of enough wholesome food. Chronic malnutrition has a lasting impact on the physical and cognitive development of children, resulting in social exclusion and long-term disadvantages. It results in compromised immune systems, increased illness susceptibility, and eventually elevated death rates. Consequently, undernourished people find it more challenging to work and sustain themselves, which feeds the cycle of poverty and marginalization from economic possibilities (Debrix 69). Each of these features—incarceration, homelessness, lack of ventilation, and malnutrition—illustrates different dimensions of how necropolitics operates to enforce social death.

A Liminal Life: The Train, the Tracks, and the Traps

The statement “the calculus of life perforce passes through the death of the Other” (Mbembe 72) explores the notion that the management and appraisal of life in society are intricately linked to the marginalization and dehumanization of particular groups or persons. This idea implies that the privilege and well-being of one group frequently come at the price of another, whose lives are judged less valued or expendable. Societies frequently value lives differently based on race, class, gender, or other features, resulting in structural inequities. A key component of necropolitics is this dynamic, in which political authority controls life by deciding who may be sacrificed and who is worthy of survival. “Life is not a paragraph[,] and death is no parenthesis” (cummings 22; Hawkins 22). In contrast to the idea that death is only an afterthought or an aside in the story of life, it reveals a complicated interplay between life and death. The fact that life is not a paragraph indicates that it cannot be neatly confined or described. Analogous to the experiences of individuals living under the shadow of necropolitics, it is chaotic, complicated, and continuous. Their lives are complex tales shaped by the structural factors determining their value and life expectancy. What Rachel is dealing with is quite in line with what “necrodistance,” which as

Marina Gržinić explains lets the necrosubject (in this case Rachel) “see her position clearly and understand that her experience, knowledges and practices are continually being erased or repressed by the neoliberal necrocapitalist mode of (re)production” (29) the representative figure of which would be her ex-husband Tom who constantly gaslights and manipulates women around her, aiming to have them emotionally, or if perceived necessary physically, dead.

To be let alive in necropolitics means to “conform to a white, middle-class, heteronormative, gender-normative, able-bodied, legally employed, state-documented existence, while simultaneously cultivating and promoting other bodies, identities and subjectivities” (Quinan and Thiele para. 12). The lives of the people in *The Girl on the Train* are entwined with secrets, pain, and social expectations, which reflects the complexity and unpredictability of the human condition. Death’s presence in e. e. cummings’ line of a poem, as quoted in the novel, implies that existence is inextricably linked to death rather than existing as a footnote or interruption. It cannot be confined to the periphery since it is always there. The persistent undercurrents of death and the fear of death influence the characters’ behavior and mentalities. Mbembe’s idea of necropolitics refers to both physical and metaphorical deaths, which are characterized by the loss of identity, purpose, or hope. Actually, the intricacy of existence and the certainty of death serve as examples of the interplay between societal pressures and individual tragedies. Similar to how social power dynamics decide who prospers and who suffers death, it is a ubiquitous force that forms and defines existence in life’s complex and continuing story. It is not something to be taken lightly.

Incarceration: Trapped Between the Tracks of Past and Present

The concept of necropolitical incarceration can be extended to Rachel’s emotional and psychic confinement since her experiences serve as a metaphor for necropolitical incarceration. Relegated to a condition of social death, she has struggled with despair, alcoholism, and the fallout from her failed marriage. Like inmates who are physically and mentally imprisoned within the prison system, she is lonely, alienated, and caught in a vicious circle of self-destruction. For example, her addiction to canned gin and tonic serves as a type of self-imposed captivity. Socially and biologically, this makes self-realization and self-actualization less possible, and the only thing that can bring one to redemption is self-sacrifice (Mbembe 106). Rachel does this to save either the people she has never met in person, like Megan, or those who have wronged her, like Tom. She becomes cut off from friends, the wider community, and possible sources of assistance. Her

alcoholism makes it impossible for her to function regularly and keeps her on the margins. Furthermore, the consequence of her marriage to Tom is a substantial contributor to Rachel's psychological confinement. She feels inadequate and unlovable due to the psychological damage caused by the betrayal and her inability to conceive.

A woman's ability to procreate is highly valued in a necropolitical society (Beasley 39), which increases Rachel's stress and difficulties related to her infertility. She thus experiences three distinct types of worry, characterized as "neurotic," "realistic," and "moral" (Siregar, Moelier, and Asyrafunnisa 7). She feels trapped in her own head by this sense of failure, which accentuates her social death. Her sense of confinement is made worse by her mental health problems. Her depressive condition prevents her from taking action and keeps her in a state of immobility. She becomes imprisoned inside herself, plagued by memories of her past and perceived shortcomings. Her outsider status is indeed a result of her apparent decline—weight gain, puffy face, and overall damaged vibe. She absorbs these social criticisms, which keeps her trapped in a vicious cycle of guilt and self-loathing. Rachel is very aware of both the criticism she receives from society and her metamorphosis:

I'm not the girl I used to be. I am no longer desirable, I'm off-putting in some way. It's not just that I've put on weight, or that my face is puffy from the drinking and the lack of sleep; it's as if people can see the damage written all over me, can see it in my face, the way I hold myself, the way I move. (Hawkins 27)

Rachel seems to have experienced a significant loss of identity in her statement. She has lost the ability to identify herself as the person she once was. Necropolitical confinement is a crucial phenomenon in which both internal and external factors undermine the person's identity. Rachel explains how her bodily changes are an external representation of her internal conflict. They go beyond appearances. They represent the underlying harm she has undergone. She becomes an object of contempt or sympathy in the eyes of others due to her apparent harm, which acts as a marker of her social death. She is of the opinion that her internal wounds are evident to others and that they have significantly altered her public image. This is a contributing factor to her social terminality, as she perceives herself as undesirable and repulsive. She feels even more trapped in her psychological prison as a result of this outside judgment, which only serves to confirm her internal sense of worthlessness. Internalizing social judgment is a type of

necropolitical control in which the person regulates their own behavior in accordance with perceived standards and expectations from the outside world.

Mbembe contends that “liberal democracies need antagonism against enemies in the same way they need slavery and colonies” (53). This antagonism is employed to unify the majority by designating and opposing an “Other.” The manner in which colonialism and slavery have historically been essential to the social and economic underpinnings of these democracies serve as historical examples of this. The establishment of an enemy facilitates power consolidation and population unity in response to a shared peril. This enemy might be either internal or external. Many liberal democracies derived their economic foundation from slavery and colonialism, emphasizing a dependence on tyranny and exploitation. Societies can rationalize exclusionary policies and preserve a feeling of order and superiority within the dominant group by portraying some groups as dangerous or inferior.

The term “selective elimination” highlights the fact that even democratic regimes, which assert to protect the rights of all people, participate in the practice of selective elimination, making democracy the repository of death and horror. It is up to them to determine whose life is worthy of protection and whose can be disregarded or sacrificed. In addition, democracies shield specific populations from violence, hardship, or neglect while leaving others vulnerable. This makes life more important in a hierarchical way for certain people than for others. Democracies have the power to impose violence on disenfranchised populations through law enforcement, military action, and other means of state control, frequently rationalizing such acts as required for the greater good. Mbembe contends that necropolitics entails the systematic exploitation of bureaucratic systems to perpetrate large-scale violence and death. Frequently seen as impartial and effective establishments, bureaucracies may play a crucial role in the organization and implementation of large-scale violent crimes. In reality, bureaucracy facilitates the effective execution of policies—like genocide, war, and state-sponsored terrorism—that have the potential to cause widespread misery and fatalities.

States may justify and legalize violent acts by integrating them into bureaucratic procedures, frequently hiding the human cost of their actions behind figures and reports. In order to maintain population management and maximize quality of life, statistical analysis, monitoring, and regulation are required. Governance of populations is achieved by regulating life processes, including mortality, health, and fertility rates. The bureaucratic nature of the police officers, Riley

and Gaskill, can be analyzed as bureaucratic agents in *The Girl on the Train*. Law enforcement officers frequently dismiss Rachel as a result of her perceived unreliability. This illustrates how certain voices and lives are eliminated because they are thought to be less valued or believable.

The police investigation is portrayed as a set of formal procedures with an emphasis on reports and evidence. As Rachel's example demonstrates, this bureaucracy may miss the complicated reality of individual experiences and tragedies. Police investigators also use surveillance and control tactics in their investigation of the case. Suspects and witnesses are weighed down and categorized, forcing them into bureaucratic shapes that occasionally overlook the human aspect of the inquiry. Rachel is seen by society, especially the police, with suspicion and sympathy, demonstrating the selective protection inherent in necropolitics. She becomes an antagonist in her narrative due to her perceived unreliability. The bureaucratic management of her case by the police emphasizes the necessity of such figures in liberal democracies to establish boundaries of trust and credibility. The challenges of surviving in a society that prioritizes specific lives above others are highlighted by Rachel's jumbled recollections and horrific experiences.

Homelessness: Searching for Stability in a Tumultuous Mind

The state of homelessness is mirrored in Rachel's decline into emotional and psychological instability. Her emotional and mental state renders her comparable to the socially deceased, even though she is not physically destitute. She experiences the loss of her marriage, her career, and her self-worth. This absence of control is a fundamental component of necropolitical homelessness, in which individuals are deprived of their autonomy and agency. Rachel undergoes an intense sense of isolation. Because of her unstable behavior and addiction, her friends and family avoid spending time with her. This social seclusion is a hallmark of necropolitical exclusion since she becomes an outcast in her community. Her idea of homelessness as a whole is reflected in her feeling of psychological dislocation. She has a sense of disconnection and unmooring from her identity, history (invented by Tom), and future.

This mental condition is reflected in her sense of not belonging anywhere, similar to a homeless person with no physical location to call home. She identifies her mental condition as being beyond her control when she says that she has "lost control over everything, even the places in my head" (Hawkins 24). Her drinking has damaged her memory and cognitive abilities,

making it hard for her to believe the impressions and memories she has of herself. It highlights a fundamental psychological homelessness that this loss of mental autonomy is similar to the disempowerment that the homeless face, who frequently lose control over their own lives and futures. This internal turbulence hinders her from obtaining any mental peace or stability.

The train represents a liminal, transitional space in which Rachel is entangled between various states of being. She is not entirely dead in this location since she is still physically present, but she is also not fully alive because she is unable to interact meaningfully with the outside world. As Carla Rodríguez González explains, “[s]he [Rachel] must negotiate her presence in spaces of disempowerment and alienation, which contributes to her recurring obsession with watching other people’s lives and fantasizing about a distorted reconstruction of her own past” (117). This vacillating quality is what defines Rachel’s existence. She is unable to proceed, yet she is not entirely resigned to her destiny. She sees her lifeless, transitional condition as reflected in her everyday train ride.

In her review, Heidi Pitlor characterized the train’s function as follows: “Like its train, the story blasts through the stagnation of these lives in suburban London” (para. 1). The train’s unceasing, monotonous progress along the same tracks stands up for Rachel’s life’s cyclical patterns. Despite the movement, there is no actual development or change, and this repeated voyage highlights Rachel’s life’s futility and monotony. The way one day seems to fade into the next reinforces the feeling that one is stuck in an unchangeable repetition of the same thing. It is as if she is moving from nowhere to nowhere. Nonetheless, Rachel’s being on the way signifies that “she has not given up the possibility of regaining a dignified position within the net of power relations favoured by urban structures” (González 117). According to Olha Chernenko, in this novel the train further symbolizes “uncertainty, wavering, [and] the impossibility of escaping from the ‘enchanted circle’” (232). Rachel’s life is in a condition of suspension, where she is neither moving ahead nor living fully. This fits with Alexandra Roxana Mărginean’s idea that Rachel is a Kristevian “object being,” someone who is neither subject (autonomous) nor object (the desired one) but simultaneously both (112). Rachel’s train experiences perfectly capture the essence of modern-day isolation. Even though she travels with a large group of people, she yet feels incredibly disconnected and cut off. Her connections are broken and fragmented. Her divorce from Tom demonstrates her incapacity to build deep relationships, her tense friendship with her housemate and friend Cathy, and her compulsive interest in Megan and Scott’s lives.

In the opening paragraph of this section, I asserted that the train represents liminal space. On the same note, according to Shurong Wu, Rachel's subliminal self is activated when she boards the train; nevertheless, despite her desire to go home, she is unable to do so and must remain in her current location until she can gather her memories and bring her thoughts together (121). Therefore, the train appears to be a tool of conflicting mechanisms: first, by passively sitting in it until Megan is killed, the inebriated Rachel succumbs to necropowers and is engulfed by the prison cell where she commutes daily, while later, the train transforms into a potential space that, near the end of the novel, sounds like a "scream" (Hawkins 402) as a symbol of active Rachel's outcry.

No Ventilation: The Breathless Chase of Memory and Truth

Rachel's struggle to break free from her dreams represents her more remarkable inability to escape her horrific background and current surroundings. This is similar to the necropolitical notion of no ventilation, in which there is no escape or liberation from repressive powers. In her dreams, Rachel is always trapped and being chased, which is a reflection of her actual experiences of feeling like she is being followed by both her past and her own thoughts. Her recurrent nightmares highlight her continuous psychological suffocation. Another potent metaphor for her helplessness and lack of action is her incapacity to scream in her nightmares. Her attempts to call out and ask for assistance are met with silence, a situation that is like the silencing of people in necropolitical circumstances.

The description of Rachel straining to scream but only making a rasping sound, "like a dying person fighting for air" (Hawkins 198), accurately depicts a real struggle for breath and expresses how her circumstances are choking her. Her dreams are repetitious, mirroring her everyday existence even though she knows there is an escape but is unable to locate it. The fact that Rachel keeps going back to the same unpleasant places—her broken marriage, her addiction, her voyeuristic fixation—shows how she is caught in a hopeless cycle from which there seems to be no way out: "I can't scream. I try—I suck the air into my lungs, and I force it out—but there's no sound, just a rasping" (Hawkins 198). This is a Kafkaesque description. In addition to being worse by her drinking, Rachel's sleeplessness is now caused mainly by recurring nightmares. This suggests that her psychological problems are getting worse, going beyond simple physical complaints to cause severe emotional anguish. Rachel realizes there is a way out, but her incapacity to discover it represents her hopeless quest for answers in her everyday existence.

Despite her recognition that rehabilitation and a more fulfilling existence are feasible, her numerous setbacks and relapses render them appear unattainable.

One may argue that Rachel engages in surveillance when she constantly watches people from the train. As mentioned, surveillance functions as a control and regulating mechanism in necropolitical environments. Nevertheless, Rachel is trapped in a cycle of scrutiny that she internalizes, as she is both the observer and the observed. She creates an idealized picture of the lives she sees via her monitoring, especially the lives of Megan and Scott. This idealization represents her longing for escape and a better life, which contrasts starkly with her current reality. She uses this fantasy to draw attention to the differences between her life—which is characterized by social death—and the lives of those she considers more “alive” or satisfying. Rachel’s function as an observer who does not engage in the lives she observes emphasizes her feelings of powerlessness and separation. She lacks the ability to engage meaningfully with the world around her due to her marginalization.

Rachel’s inability to participate serves to accentuate her sense of powerlessness. She is an outsider looking in, contributing to her sense of loneliness and insignificance. Furthermore, her separation from individuals she sees reflects her separation from her existence. This alienation and inaction loop is brought on by and results from her detachment, which is both a cause and an effect of her disempowerment. She takes in the rules and judgments of society and becomes a self-critical observer and critic. Rachel’s self-surveillance keeps her imprisoned in a cycle of self-loathing and inadequacy. Rachel perpetuates her marginalization by talking about her shortcomings all the time. This cycle of self-criticism and failure impedes her ability to emerge from her necropolitical state, thereby perpetuating her social death.

Malnutrition: A Hunger for Connection in a Fractured World

Rachel’s dependency on alcohol suggests that she may be neglecting healthy nutrition, substituting drinking for meals. Her health is impacted by this physical malnourishment, resulting in signs including weight gain, puffiness in the face, and general physical decline. Her physical deterioration is exacerbated by the deficiency in vital nutrients brought on by her frequent drinking, which adds to her general feeling of malaise and reinforces her exclusion. Similarly undernourished is Rachel’s emotional state. Her emotional well-being is severely lacking due to the absence of meaningful interactions and supporting relationships. Her broken marriage and

solitude exacerbate this emotional deprivation. Rachel's saying, "I never learn. I wake with a crushing sensation of wrongness, of shame, and I know immediately that I've done something stupid" (Hawkins 140) illustrates her emotional malnutrition. She is stuck in a cycle of guilt that prevents her from experiencing emotional development and healing.

Rachel's alcoholism might be interpreted as a type of social death, reducing her to a dysfunctional body devoid of its powers and potential. Rachel's life starts to feel meaningless and is characterized more by reliance than initiative. She is unable to engage in life entirely and exists on the periphery due to her isolation, which is a type of social death. Furthermore, Rachel's recurring fragmentary blackouts and memory lapses reflect a life dictated by factors beyond her control, such as her addiction and the cultural expectations that drive her conduct. These errors indicate a lack of control over her existence since they make it impossible for her to piece together her life in an understandable manner. This situation highlights the necropolitical belief that life is at the mercy of outside forces. The fact that Rachel is unable to remember things or keep her life together demonstrates how the oppressive powers of addiction and social neglect control her life.

Rachel rationalizes her drinking by comparing it to societal norms, demonstrating her intense involvement with addiction. Her mental and physical malnourishment are concealed by this reasoning, which enables her to carry on with her harmful behavior. Drinking on the train is a type of escapism that allows her to postpone confronting her reality briefly. It is clear how emotionally malnourished Rachel is when she acknowledges her repeated errors and the guilt that goes along with them. Her social death is prolonged because she lacks the emotional fortitude to escape this pattern. Her lack of control is demonstrated by the fact that she wakes up feeling ashamed and cannot recall what she did. The necropolitical idea that existence is at the mercy of outside forces is reinforced by the dominance of addiction in her life and the memory gaps that follow.

Conclusion

The current study attempted to examine the impacts of incarceration, homelessness, no ventilation, and malnourishment in *The Girl on the Train*, focusing on the concept of necropolitics with a consistent Mbembean approach and an analysis of how the central character,

Rachel, deals with these forces. In this respect, the key findings of the above analysis showed that necropolitical societies put enormous pressure on people, particularly women, by valuing them based on their capacity to adhere to societal standards such as childbearing. Rachel's psychological abuse, social exclusion, and infertility serve as prime examples of the widespread marginalization and control exercised by necropolitical forces. It was also shown how Rachel's being on the train keeps her in a liminal space and make a subliminal subject of her that becomes able to witness the movements around and within her, become part of the movements and, ultimately, make everywhere and nowhere her home, which is an unsettling status for the necropowers that intend to place a body and determine its death.

This study adds to the necropolitical debate by highlighting the ways in which the characters in the novel, Rachel in particular, represent the fights against systematic marginalization and societal limitations. In other words, Rachel challenges and disturbs expectations since her unpleasant feelings are not hushed at the end of the novel. Then, it was explained that Rachel's act of quitting drinking helps her reconstruct her identity, remember her history unaffected by external forces and experience a coherent voice that make her feel alive, to herself and others. This study also contributes to the academic discourse on the novel by offering a necropolitical study that draws attention to the repressive power systems that mold the protagonists' lives and curtail their agency.

References

- Adhikari, Rudra Bahadur. *Critique of Cosmopolitan Modernity in Hawkins' The Girl on the Train*. 2017. Tribhuvan University, Master's thesis.
- Beasley, Myron M. *Performance, Art, and Politics in the African Diaspora: Necropolitics and the Black Body*. Routledge, 2023.
- cummings, e. e. *Is 5*. Liveright, 1970.
- Chernenko, Olha. "Semiotic and Multimodal Representation of Existential Conflict in Fictional Discourse." *Alfred Nobel University Journal of Philology*, vol. 2, no. 26/2, 26 Dec. 2023, pp. 225-237, <https://doi.org/10.32342/2523-4463-2023-2-26/2-14>.
- Couch, Rosie Clare. "*Pragmatically Bad*" *Women: Looking at the Contemporary Femme Fatale*. 2022. Cardiff University, PhD Dissertation.
- Crawley, David. "Otherness in Relation: A Dialogic Perspective." *Stories of Therapy, Stories of Faith*, edited by L. McMillan, S. Penwarden, and S. Hunt, Wipf & Stock, 2017, pp. 18-38.
- Debrix, François. "Necropolitics and American Hype-Power." *Spectra*, vol.10, no. 1, 2023, pp. 65-74, doi:10.21061/spectra.v10i1.236.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. Translated by Michel Senellart and Graham Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Giovanelli, Marcello. "'Something Happened, Something Bad': Blackouts, Uncertainties and Event Construal in *The Girl on the Train*." *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics*, vol. 27, no. 1, Feb. 2018, pp. 38-51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947017752807>.
- González, Carla Rodríguez. "Geographies of Fear in the Domestic Noir: Paula Hawkins's *The Girl on the Train*." *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 56, 2017, pp. 109-27, doi:10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.20176791.
- Gržinić, Marina. "What Is the Aesthetics of Necropolitics?" *The Aesthetics of Necropolitics*, edited by Natasha Lushetich, Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2018, pp. 17-36.
- Haritaworn, Jin, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco. "Introduction." *Queer Necropolitics*, edited by Silvia Posocco, Adi Kuntsman, and Jin Haritaworn, Routledge, 2014, pp. 1-27.

- Hawkins, Paula. *The Girl on the Train*. Black Swan, 2016.
- Jaber, Maysaa H. "Shame and Alcoholism in Paula Hawkins's *The Girl on the Train*." *Arab World English Journal for Translation and Literary Studies*, vol. 5, no. 4, 15 Oct. 2021, pp. 60-71, <https://doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol5no4.5>.
- Kirk, Ronald. "Neoliberal Necropolitics and the Global Competition for Urban Dominance." *Geoforum*, vol. 155, 2024, pp. 1-10, doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2024.104107.
- López, Andrea M. "Necropolitics in the 'Compassionate' City: Care/Brutality in San Francisco." *Medical Anthropology*, vol. 39, no. 8, 2020, pp. 751-64, doi:10.1080/01459740.2020.1753046.
- Mărginean, Alexandra Roxana. "The Ruined Feminine and Questionable Perspectives in Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*." *Limba Și Literatura – Repere Identitare în Context European*, no. 21, 2017, pp. 109-117.
- Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Translated by Steven Corcoran, Duke University Press, 2019.
- Pitlor, Heidi. "The Girl on the Train by Paula Hawkins." *The Boston Globe*, 3 Jan. 2015, www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2015/01/03/book-review-the-girl-train-paula-hawkins/s1VAJ2tsJ5HAGyxHLGrbUI/story.html.
- Quinan, C. L., and Kathrin Thiele. "Introduction." *Biopolitics, Necropolitics, Cosmopolitics: Feminist and Queer Interventions*, edited by C. L. Quinan and Kathrin Thiele, 2021.
- Reni, Fetri, and Imelda Syam. "The Affair and Betrayal in The Murder Investigation as Seen in Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on The Train*." *Jurnal Ilmiah Langue and Parole*, vol. 2, no. 1, 30 Dec. 2018, pp. 39-45, <https://doi.org/10.36057/jilp.v2i1.332>.
- Ringer, C. D. *Necropolitics: The Religious Crisis of Mass Incarceration in America*. Lexington Books, 2021.
- Samy Mohamed Gamal El-Din, Hend. "Amnesia, Imagination, and Subsequent Narration Twists in *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins." *Sahifatul-Asun*, vol. 38, no. 38, 2022, pp. 79-96, doi:10.21608/salsu.2022.286378.
- Siregar, Anggi, Debora Dwi Moelier, and Asyrafunnisa. "Anxiety and Depressive Disorders toward the Main Character in Paula Hawkins' Novel *The Girl on the Train*." *Humaniora*:

Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Education, vol. 2, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1-8,
doi:10.56326/jlle.v2i1.1448.

Shrivastwa, Bimal Kishore. "Analysis of Defense Mechanisms in Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*." *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2023, pp. 15-21, doi:10.24018/ejsocial.2023.3.3.445.

Wu, Shurong. "On the symbolic significance of train in *The Girl on the Train*." *Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, vol. 4, no. 1, 30 Jan. 2022, pp. 119-124,
[https://doi.org/10.53469/jssh.2022.4\(01\).26](https://doi.org/10.53469/jssh.2022.4(01).26).

Pre-print Version