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THE POSTCOLONIAL REPRESENTATION OF THE FAMINE PERIOD IN E.MAGAUIN'S "THE YELLOW BOOK"

Abstract. Postcolonial theory, in the study of historical narratives, is not limited solely to ideological or empirical approaches; it also functions as an analytical space aimed at uncovering the complex interrelations between power, language, and memory. From this perspective, documentary prose is not merely a genre that records facts but also a critical instrument for reviving marginalized voices and offering alternative narratives to official history. In particular, testimonial texts, central objects of postcolonial inquiry, capture the linguistic manifestations of historical trauma and preserve the emotional and cultural layers of the past through silence and fragmentation. In such texts, the polyphonic structure of individual experiences reflects the processes of collective memory formation and enables a reconsideration of historical truths in confrontation with dominant discourses. In this regard, Edige Magauin's *The Yellow Book* occupies a distinctive place. This text, based on the recollections of witnesses who endured the famine of 1931-1933, presents the consequences of Soviet colonial policies and collective trauma in a polyphonic, fragmented structure. Each testimony illustrates how such historical trauma is expressed linguistically and demonstrates the position and influence of forgotten or marginalized experiences within the national memory. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the reconstruction of national memory and the literary representation of the colonial past through the aesthetic-documentary depiction of the famine in Magauin's text.

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Keywords: documentary prose, postcolonialism, colonialism, *The Yellow Book*, famine.

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Е.МАҒАУИННИҢ «САРЫ КІТАП» АТТЫ ЕҢБЕГІНДЕГІ АШАРШЫЛЫҚ КЕЗЕҢІНІҢ ПОСТКОЛОНИЯЛЫҚ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯСЫ

Аңдатпа. Постколониалдық теория тарихи нарративті зерттеуде тек идеологиялық немесе эмпирикалық тәсілмен шектелмейді; ол сонымен бірге билік, тіл және жад арасындағы күрделі өзара байланыстарды ашуға бағытталған аналитикалық алаң ретінде көрінеді. Бұл тұрғыдан алғанда, деректі проза тек фактілерді тіркейтін жанр емес, сонымен қатар маргиналданған дауыстарды қайта жаңғыртатын,

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ресми тарихқа балама нарратив ұсынатын маңызды құрал болып есептелінеді. Әсіресе постколониалдық зерттеудің негізгі объектісі ретінде саналатын куәгерлік мәтіндер, тарихи травманың тілдік көрінісін, үнсіздік пен фрагментарлық арқылы өткеннің эмоционалдық және мәдени пласттарын сақтап қалуға мүмкіндік береді. Мұндай мәтіндерде жеке тәжірибенің көп дауысты құрылымы ұжымдық жадтың қалыптасу процесін көрсетіп, үстем дискурстармен соқтығысқан тарихи шындықты қайта ойластыруға жол ашады. Осы тұрғыдан алғанда Едіге Мағауиннің «Сары кітап» жинағы ерекше мәнге ие. Бұл мәтін 1931-1933 жылдардағы ашаршылықты бастан өткерген куәгерлердің естеліктеріне негізделіп, кеңестік колониалдық саясаттың салдарын және ұжымдық травманы көп дауысты, фрагментарлық формада ұсынады. Әрбір жеке куәлік оқырманға сол тарихи травманың тілде қалай көрініс табатынын және ұмытылған немесе маргиналданған тәжірибенің ұлттық жадтағы орны мен ықпалын көрсетеді. Бұл мақалада аталған мәтіндегі ашаршылықтың көркем-деректік репрезентациясы арқылы ұлттық жадтың қайта құрылу үдерісі мен колониалдық өткеннің әдебиеттегі көрінісі кешенді түрде талданады.

Алғыс: Мақала ҚР Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі Ғылым комитетінің 2025-2027 жж. АР26100503 «Қазақ әдебиетіндегі деректі прозаның даму үрдістері» іргелі ғылыми-зерттеу жобасының қаржыландыруы негізінде жарияланды.

Кілт сөздер: деректі проза, постколониализм, колониализм, Сары кітап, ашаршылық.

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ПОСТКОЛОНИАЛЬНАЯ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ ПЕРИОДА ГОЛОДА В ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИИ Э.МАГАУИНА «ЖЁЛТАЯ КНИГА»

Аннотация. Постколониальная теория в изучении исторических нарративов не ограничивается исключительно идеологическими или эмпирическими подходами. Она также выступает в качестве аналитического пространства, направленного на выявление сложных взаимосвязей между властью, языком и памятью. С этой точки зрения документальная проза не является просто жанром, фиксирующим факты, но также представляет собой важный инструмент для возрождения маргинализированных голосов и предложения альтернативных нарративов официальной истории. Особенно важные свидетельские тексты, являющиеся ключевыми объектами постколониальных исследований: они фиксируют языковые проявления исторической травмы и через молчание и фрагментарность сохраняют эмоциональные и культурные пласты прошлого. В таких текстах полифоническая структура индивидуального опыта отражает процессы формирования коллективной памяти и позволяет переосмыслить историческую действительность в столкновении с доминирующими дискурсами. В этом отношении сборник Эдиге Мағауина «Жёлтая книга» занимает особое место. Этот текст, основанный на воспоминаниях свидетелей, переживших голод 1931-1933 годов, представляет последствия советской колониальной политики и коллективной травмы в полифонической, фрагментарной форме. Каждое свидетельство показывает, как историческая травма проявляется в языке, и демонстрирует место и влияние забытых или маргинализированных опытов в национальной памяти. В данной статье проводится комплексный анализ процесса реконструкции национальной памяти и литературного отражения колониального прошлого через художественно-документальное представление голода в тексте Мағауина.

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Ключевые слова: документальная проза, постколониализм, колониализм, Жёлтая книга, голод.

1. Introduction

Kazakh literary space, from the moment of independence to the present day, has been undergoing a sustained process of rethinking the colonial past, restoring collective memory, and redefining national identity. Over this period, the reassessment, interpretation, and evaluation of historical experiences that were long concealed, distorted, or marginalized by the Soviet colonial system have become among the most pressing concerns across virtually all literary genres. Within this context, the genre of documentary prose has acquired particular significance. Unlike other genres that may confine themselves to the aesthetic or literary narration of historical events and facts, documentary prose has emerged as a distinctive analytical and discursive platform that revives marginalized voices and offers alternatives to colonial narratives. Indeed, texts within this genre have played a leading role in the decolonization and rehabilitation processes of peoples who, for many years, had been, as Albert Memmi notes, "removed from history and from the community" (Memmi, 2003: 135), while also contributing to the formation of alternative spaces of thought that resist colonial discourse. This is largely because, in documentary texts, Soviet historical campaigns and social catastrophes are represented not merely at a factual level, but also across collective and cultural dimensions. The fragmentary structure of testimonial discourse, along with the strategic use of interruptions and silences, enables a more precise aesthetic and discursive rendering of historical trauma than is typically possible in other literary forms. In turn, this becomes a crucial mechanism for limiting the meta-persistence of colonial violence. To substantiate this claim, one may recall Frantz Fanon's well-known thesis that colonialism, which is founded on violence, "will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (Fanon, 1963: 59). However, this should not be understood in a literal or reductive sense as if violence must simply be met with equivalent physical force. Rather, the "greater violence" in this context may be more accurately interpreted as an epistemic intervention: the questioning of colonial epistemology, the disruption of colonial narratives, and their deconstruction. Like any form of power, colonial power seeks to assert and absolutize its own existence. This process depends on subjects and objects through which colonial power is enacted. As Albert Memmi argues, "along with the colonized, colonization would disappear, and so would the colonizer" (2003: 193), since both are structurally dependent on one another. In the words of Achille Mbembe, colonialism operates through a dual movement: to colonize, to destroy, and to create; to create through destruction; to transform destruction into creation and creation into destruction; to create in order to create and to destroy in order to destroy (Mbembe, 2001: 189). The disintegration or destabilization of such an epistemological system thus begins with the efforts of local populations to dismantle colonial narratives and to articulate decolonial forms of rhetoric. Indeed, the decolonization of peoples endowed with autonomous desires and freedoms independent of colonial power becomes possible only through what Frantz Fanon describes as the "creation of new men" (Fanon, 1963: 35). From this perspective, fragmented and polyphonic documentary texts play a crucial role in deconstructing colonial epistemology and dismantling colonial structures. By re-examining history through the prism of subaltern voices and by offering alternative representations that challenge state-sanctioned narratives, such texts contribute significantly to the emergence of "new subjects" in postcolonial Kazakh

society. One such text is Edige Magauin's *Sary Kitap* (The Yellow Book) (Magauin, 2024).

This collection is based on the testimonies of witnesses who endured the famine of 1931-1933 and presents the social, economic, and cultural consequences of Soviet colonial policy through a polyphonic and fragmentary structure. Each individual testimony articulates the linguistic manifestation of historical trauma, illuminating the role of forgotten or marginalized experiences in shaping national identity and collective memory. The text's polyphonic structure, its discontinuities, and its recurring motifs foreground the tension between Soviet ideological frameworks and lived personal experience. At the same time, its polyphony and fragmentation function as strategic narrative devices for reconstructing national memory, rethinking colonial normativity, and representing cultural trauma in both aesthetic and discursive terms. Accordingly, as the primary object of analysis in this article, the work provides a critical analytical framework for examining the linguistic, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of historical trauma, while also offering a significant platform for reconstructing the historical being of subaltern subjects. As Gurminder K. Bhambra suggests, "In this context, he argues that the only way to reconstruct their historical presence is to read official documents, produced for administrative purposes, against the grain and to do so in the name of the subaltern." (Bhambra, 2023: 16). In this regard, the attempt of suppressed voices from the margins to speak becomes clearly visible within the text. In line with these considerations, this article aims to analyze the postcolonial representation of the famine in *The Yellow Book*, while demonstrating the role of documentary prose in the literature of independent Kazakhstan in restoring collective memory, reinterpreting historical truth, and revitalizing marginalized voices. The study focuses in particular on key motifs such as testimonial discourse, the re-articulation of marginalized voices, fragmentary narration, counter-narratives to Soviet discourse, and the reconstruction of historical reality.

2. Research methods and materials

2.1. Research methods

The article employs postcolonial analysis, textual analysis, comparative and contextual analytical methods.

2.2. Material description

As the primary research material, Edige Magauin's *The Yellow Book* was selected. This collection is based on the testimonies of witnesses who experienced the famine of 1931-1933 and represents the social, economic, and cultural consequences of Soviet colonial policy on Kazakh society. The text not only records the individual experiences of witnesses but also serves as an important source for examining the collective dimensions of historical trauma, the psychological impact of social catastrophe, and the reconstruction of national identity. Through this work, in order to represent the strategic role of documentary prose within postcolonial representation and to analyze the linguistic, cultural, and psychological manifestations of historical trauma, the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial thinkers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, Achille Mbembe, and Gurminder K. Bhambra are employed.

3. Discussion

Within colonial epistemology, the history of local populations or subalterns is rendered as "non-existent." As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously argues, the subaltern "cannot

speak" (Spivak, 2010: 41). Similarly, Frantz Fanon emphasizes that "The settler makes history" (1963: 51), insofar as it is the colonizers themselves who produce and impose what is perceived as "non-existent" history. Nevertheless, as Achille Mbembe notes, colonial power has never established a genuine relation with the colonized subjects (Mbembe, 2001: 34); rather, it has positioned them as objects of observation, imposing a version of history aligned with its own epistemic and political interests. These processes have persisted for such a prolonged period that, to use the terms of Jean Baudrillard, "simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Baudrillard, 2010: 1). Within this hyperreality, the simulacrum imposed by colonial power upon local populations itself comes to be perceived as reality. Under such conditions, it becomes impossible to determine whether this "reality" is true or false. In this regard, testimonial/documentary texts should be understood not merely as forms of individual memory, but as discursive practices that construct alternative representations to the hyperreal history imposed by colonial power. One such example is the testimonial texts contained in "The Yellow Book", which re-articulate voices that remained outside the framework of Soviet colonial history and, as Gurminder K. Bhambra suggests, were long marginalized within "laboratories" (Bhambra, 2023: 138). In other words, the documentary character of the work may be understood as an important decolonial step that seeks to expose the foundational or constitutive violence of colonial domination (Mbembe, 2001: 25) and to disrupt colonial epistemology. For instance, while Soviet ideology treated famine as a prohibited and closed topic (Axakalova et al., 2023: 271), attempting to frame it as a natural or accidental phenomenon, the testimonial texts in this collection reveal its structurally violent nature. This perspective directly resonates with the arguments presented by Mike Davis in *Late Victorian Holocausts*, where he demonstrates, through clear and empirical evidence, that famines across the world were consequences of colonial policy. According to Davis, "millions died not outside the 'modern world system,' but in the very process of being forcibly incorporated into it" (Davis, 2017: 19). When this observation is considered alongside eyewitness testimonies, the findings support the interpretation that the famine in the Kazakh steppe resulted from Soviet policies aimed at forcibly integrating Kazakh society into the Soviet economic and social order. In particular, collectivization and the administrative restructuring of pastoral livestock husbandry destroyed the traditional foundations of Kazakh life and led to mass starvation. Supporting this interpretation, Sarah Cameron argues in "The Hungry Steppe", one of the most comprehensive studies of the Kazakh famine, that:

"Nomadism, they argued, impeded Kazakhs' development into a modern Soviet nation. Fracturing Kazakhs' 'petty bourgeois' consciousness required their sedentarization as a group. Experts began to harness the language of Soviet nation-making to reinforce the change in agricultural policy. Nomadism was denounced as both economically inefficient and culturally backward" (Cameron, 2018: 47)*.

Nevertheless, as noted above, such interpretations of the famine could not be articulated openly during the Soviet period. As a result, the experience of famine was pushed into silence and remained marginalized in public and historical discourse for many decades.

* For a detailed discussion of the origins, development, and impact of the Kazakh famine, as well as the Soviet policies that contributed to it, see Cameron, "The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan" (2018).

Even in the post-independence period, public discussion of this event remained limited. This is because, in Frantz Fanon's terms, independent power often functions as the "spoiled children of yesterday's colonialism" (Fanon, 1963: 48), making it highly unlikely that homogeneous, single-authored documentary texts could escape its influence. Accordingly, in societies where, as Achille Mbembe describes, yesterday's delinquents become today's damned corrupt elites (Mbembe, 2001: 111), the author's capacity for free and autonomous expression is limited by the extent permitted by those in power. This, in turn, can be seen as one of the indicators of the meta-persistence of colonial narrative. By contrast, "organless"^{*} texts such as *The Yellow Book*, dispersed across "a thousand pastures,"^{***} along with the documentary memories they contain and the marginalized historical subjects they represent, fragment themselves within the text and assume not the role of passive victims, but of witnesses and carriers of colonial trauma. This is already evident in the introductory section written by Mukhtar Magauin. He notes that all the crimes orchestrated by Goloshchekin, who was sent to Kazakhstan on a special and extraordinary mission between 1925 and 1933, were consistently supported by Moscow:

"On the eve of 1930, Goloshchekin's unchecked power was established within Kazakhstan. At that time, the confiscation of large bai estates was carried out, and the collectivization of the Kazakh aul began. This was the initial condition of the Great Famine. Stalin himself evaluated all of Goloshchekin's actions in sovietizing Kazakhstan as 'the only correct policy'" (Magauin, 2024: 15).

Mukhtar Magauin's introduction functions not only as a foundation for the book's testimonial discourse but also as a counter-discursive intervention against Soviet hegemonic narratives. As Frantz Fanon argues, "the settler makes history and is conscious of making it" (1963: 51). In this sense, colonial discourse seeks to neutralize famine as "objective", "natural," or a mere "error," (Cameron, 2018: 7) whereas Magauin defines it as a deliberately organized and state-legitimized form of structural violence. Similarly, in "Famine and Kazakh Society in the 1930s", Ardak Yesdauletova et al. argue that: "An examination of the latest research concerning famine in Kazakhstan in 1931-1933 in the light of economic development reveals that this unprecedented and horrific phenomenon was a deliberately planned policy formulated by Stalin and his government in accordance with the principles of Communism" (Yesdauletova et al., 2015: 542). Indeed, the fact that 42%^{***} (Yesdauletova et al., 2015: 538) of a single population perished due to famine and epidemics clearly cannot be attributed to any "natural" causes. Furthermore, in later sections of "The Yellow Book", the childhood recollections of the poet Gafu Kairbekov, recorded

^{*} "Body without organs" (corps sans organes), a concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, refers to the suspension of fixed functions and hierarchical structures, enabling the free circulation of desire and meaning. In this study, the concept is transposed onto the textual level to describe texts that are freed from "organized" narrative structures and that allow for open-ended, plural interpretations.

^{**} The concept of "A Thousand Plateaus," developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their work *A Thousand Plateaus*, denotes a non-hierarchical and non-teleological understanding of becoming, characterized by multiplicity and continuity. In this framework, a "plateau" refers to a field of intensities that does not orient toward a fixed beginning or end but operates immanently within itself.

^{***} Although scholars have been unable to establish the exact number of people who perished during the famine, there is little doubt that this catastrophe led to the greatest proportional population loss under Stalin's brutal political regime. For a more detailed discussion of the famine, see Ardak Yesdauletova, Aitmukhanbet Yesdauletov, Saule Aliyeva, and Galina Kakenova, "Famine and Kazakh Society in the 1930s."

by Valery Mikhailov, further substantiate the arguments of Magauin and Yesdauletova. Critically reflecting on Goloshchekin's policies, Kairbekov describes their devastating consequences for the Kazakh steppe as follows:

"The spiritual essence of the nation was destroyed. All mosques were closed, and the faith of believers was humiliated. By artificially intensifying class struggle, the kinship unity of the Kazakhs was fractured. All of this constituted preparations aimed at the destruction of the Kazakhs as a nation" (Mikhailov, 2024: 47).

As this testimony illustrates, whereas colonial discourse softened the famine through terms such as "food shortage" or "hardship" (Cameron, 2018: 111), Kairbekov's memoir depicts it through extreme experiences such as stepping over corpses, consuming carrion, and even cannibalism. In doing so, the poet replaces abstract and euphemistic language with a vocabulary grounded in bodily suffering and trauma. A similar mode of testimonial narration appears in Ghalym Akhmedov's recollections in *The Yellow Book*, particularly in his accounts of people who resorted to killing and consuming other human beings. Here, too, the consequences of famine are rendered not through generalized formulations, but through extreme situations and profoundly disturbing experiences that became woven into the fabric of everyday life.

In this passage, the discourse of witnessing completely displaces the euphemistic language of colonial discourse, revealing the famine as an extreme experience that transgresses the boundaries of human existence itself. Here, hunger does not remain merely at the level of a social crisis; rather, it transforms into a force that disintegrates the ethical, cultural, and anthropological foundations of the human subject. Consequently, the motif of cannibalism in the text should not be interpreted as a manifestation of individual moral degeneration, but rather as evidence of a colonial biopolitics that pushed human beings toward the most extreme conditions of survival. A similar depiction appears in Token Bekmagambetov's memoir "After the Establishment of the Kolkhoz" (Bekmagambetov, 2024: 202).

These examples demonstrate that famine is represented in this testimony not merely as a condition of food scarcity or material deprivation. Rather, it emerges as a totalizing experience that permeates every sphere of human existence. Under such circumstances, moral principles, ethical norms, and cultural prohibitions lose much of their regulatory force, while the imperative of survival becomes the primary measure through which reality is perceived and experienced. In this context, the transformation of a child's body into a source of food signifies more than a physiological instinct for survival; it stands as a powerful indication of the profound disintegration of the social, moral, and cultural order. What is at stake here is not an individual moral choice but a threshold condition in which starvation compels human beings to act beyond the boundaries of ordinary social and cultural life. Read from this perspective, the testimony reveals that the famine constituted not only a demographic catastrophe but also a deep social rupture that destabilized the very foundations of human coexistence. A similar representation can be found in Tursyn Zhurtbay's memoir, "My Father's Story", included in the same volume:

"A man who had lost his sanity from eating human flesh stalked us for two days, terrifying us. He had braided a rope from strands of human hair. Presumably, he used it to strangle those he could overpower. When my companion saw the skeleton of a woman who had died clutching her infant, he burst into tears and cried out: 'What if that lying there

were my wife and child, O God!’ – and collapsed to the ground” (Zhurtbay, 2024: 299-300).

In the testimonies of Kairbekov, Akhmedov, Bekmagambetov, and Zhurtbay, the struggle for survival clearly shifts into “extreme” experiences, and the boundaries between human beings are fundamentally eroded. In all the examples cited, animalistic instinct and radical individualism come to the fore. However, Zhurtbay’s text contains a particularly significant detail. The utterance, “What if that were my wife and child,” resonates with Frantz Fanon’s assertion that “when the native is tortured, when his wife is killed or raped, he complains to no one” (Fanon, 1963: 92). For no matter how heavily he bears the burden of his history, even more than others, he remains not the subject of that history, but its object (Memmi, 2003: 136). Thus, even if those lying before him were indeed his wife and child, he would not become a participant in the paradigmatic struggle that concerns him; rather, he would remain nothing more than the silent scream of a defeated subaltern.

In Mariyam Khakimzhankyzy’s memoir, one can observe the extent to which famine affected everyday life, food practices, and even ordinary understandings of survival itself. The episode describing the consumption of tortoise meat should not be read merely as a substitution of one food source for another. Rather, it illustrates how conditions of starvation compelled individuals to alter established dietary habits, customary forms of subsistence, and familiar patterns of daily life. From this perspective, the fact that Mariyam and those around her were forced to consume tortoise meat may be regarded as a concrete anthropological manifestation of the humanitarian crisis produced by colonial policy. The memoir suggests that famine affected not only the physical conditions of human existence but also the ways in which people perceived their surroundings, organized their daily lives, and related to the environment around them. A comparable experience can also be found in Seitqasym Boranqulov’s memoir. His testimony similarly indicates that famine created a liminal condition in which previously accepted social and cultural boundaries were subjected to reconsideration:

“...on the top of a hill by the road, Jappas – the son of Syzdyk, with whom I had studied - was cooking and eating a ground squirrel. He offered me a piece, asking if I would eat. My whole body shuddered in disgust; I refused and hurried away” (Borankulov, 2024: 322).

Within the framework of the re-articulation of marginalized voices, in “The Yellow Book”, not only the voice of the colonized but also the representation of colonial space itself acquires a distinctive form. In other words, while in the Soviet colonial narrative the village and the collective farm (kolkhoz) function as sites of socialist transformation, in the texts we are analyzing the village which is transformed into a space of death. For instance, this can be clearly observed in Shaghi Sarsenbekova’s text “Three Famines” within “The Yellow Book”:

“Surrounded by corpses, when my maternal uncle still had the strength, he would cover their faces, but now even his strength was exhausted. They forcibly relocated us to a place called Zhauynger. They said we would become a kolkhoz. People were starving, dying one after another, and my aunt was grinding barley. She would boil barley soup in three or four pots and distribute it to three or four people using small bowls. One day, the dry reeds by the doorstep suddenly rustled. My mother lit a lamp and looked outside, only to find a huge black snake... We killed it and roasted it in the pot and ate it” (Sarsenbekova, 2024: 291).

The evidence suggests that in Sarsenbekova's text, the consequences of collectivization are narrated through the corpses surrounding the area and the fact that starving people were forced to eat snakes. Accordingly, "collectivization" here no longer appears as progress, but rather as regression, a mechanism for the destruction of the very foundations of life. Continuing this logic, in the following testimonial examples we can observe how this space is not only a site of statistical collapse, but also how it becomes a "landscape of death" at the level of everyday life, that is, how it is manifested in lived experience through images such as abandoned houses, deserted settlements, and the mass displacement of survivors. This can also be observed in Jortuyul Rysakov's memoir "Years of Misery":

"By the end of 1930 and the beginning of 1931, living conditions had deteriorated drastically; there was neither livestock nor livelihood, which had previously been the source of sustenance. All settlements that had once been known as 'such-and-such village' became completely deserted. In some abandoned winter camps, newcomers from other regions settled and spent the winter. Wandering, poverty reached extreme levels. Corpses in the barns..." (Rysakov, 2024: 229).

Nuguman Bayandin's memoir "A Record from the Days of Wandering" likewise presents similar circumstances in considerable detail. Drawing on his own eyewitness experience, the author recounts the harsh realities of everyday life during the famine years, the transformations in people's living conditions, and the broader disintegration of the social environment. The memoir depicts the rural landscape as a space that had gradually drifted away from its former rhythm of everyday life, becoming marked by population decline and the weakening of communal relations (Bayandin, 2024: 391).

When several testimonial texts situated within this "thousand plateaus" space are read alongside one another, it becomes apparent that the Soviet colonial system sought to legitimize its policies and ideological objectives through official slogans, administrative reports, and economic planning. Testimonial and archival accounts, by contrast, bring into view the social experiences that remained obscured by such official narratives, foregrounding the disruptions of everyday life and their human consequences. From this perspective, memoirs of the famine make it possible to discern the distance between administrative discourse and lived historical experience. As a result, the village or collective farm emerges not as a site of Soviet modernization but, as in Bayandin's account, as a topos marked by displacement, death, and mass destruction. Comparable evidence can also be found in Ibrahim Shamshatuly's memoir, "A Victim of Forced Collectivization". There, information concerning those who perished as a consequence of forced collectivization is presented within a testimonial space that exists independently of official colonial discourse:

"If T. Omarbekov writes 2,277,000 (...), some increase it to 2.5-2.6 million. The prominent Anglo-American researcher Robert Conquest estimates it at about one and a half million (...). A figure close to this, and one that clarifies it more precisely, is found in the research of historians Zh. B. Abylkhodzhin, M. K. Kozybayev, and demographer M. B. Tatimov. They estimate that 1,750,000 Kazakhs died as a result of famine and its epidemics, which constituted 42% of the Kazakh population in 1930 before the famine (...)" (Shamshatuly, 2024: 171).

As this excerpt demonstrates, famine appears in Shamshatuly's account as a demographic

catastrophe on a national scale. Yet aggregate figures alone cannot fully convey how this catastrophe unfolded within particular localities. The effects of colonial violence become more visible when examined through regional experiences and local archival records. In this regard, the archival materials published by Kamel Zhunisov are especially valuable. They not only provide a more detailed picture of the famine in the Shet district of the Karaganda region but also illuminate the gap between official policy and its devastating consequences for everyday life:

“According to archival data (...), at the beginning of 1932 there were 36,568 local residents in Shet district. Just before this, following the confiscation of wealthy livestock owners, a 1930 census recorded 107,832 head of livestock remaining in people’s possession. By 1933, only 1,752 livestock remained. (...) According to archival records, as a result, only 5,021 people remained in Shet district in 1933” (Zhunisov, 2024: 420).

As can be seen, the archival materials cited by Zhunisov recast the Soviet concept of “socialist reconstruction” through a postcolonial lens. As Gurminder K. Bhambra argues, “archives do not simply exist as spaces from which historical truth can be discerned, [but] are part of the very constitution of knowledge that determines how truth is to be known” (Bhambra, 2023: 16). Archival documents and eyewitness testimonies thus bring into view historical experiences that remained obscured by colonial discourse or were only partially articulated through official rhetoric. These materials offer insight into the social realities of the period, the lived experience of everyday life, and the tangible consequences of broader historical processes. A particularly revealing example can be found in the memoir of Zhorabek Duisenbin, where the colonial dimensions of collectivization are narrated through the intertwined perspectives of personal experience and historical memory (Duisenbin, 2024: 283).

Thus, it becomes evident that the forcible imposition of communist policy on local populations, and the involuntary collectivization of the nomadic Kazakh people at that time, ultimately led to famine. If we reinterpret Mike Davis’s thesis in his study of Western colonialism, “India became an ‘experimental field’ for British rule. Belief in the idea that the market solves everything cost millions of lives” (Davis, 2017: 39), and apply it to the Kazakh steppe, it would be appropriate to state that Kazakh land became an ‘experimental field’ for Soviet power. In order to prove the superiority of the Soviet economy over the capitalist system, millions of lives were sacrificed (Yesdauletova et al., 2015: 541).

Alongside its representation of space, the text also recounts the fate of those who, in their struggle to survive the famine, were forced to abandon their homes and scatter in different directions. This experience can be understood through the lens of displacement, a key concept in postcolonial theory. In colonial contexts, questions of space extend beyond the physical occupation of territory and are closely tied to the social, cultural, and historical foundations of collective existence. From this perspective, Fanon’s observation that “for a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land” acquires particular significance (Fanon, 1963: 44). Land functions not merely as a means of subsistence, but also as a repository of historical memory, cultural continuity, and collective identity. The loss of land, therefore, signifies far more than a change of residence. It entails the disruption of established ways of life, the severing of long-standing

ties to place, and the fragmentation of the social world through which communal existence is sustained. The mass movements of population during the famine years can be viewed within this framework. Deprived of the means necessary for survival, countless people were compelled to leave their native regions and wander in search of food and refuge. Such displacement was not simply a consequence of hunger; it also reflected the broader social and spatial dislocations produced by colonial policies. A vivid illustration of this process appears in Khusaiyn Bizhanov's documentary memoir "The Common Cauldron", where he describes the widespread scattering of the Kazakh population across the steppe as follows:

"(...) in the village there were two brothers, Saktibai and Shormaq. Saktibai had a son named Tilepbergen, and Shormaq had a daughter named Zeynep. Both children lost their parents to famine. Left orphaned and without care, the two children joined hands and crossed the Alatau mountains toward Kyrgyzstan.(...) Tilepbergen died on the way, while Zeynep reached the Kyrgyz side and survived" (Bizhanov, 2024: 207).

As can be observed from these excerpts, famine is narrated not only as hunger but also as spatial rupture and the separation of people from their land, one of the most violent manifestations of colonialism. Valery Mikhailov, in his memoir "The Disaster of Famine," provides figures not only for those who fled during famine but also for those who escaped "the fortune of joining the kolkhoz." According to his data based on official statistics, "if 121.2 thousand people left their homeland in 1930, then in 1931 1 million 74 thousand people, that is, one-third of the Kazakh population, left their native land" (Mikhailov, 2024: 53). However, the Soviet colonial system also attempted to restrict this dislocation within the framework of a planned policy of national destruction. For instance, "in March 1931, the Council of People's Commissars of Kazakhstan adopted a resolution 'On combating migration from the territory of Kazakhstan' and sent urgent letters to the heads of neighboring republics" (Issenov, 2024: 223). In a narrative recorded from writer Mukhtar Magauin, the theme of mass migration during famine is addressed as follows:

"In 1944 we moved; I was four years old at the time. (...) I still remember everything I saw on the road: abandoned winter settlements, houses with broken doors and windows, long since turned into wolf dens. Scattered human skeletons; herds of thousands of gazelles. Not a single village was encountered along the way – all had been completely destroyed by the catastrophe of 1932" (Mikhailov, 2024: 115).

The evidence suggests that, in all of the above testimonial texts, space is represented not merely as an empty territory but as a traumatic landscape marked with material traces of death. The scattering of skeletal remains transforms space into a site of memory, inscribing famine directly onto the body. At this point, testimonial discourse gradually shifts from space to the body, because the final and most authentic record of this catastrophe is the human body itself. While space becomes emptied, the body emerges as the "living archive" of that emptied space. Therefore, in the following testimonial texts, we observe not only the external devastation of famine but also its destruction of human physical existence. In other words, the ultimate representation of historical violence lies in emaciated, swollen, dead, and decaying bodies. For instance, in Token Bekmagambetov's memoir "After the Establishment of the Kolkhoz", bodily representation is described as follows:

"Along ravines and riverbanks, the bones of people who died of starvation were scattered. The village elder, Magauiya, gathered them and ensured they were properly buried. When

we regained some awareness and counted, we realized that out of nearly three hundred households of the Kerei and Kozhakeldi clans – approximately one and a half thousand people - only a few hundred had survived” (Bekmagambetov, 2024: 204).

This passage presents the human body not merely as an indicator of individual suffering, but as evidence of the destruction of an entire community. In this context, the “scattered bones” are understood not simply as the remains of those who perished during the famine, but as material traces and historical inscriptions of the famine experience itself. The consequences of starvation are thus conveyed not through statistical data or demographic calculations alone, but through a form of historical experience that can be read directly on the human body. In this sense, famine emerges as a phenomenon that left its mark not only on social morality and ethical relations, but also on the physical body itself. The body consequently becomes a site upon which history is inscribed, while its physical condition serves as a testimonial record preserving the consequences of famine. Kapash Galimov, for instance, recounts this history of famine as inscribed upon the human body in the following memoir passage:

“There was no sign of life around the village. Traces of humans and livestock, even smoke from chimneys, were absent. A silent, dead village.(...) The owners had fallen into eternal sleep where they had sat or lain. Some had embraced their children, others their loved ones. In some cases, bodies had decomposed, leaving only skeletons behind” (Galimov, 2024: 254).

These scenes likewise reveal how the reality of famine became inscribed upon the human body. The effects of starvation were manifested not only in the everyday lives of individuals, but also in their physical condition, bodily deterioration, and even in what remained after death. In this sense, the history of famine survives not solely in archival records or official statistics; it is also preserved in bones, decomposing bodies, unburied corpses, and human remains scattered across the landscape. Such images render visible the material traces of a historical catastrophe and the profound impact it exerted on human life. Put differently, the consequences of colonial policies became inscribed upon the body itself, transforming it into a historical text that bears witness to violence and suffering. The body thus emerges not merely as an object subjected to famine, but as a testimonial site upon which the effects of historical violence are recorded and preserved. Physical deterioration, emaciation, decomposition, and death can therefore be read as material evidence of a broader historical process. A further example of this “history written on the body” can be found in Seiten Sauytbekov’s memoir “What Have We Not Witnessed?”:

“The next day, I saw the body of an elderly man lying under a solitary tree, his eyes still open. I also came across a woman frozen in place, sitting and leaning against a roadside pole. As the saying goes, the eye sees all suffering; when I entered a dense forest, I saw a human skull torn apart by a pack of wolves. The long bones and skeletal remains of limbs were scattered across the road” (Sautbekov, 2024: 434-435).

The images of the “deceased old man,” the “frozen woman,” and the scattered “human skulls” and “bones” that appear in these accounts function as more than simple representations of famine. Rather, they serve as direct carriers of a colonial reality that often remains obscured within official narratives and statistical records. Such images render historical

experience visible at a tangible and immediate level, conveying forms of suffering that cannot be fully captured through demographic data alone. From this perspective, famine emerges as a historical force inscribed upon the human body itself. Even when deprived of the capacity to speak, the body continues to communicate through its condition, its presence within space, and the traces it leaves behind. In this sense, these corporeal images may be read as silent testimonies to a traumatic past. A comparable representation can be found in Valerii Mikhailov's memoir, recorded from the recollections of Gafu Kairbekov:

"The streets were full of adults. Most could no longer walk; exhausted, they crawled on all fours, dragging themselves forward. After briefly resting from extreme fatigue, they would scrape the ground with their fingers and continue moving. Some lay motionless on the road like felled trees. We had to step over several corpses before reaching the river" (Mikhailov, 2024: 30).

This excerpt demonstrates how death had become a normalized feature of everyday life during the famine. The human body functions here not merely as a marker of individual suffering but also as visible evidence of a broader humanitarian catastrophe. As famine intensified, death ceased to be an exceptional occurrence and instead became woven into the fabric of everyday existence. Mariyam Khakimzhankyzy's memoir reveals the next stage of this process, illustrating how the management and disposal of the dead became incorporated into the administrative routines of daily life:

"In March, we went out into the streets to collect the bodies of famine victims. Each brigade consisted of ten people. (...) From morning until evening, we went from street to street collecting corpses. We delivered the collected bodies to the Red Cross yard on the western outskirts of Almaty. Trucks loaded with bodies arrived from all directions. A large military truck stood there. The corpses were piled into its bed, alternating heads and legs in a crisscross manner. If all heads were placed on one side, the legs would sink unevenly" (Khakimzhankyzy, 2024: 178).

This passage provides a revealing example of how history becomes inscribed upon the human body within a colonial space. For instance, Khakimzhankyzy's account of famine victims being transported to the Red Cross yard on the western outskirts of Almaty and thrown into pits suggests a process through which individuals were deprived of their individuality even after death and reduced to entities that could be counted, transported, and administratively disposed of. In this context, death appears not solely as a personal tragedy but also as an element incorporated into broader mechanisms of administration and control. The body, therefore, emerges not only as a victim of famine but also as a site upon which the traces of this historical experience remain inscribed. It is in relation to this colonial condition that Achille Mbembe, in "On the Postcolony", offers the following observation:

"In such circumstances, the only possible relationship with him/her was one of violence and domination. At the heart of that relationship, the colonized could only be envisaged as the property and thing of power. He/she was a tool subordinated to the one who fashioned, and could now use and alter, him/her at will. As such, he/she belonged to the sphere of objects. They could be destroyed, as one may kill an animal, cut it up, cook it, and, if need be, eat it. It is in this respect that, in the colony, the body of the colonized was, in its profanity, assimilated to all other things. For, being simply a "body-thing," the colonized

was neither the substratum nor the affirmation of any spirit" (Mbembe, 2001: 26-27).

"I saw about ten corpses lying there. There were starving women and children among them. Their hair was tangled and matted. Seeing this, tears involuntarily came to my eyes. The bodies of four or five people in a cart were loaded onto my sleigh, and I was told: 'Take them to the yard on Khlebnaya Street and hand them over'" (Mashakov, 2024: 189-190).

These examples demonstrate that, the "yards on Khlebnaya Street" and the "Red Cross yard" in the previous examples clearly demonstrate how this violence extended to the most vulnerable and defenseless bodies. Ethical and cultural boundaries are completely erased, and the relationship to death loses its human content. Indeed, while earlier examples illustrated the transformation of villages into "landscapes of death," the disintegration of social structures, mass displacement, and demographic collapse as expressions of colonial famine, the final and most concrete manifestation of this process is concentrated in the human body itself. Corpses are no longer represented as mourned or buried individuals but as disposable masses. In poetic terms, they become the "living archive" of colonial historical violence.

Even those who transport the dead are, in Spivak's terms, subaltern subjects who do not issue orders but rather receive them (Spivak, 2022: 19). The fundamental feature of colonial governance is precisely this logic of command and enforced obedience, which, as Mbembe argues, is based on issuing orders and having them carried out (Mbembe, 2001: 32). In other words, what we see here is, in Aimé Césaire's terms, "thingification" (Césaire, 2000: 42). Through these texts, as Mike Davis argues regarding the process of "forced incorporation into colonial systems" (Davis, 2017: 19), it becomes clear that famine cannot be reduced to abstract categories such as "hardship" or "scarcity" within Soviet discourse. Rather, it emerges as a traumatic reality that speaks through space, time, and most importantly, the human body. Testimonial discourse thus constructs an alternative historical representation, exposing the violence-based structure of colonial power. Ultimately, in Césaire's words, "A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization" (Césaire, 2000: 31).

In conclusion, the testimonial discourse in "The Yellow Book" is not merely a collection of memories. Rather, the book can be understood as a crucial epistemological space that enables the formation of postcolonial memory and the rethinking of historical justice. Its "A Thousand Pastures" narrative disrupts the monopoly of colonial history, reconfigures historical truth, and brings marginalized voices into a new semantic space. In other words, the famine narrative within postcolonial memory appears as a fragmented trauma that continuously returns. In the articulation of such trauma, a polyphonic structure becomes particularly evident. Voices from different social, geographical, and experiential positions coexist within a single text, yet remain autonomous from power. Thus, through polyphony, "The Yellow Book" does not present a unified or monolithic history. Instead, it reveals the multi-layered, contradictory, and heterogeneous nature of historical experience. Each testimony is autonomous, yet their totality contributes to the formation of collective memory. Memory here is not a centrally controlled structure but a dynamic process emerging from the intersection of multiple voices.

4. Results

In writing about the literary representation of the famine period constructed within a colonial narrative, Edige Magauin's work "The Yellow Book" was employed. For the postcolonial, textual, comparative, and contextual analysis of this work, the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial scholars such as H. Bhabha, G. Spivak, F. Fanon, A. Memmi, and A. Césaire were utilized. Within this framework, the individual lived experiences and fragmented traumas of each author, the national identity of the subaltern, and their role in the process of decolonization were examined.

The study was structured into several sections focusing on the re-articulation of marginalized voices, fragmentary narration, counter-narratives to Soviet discourse, and the reconstruction of historical truth. For instance, the manifestations of regression resulting from colonial policy and the representation of colonial space within the re-articulation of marginalized voices were analyzed through the texts of eyewitnesses such as Gafu Kairbekov, Token Bekmagambetov, Tursyn Zhurtbay, Seitkassym Borankulov, and others.

Furthermore, the Soviet colonial narrative of the village as a site of agricultural production and socialist transformation was examined through the testimonies of Shaghi Sarsenbekova, Jortuyul Rysakov, Zhorabek Duisenbin, Nuguman Bayandin, and others. Through descriptions of abandoned houses, deserted settlements, and scattered human remains, the transformation of the Soviet village into a "landscape of death" was critically analyzed. Within the postcolonial interpretation of the concept of the village, the issue of dislocation was also addressed. Through the memoirs of Khusain Bizhanov, Valery Mikhailov, Mukhtar Magauin, and Token Bekmagambetov, the forced displacement, mass flight, and migratory survival strategies of local populations were discussed within a postcolonial framework. Additionally, through the texts of Kapash Galimov, Seiten Sautbekov, Mariyam Khakimzhankyzy, and Sadu Mashakov, the study explored how colonial history was inscribed not only onto social and political structures but also onto the bodies of both the living and the dead, and how corpses were transformed into objectified, quantifiable, and disposable masses.

5. Conclusion

A defining characteristic of all colonial systems is their tendency to describe historical events as "natural," "legitimate," and "progressive," thereby normalizing violence and acts of destruction in order to legitimize their rule over local populations. In the Soviet narrative, a similar strategy was employed, whereby catastrophic events such as famine were framed through neutralized terms such as "food shortage" or "the path toward communism."

Accordingly, demographic collapse in the Kazakh steppe, the disintegration of social structures, the abandonment of villages, and mass displacement were long obscured or distorted both during the colonial period and in the early years of independence. From this perspective, Edige Magauin's documentary memoir collection "The Yellow Book" acquires particular significance as an alternative to the colonial narrative. The authors included in this work reject abstract and euphemistic language and instead reconstruct famine through bodily, traumatic, and extreme experiential registers.

As a result, marginalized voices are re-articulated, revealing previously neglected dimensions of historical truth. Through the texts of Gafu Kairbekov, Token Bekmagambetov,

Tursyn Zhurtbay, Seitkassym Borankulov, and others, the “softened” representation of the famine period is replaced with its authentic, lived reality. Through the memoirs of Shaghi Sarsenbekova, Jortuyul Rysakov, Zhorabek Duisenbin, Nuguman Bayandin, and others, the Soviet village is revealed as a site of death rather than socialist progress. Through the accounts of Khusain Bizhanov, Valery Mikhailov, Mukhtar Magauin, and Token Bekmagambetov, mass displacement is presented as a counter-narrative to colonial discourse. Through the texts of Kapash Galimov, Seiten Sautbekov, Mariyam Khakimzhankyzy, and Sadu Mashakov, the operations of colonial power over dead bodies are critically examined.

However, these documentary memoirs should not be understood as mere representations of the past. Rather, they constitute an epistemological space that deconstructs colonial discourse and enables a rethinking of historical justice. For while the Soviet regime long deprived Kazakh society of “light” and subsequently attributed that “darkness” to the very people it had oppressed, the documentary texts examined here function as a beacon illuminating the question of to whom that imposed “darkness” truly belongs.

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