



“Sanctioned Trespassing”: Rhythmanalyzing Rome in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Roman Stories*

Minu Susan Koshy*

Abstract

Henri Lefebvre, in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (1992), established rhythmanalysis as a potent tool to engage with urban space. To analyse the rhythms of the city, the rhythmanalyst has to be one simultaneously within and outside the grasp of the rhythms. Migrants possess the potential to be ideal rhythmanalysts in that they are within the rhythms of the city they call their new home, while being simultaneously being outside them by virtue of their status as ‘trespassers.’ John McLeod, in *Global Trespassers* (2024), characterises migrants as “sanctioned trespassers,” (5) playing on the double meaning of the word ‘sanction’ as ‘permission’ and ‘restriction.’ As subjects ‘allowed’ to flourish, but within the limits laid down by the mainstream, migrants possess a unique vantage point from which they can observe and analyse the rhythms of the new homeland, while negotiating with urban space as insider-outsiders. My paper is a rhythmanalytic study of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Roman Stories* (2023), through the eyes of migrants engaging with urban space in the city of Rome.,

Keywords: Urban Space, Cities, Migrants, Insiders and Outsiders, Rhythm.

“Rhythms. Rhythms. They reveal and they hide. Rhythms: the music of the City, a scene that listens to itself, an image in the present of a discontinuous sum.”

—Lefebvre 36

Introduction

Urban space is marked by a multitude of rhythms that intersect and engage with each other constantly, shaping, and in turn being shaped,

* Assistant Professor (English), Mar Thoma College for Women, affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala

by the lives that unfold with the city. Rhythms are fundamentally constituted by the intersection of space, time and energy. All spatio-temporal systems are inevitably constituted and marked by rhythms, which enable the territorialisation of space. In “Territories, Environments, Politics” (2022) Brighenti and Karrholm assert that “rhythms are spatialized times and, simultaneously, temporalized spaces, so territories are no less temporal than spatial” (2). This becomes particularly significant in the case of “migrant cities” (Panayi 2) where there is a high concentration of migrants who contribute to the growth and development of the city. The territory of the city becomes a problematic one for the migrants, caught between the familiar rhythms of the homeland and the novel ones in the host city. John McLeod, in *Global Trespassers* (2024), characterises migrants as “sanctioned trespassers,” (5) playing on the double meaning of the word ‘sanction’ as ‘permission’ and ‘restriction.’ As subjects ‘allowed’ to flourish, but within the limits laid down by the mainstream, migrants possess a unique vantage point from which they can observe and analyse the rhythms of the new homeland, while negotiating with urban space as insider-outsiders.

Rhythmanalysis, as envisaged by Henri Lefebvre, can serve as a potent mode of analysis to understand locales populated by liminal entities such as migrants, who enable transnational rhythms within the space of the city, even as they mould themselves through existing rhythms in the new country. Rhythms possess the capacity to unveil hidden ideologies and power dynamics inherent in their sites by incorporating alterations in pace and style. This is particularly significant in the case of cities with large migrant populations, where racial violence and micro aggressive practices against ‘outsiders’ abound, and often obtain quasi-legal sanction. My paper is a rhythmanalytic study of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Roman Stories* (2023), through the eyes of migrants engaging with urban space in the city of Rome, negotiating and renegotiating their identities as “sanctioned trespassers” (McLeod 5) in the global city. Rome, which had, from its inception, been a city of migrants, housing refugees, slaves and exiles (McIntyre), functions as the locus around which the narratives in Lahiri’s work revolves. The aura of ancientness associated with Rome, along with its status as a modern capital city, makes it a potent

venue for the study of rhythms centred on spatio-temporal intersections and energy.

The study employs rhythmanalysis as a methodological framework to comprehend the dynamics of urban rhythms depicted in Lahiri's *Roman Stories*, through the perspective of migrant subjects. It is primarily a textual analysis involving a detailed reading of the primary text against the background of urban studies scholarship, with specific reference to the theoretical contributions of Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault. Since the investigation is centred on the experiences of migrant subjects, significant inputs have been drawn from the field of mobility studies. The analysis focuses on the intersections of urban rhythms with the quotidian life of migrants, who function as rhythmanalysts observing and engaging actively with the city as 'trespassers', who have, nevertheless, been 'permitted' to flourish. Through this methodology, the study aims contribute to the discourse on urban mobility studies, utilising rhythms as a mode of engagement.

Rhythmanalysis was established as a method of analysing the city by Henri Lefebvre, who, in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (1992), defined rhythms as being created by "the interaction of space, time and an expenditure of energy" (15). For there to be a rhythm, there has to be differentiated repetition. Lefebvre maintained that daily life is constituted by multiple rhythms which co-exist, sometimes in harmony and at other times, in dissonance with each other. He identified various kinds of rhythms including the linear and cyclical rhythms, as also various states in which they co-exist, namely eurythmia, arrhythmia, polyrhythmia and isorhythmia. Lefebvre foregrounds corporeality as central to any rhythmanalytic project, since the body as a polyrhythmic site is essential to measure and analyse external rhythms. The paper takes into account the various aspects of rhythmanalysis as expounded by Lefebvre in order to comprehend the rhythms of Rome, constituting, and in turn, being constituted, by the presence and movement of migrant subjects, liminal entities constantly 'trespassing' into the city with 'sanction(s).'

The Migrant Flaneur as Rhythmanalyst

The rhythmmanalyst listens to the City, with her/his body as the metronome to measure not only the sounds and “noises,” but also the “murmurs” and “silences” (Lefebvre 19) in the city. The body functions as the metronome against which the rhythms of the metropolis are measured. The rhythmmanalyst must be simultaneously within and outside rhythms in order to perceive and assess them. Lefebvre asserts that “in order to grasp and analyse rhythms, it is necessary to get outside them, but not completely; it is therefore necessary to situate oneself simultaneously inside and outside (27). The rhythmmanalyst, thus, has to be one who is able to observe and listen to the rhythms ‘from outside’ even while remaining within them.

The diasporic subject thus becomes the perfect rhythmmanalyst in that (s)he is both a part of the city’s rhythm and yet, essentially outside it. He/she contributes to it, yet, (s)he can be a spectator, gazing at the street and the city from a location that is unique to him/her. The everyday spectacle of the street, the music of the city, can be perceived in all its complexities by the diasporic subject with her/his ability to be both internal and external to the city. The city as a text unfurls itself before the diasporic rhythmmanalyst, thereby making it possible for him/her to perceive an alternate vision of the new ‘homeland’.
(Koshy, *Rhythmanalyzing New York* 126)

The status of the migrant as a “sanctioned trespasser” (McLeod 5) permitted to flourish within invisible conditions laid down by the mainstream enables her/his to be within the rhythms of the city even while remaining external to them. In Lahiri’s *Roman Stories*, located in the city of Rome, the narrators are mostly migrant subjects negotiating with the space of the new homeland, trying to integrate and assimilate, despite being aware of their perpetual status as ‘outsiders.’ Their acute consciousness of their situation prompts them to observe and analyse the city in order to devise strategies and “tactics” (De Certeau 37) to appropriate its space and feel ‘homed.’ The rhythms of the city dictate and modify their daily lives, as well

as the migrant consciousness within them, transforming them into rhythm analysts constantly in negotiation with the movements, noises and silences within the city.

The migrants in the stories – the “*moretta*” (Lahiri 19), the protagonist of “Well-Lit House,” the mother in “Notes” and the maid in “The Delivery” are all immigrants, possibly from Asian countries, as stereotyped descriptions of their appearance and food habits reveal. They are flâneurs, navigating the city, watching the urban spectacle unfold before them. Being immigrants, the ‘pleasure’ of watching the city seems to be lacking in the narratives, with the characters encountering the space of Rome as a potentially dangerous site where their existence is precarious. Nevertheless, they measure the rhythms of the new city, often engaging in comparisons with those of their homeland as insider-outsiders, thus becoming rhythm analysts grasped by, and yet beyond, the rhythms of Rome.

“The ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below,’ below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandersmanner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’” (De Certeau 93). The migrant subjects in Roman Stories, most of whom belong to the lower rungs of the social ladder, resort to walking as a means of comprehending the rhythms of the city. The Muslim migrant in “Well-Lit House” takes his wife on walks in the park, so that “she could get to know the city” (Lahiri 68). However, it is interesting to note that their walking remains mostly confined to the relative safety of the park. The insults hurled at them in the public sphere renders ‘walking in the city’ unsafe for the migrant. As sanctioned trespassers, ‘allowed’ to flourish within norms laid down by the mainstream, the husband and wife, who are doubly marginalised owing to their status as Muslim migrants, finds *flânerie* outside the boundaries of the park dangerous. The ‘joy’ that the mainstream associates with *flânerie* is unavailable to the migrant subject, making the idea of the flâneur as a “passionate spectator” (Baudelaire 24) or a relaxed observer of the urbanscape, untenable in the case of subjects rendered marginal. The rhythms of the city are perceived as threatening rather than enjoyable for those accused of trespassing. This is further illustrated in the case of the maid who walks to her employer’s house, taking in the sights the city offers.

I decide to walk back . . . I stop on the bridge for a moment to look at the river. . . The river is green. On the wall, just by my elbow, I notice a mass of ants. They're transporting a dead fly . . . And as usual I notice a young couple slowly kissing . . . A light push, perhaps even a gust of wind, would be enough to send her backwards over the edge. After crossing the bridge, I walk beneath a derelict archway sprouting weeds. (130)

Unlike the privileged flaneur conceptualised by Baudelaire, Benjamin and Simmel among others, the sights in the city are all marked by an aura of pessimism for the maid, reflecting her awareness of her own precarious existence. The awareness reaches its culmination when the Italian boys hurl racist slurs at her and shoot her in the shoulder. Walking the city becomes a dangerous act for the immigrant lower class subject, whose *flânerie* enables her to perceive rhythms of pessimism rather than the much-celebrated 'urban spectacle.' De Certeau argues that walking is a means through which pedestrians appropriate the topographical system. However, for the sanctioned trespasser, the migrant, the city remains ever-elusive. The hostile rhythms of the new city, engendered by communal and racial violence, renders any appropriation of the city difficult, if not impossible, for the migrant. The agency attributed to walkers in the city by Western theorists such as De Certeau and Baudelaire, do not hold ground in the case of 'secondary' subjects within urban space. As such, their perception of urban rhythms is grounded in fear and caution rather than the desire to "manipulate spatial organizations" (De Certeau 101) or assert their agency, as the characters in the stories indicate. Nevertheless, walking the city is an emotionally loaded act for the characters since, "to walk is to lack a place" (De Certeau 103) and they are subjects with no place, caught between the rhythms of the homeland and those of the new city. Through the act of walking, they attempt to comprehend urban rhythms as insider-outsiders, although it is an act fraught with complications.

The Migrant City as a Site of Arrhythmia

In *Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre discusses the various modes in which rhythms co-exist in polyrhythmic spaces. When they "unite with one

another in the state of health, in normal (which is to say normed!) everydayness,” it is called eurythmia. When “they are discordant, there is suffering, a pathological state” (16) which is called arrhythmia. The influx of migrants is viewed with suspicion by the natives of cities who believe that the ‘trespassers’ would damage the equilibrium in the social order, by bringing with them new modes of living and thinking. On the other hand, the migrants who wish to integrate with the mainstream and maintain their uniqueness in equal measure, find themselves caught in the entangling rhythms of the new homeland and their original place. When they carry their belief systems and traditional practices into the new spaces they inhabit, polyrhythmic sites are created. However, these sites often become sites of conflict between the mainstream and the new entrants, leading to the emergence of arrhythmia. The existing rhythms of the city are ruptured by violent ones emerging from ethnic and racial violence. The ensuing arrhythmia renders the city a potentially dangerous site for the migrant subjects, for whom the rhythms of the new city become the cause of anxiety rather than leisurely enjoyment.

The sense of alienation, combined with their relegation to the margins by the mainstream social order, leads to the migrant rhythm analyst reading the rhythms of the city as existing in dissonance with each other. Alhadeff-Jones, in “Beyond space and time—Conceiving the rhythmic configurations of adult education through Lefebvre’s rhythm analysis” (2019) maintains that arrhythmia may be “subjectively perceived, represented or lived as a feeling of incongruence and disconnection, a lack of harmony or a disagreement that expresses dissonance” (173). The migrant remains a perpetual outsider in the city, alienated and discriminated against, by virtue of her/his nationality, language or culture. As such, rhythm analysis through the lens of migrants would inevitably reveal the dissonance and incongruent rhythms in the space of the city.

Roman Stories features the city functioning as an arrhythmic site as experienced by migrant rhythm analysts. The cyclical rhythms occurring at “large and simple intervals” (Lefebvre 30) and the linear rhythms “consisting of journeys to and fro” (30) intersect with the daily lives of the migrant subjects, shaping their encounters and experiences within the city. Lefebvre describes the two kinds of rhythms thus: “The cyclical is social organisation manifesting itself.

The linear is the daily grind, the routine, therefore the perpetual, made up of chance and encounters” (30). For the migrant, both cyclical and linear rhythms remain sites of discrimination, alienation and the source of arrhythmia in the new city.

The mother in the story “Notes”, goes to drop her children to school every day by bus. The linear rhythm created by the daily movement to and from school is one where the migrant subject becomes acutely conscious of her status as an unwelcome outsider. “. . . [I] cram myself on the bus with the twins, standing the entire way to that distant and sleepy neighbourhood you passed on the way to the airport. No one ever gave up their seat, and if we spoke in our own language, the elderly passengers would stare” (162). The rhythms of the ‘trespasser’s’ language renders them objects to be gazed at, pointing to how the intersection of novel rhythms with the existing ones created by the ‘insiders’ leads to arrhythmia and dissonance. The seemingly calm neighbourhood which the narrator passes by in the bus, becomes a site of trauma for her owing to the contrast between the serene rhythms outside and the tense rhythms inside the space of the bus. Even as she “settles into a rhythm” (Lahiri 164) after accepting a new job in the same school years later, the rhythms are ruptured by the xenophobic notes she finds in her pockets. Her initial excitement about going to the school vanishes with her awareness of her status as a ‘trespasser’ and she begins to dread going there, creating secret rhythms of paranoia and fear in her psyche. Her already-strained relationship with the city breaks apart completely due to her perception of dissonant rhythms which refuse to accommodate her.

Similarly, in “The Boundary”, the secret physiological and psychological rhythms of the migrant is ruptured when the protagonist’s father, who used to sell flowers in a central location, is attacked by racists who tell him to “go back to wherever you came from” (12). The rhythms of the new city and the psychological rhythms tying the migrants to their homelands enter into a conflictual relationship, creating psychological strife and xenophobic attacks. “Well-Lit House” showcases a Muslim migrant couple chased away from their residential area owing to their religion and racial identity. The woman, “with her dress that hung to her feet and her head draped by a veil – the only way she felt comfortable going out” (Lahiri 66)

becomes an object of suspicion. The presence of the Muslim woman asserting her agency through the niqab creates paranoia in the psyche of the mainstream, who fear that “in twenty years, they’ll all be that way” (Lahiri 76). Their fear of the rhythms of the liberal city being ruptured by the influx of new religious identities get reflected here. The reluctance of the migrant to let go of the rhythms of the homeland and their status as sanctioned trespassers in Rome, combined with the secret psychological rhythms of paranoia in the mainstream, renders them vulnerable to xenophobic attacks. The Muslim couple is denied a space to live in, forcing the woman to return to her war-torn nation, and the man to seek refuge in the ‘abandoned’ city space of the underpass. The cyclical domestic rhythms of their daily life are ruptured, finally leading the man to commit suicide.

In “The Girl”, the protagonist taking a swim in the river under the guidance of a man becomes a cause of shame for the migrant family with its strict rules and taboos centred on sexuality, and she is chastised. The strictures laid down by the family make it impossible for her to integrate with her Italian counterparts, leading to subtle acts of exclusion and microaggression aimed at her. Innumerable instances of racial violence and discrimination create a fear of the city in the migrants who gradually withdraw to their homes or shift to the countryside where they feel ‘safer’. The arrhythmia created by their outsider status transforms both the migrant subjects and the city, creating a pathological situation where racial violence gets normalised.

Linear rhythms created by chance meetings and planned encounters abound in the city as depicted in *Roman Stories*. There are frequent meetings of friends, regular parties and events where people meet and interact. In the case of migrant subjects, such meetings become arrhythmic sites where their ‘outsider’ status gets highlighted, since the urban crowd that renders them invisible in public spaces is absent during such encounters in trattorias, cafes and domestic spaces. In “The Re-entry,” the two friends who meet in a trattoria symbolise two racial groups rather than two individuals in that, they are acutely aware of the degrees to which they ‘belong’ to the city. The migrant professor who works on ancient Roman history “knows the city well and loves it,” (16) staying in Rome for long periods of time, while the Italian woman has left Rome for another

city. Nevertheless, the irony emerges in the way the staff in the trattoria treat them. While the white woman is accorded respect and dignity, the migrant woman is rendered nameless and labelled “*la moretta*” (“the black woman”) by the Italian owners of the trattoria. ‘*La Moretta*,’ a black mask worn by Venetian women in the 17th and 18th centuries, and later used in carnivals, has another name – ‘*la muta*’ or ‘the mute.’ The racist slur thus not only denies her a name or an identity, but also a voice or the capacity of articulate herself. The migrant is rendered a ‘mute’ subject, a mask, rather than a human being with agency. She becomes a subject vulnerable to being humiliated owing to her status as a migrant. While her Italian friend who had long abandoned Rome still finds friends and acquaintances in the streets and café, the professor, despite her loyalty to the city, remains isolated in the vast urban landscape of Rome. Although she tells her companion that Rome is the only place where she feels at home, the encounter at the trattoria creates new rhythms of realisation in her psyche, forcing her to confront her own status as an outsider who will perpetually be denied a sense of ‘belonging’ by the city she calls home.

As she says this, however, she fears that her relationship with the city is actually quite tenuous. In the end, she has no personal link to the history she studies, nor will she ever experience the comfort of having lunch in a trusted restaurant that forms part of her family’s history, that holds within it memories of countless lunches between father and daughter, a space that soothes her friend even after such an immense loss. (22)

The rhythms of the city, which, till then, had seemed welcoming for the professor, suddenly turn threatening as she makes the realisation that she is a trespasser only ‘allowed’ to flourish within the unwritten laws laid down by the non-migrant Italian mainstream.

The cyclical rhythms engendered by work and play, with families going on vacations and parties at the beginning of holidays, lead to the forging or rupture of romantic relationships and friendships in the city. Parties also become venues where people from diverse backgrounds meet and interact, promising to meet later. In

“P’s Parties,” the writer establishes a romantic relationship with a migrant woman who he met at the party, and his wife strikes up a friendship with the same woman, leading to domestic strife. The protagonist’s romantic relationship with a man she meets on a holiday in “Dante Alighieri” and the homosexual relationship established by the father in “Two Brother” lead to the complete rupture of the fabric of the normative family, setting new rhythms in motion in their lives spent between the city and the countryside. The non-normative relationships thus established and the consequent arrhythmia mark the city for the characters, with specific locations serving as repositories of unpleasant memories. Although those who ‘belong,’ such as the narrator’s friend in “The Reentry” and the wife in “Two Brothers” have the privilege of escaping from such sites, the migrant subject, already caught between two worlds, finds a complete break from the new city impossible. As the Professor in “Dante Alighieri” remarks: “Rome switches between heaven and hell. By now it’s choke-full of things that have been broken, mistaken, bent, tossed, killed, but I can’t cut my ties” (202). The lack of agency stems as much from practical considerations pertaining to citizenship and work, as to emotional bonds forged with the rhythms of the city.

Although vacation spots and parties serve as seemingly carnivalesque locations within the city where rhythms coexist harmoniously in a state of eurythmia, the encounters in these spaces are marked by racial tension. The narrator in “P’s Parties” observes how the migrants and non-migrants gradually move into separate cliques during the course of the party, with the latter being transient visitors invited so that the host seems inclusive, rather than out of any genuine friendship, and often excluded from important events.

You’d encounter two distinct groups like two opposing currents . . . forming a perfectly symmetrical shape, only to cancel each other out a moment later. On one side, there were those like me and my wife, old friends of P and her husband who came every year, and on the other, our counterparts: foreigners who’d show up for a few years, or sometimes just once. (28)

The 'us-them' dichotomy becomes more conspicuous in the ensuing lines where the narrator draws clear distinctions between "them" and "those of us born and raised in Rome" (28). The subtle privileging of the latter and the perception of the migrants as a "nomadic population - prototypes for one of my future stories" (28) reveals how urban rhythms as perceived by non-migrants, function as cadences of privilege, transforming 'outsiders' into dehumanised objects to be dissected and analysed. The discordant notes established when the two groups intersect create arrhythmia in the space of the seemingly inclusive city.

Even as the city accommodates migrants and provides them opportunities to build a life, the rhythms of discordance within the urban space render it impossible for the subjects to flourish beyond the limits laid down by the mainstream. The urbanscape, dominated by the rhythms of the mainstream, becomes a potentially dangerous site where the migrant is constantly at risk of being attacked – verbally or physically. The micro aggressive practices directed against such 'liminal' subjects not only prevent the integration of their unique rhythms into the urban space, but also create problematic cadences that ultimately rupture the fabric of the city and the family.

The Migrant City as Rhythmic Heterotopia

Michel Foucault introduced the concept of 'heterotopia' in 1967, to indicate places and institutions where "existing places serve as counter-sites where the other sites of everyday existence are represented and contested" (Koshy, *Mapping the Postcolonial Domestic* 132). They "create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled" (Foucault and Miskowiec 8). Foucault terms it "the heterotopia of compensation" (8). The new city serves to compensate for the disorder and chaos, the lack of opportunities, or any other absence, in the homeland. For the migrant, the city is a new version of their homeland, while at the same time, it functions as a contrast to the latter at multiple levels. For instance, in "Well-Lit House", the narrator finds Rome to be a city which accepts them, albeit reluctantly, and when he shifts to the new house, he gains some semblance of 'belonging' as might have been the case in his

homeland. However, the peaceful ambience of the city stands in contrast to the war-torn country from which he has escaped. The compensatory heterotopic rhythms of Rome make it a counter-site where the migrant negotiates with his dual identity.

Rome is located between the Foucauldian “crisis heterotopia” and “heterotopias of deviation” (Foucault 4-5). It becomes a place where the migrants, who have left their homeland willingly or unwillingly, due to socio-economic or political crisis or even psychological crisis, recuperate. They are given the opportunity to begin again, although such opportunities are severely proscribed within stereotyped notions of migrant. At the same time, they are perceived as ‘deviant’ by the mainstream social order, and considered as potential threats to the ‘ethos’ of the city. In Lahiri’s work, the Italian couple’s concern that the migrants will overtake their city, and the old woman’s refusal to get “her groceries delivered by some boy from another country” (91) are clear indications of how migrants are perceived as deviant imposters. As such, there are conflicting rhythms within the heterotopic space of the city, which is reflected in the psyche of the migrant subjects as well.

Another principle of heterotopia is that access to such sites involve rites of opening and closing. Foucault asserts that:

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public space. Either the entry is compulsory . . . or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in, one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures. (7)

The migrant is merely a ‘sanctioned trespasser,’ who, in order to enter the city and obtain access to its resources, have to submit to rites involving legal procedures and a literal or symbolic purging of ties to the homeland. It is only with the permission of the law and even the mainstream subjects that the migrant can enter the city. The migrants in *Roman Stories* are ‘sanctioned’ in both senses of the term - they are ‘permitted’ inside and at the same time, they are ‘under sanctions.’ The near impossibility of a migrant obtaining a house with

government support, and the way in which the mainstream ensures that such spaces are wrenched away from the migrant even if s/he receives access, are highlighted in the stories. Even the rites and purification do not seem adequate for them to 'belong' to the heterotopic space of the city. As such, the heterotopic rhythms as experienced by migrant subjects are always premised on the condition of their subjugation to the cadences created by the mainstream.

Foucauldian heterotopias "inject alterity into the sameness, the commonplace, the topicality of everyday society" (Foucault and Miskowiec 4). The migrant city thus becomes a Foucauldian heterotopia by functioning as a counter-rhythmic site where novel rhythms are created by the existence of 'trespassers.' For there to be a rhythm, there has to be differentiated repetition. The monotonous repetition of the same sound does not create a rhythm; there has to be some alterity, some change in the sound or movement. The heterotopic space of the city, by introducing the alterity, enables the creation and proliferation of multifarious rhythms, moulding, and in turn, being moulded by the 'trespassing' consciousness of the migrant.

Production of Urban Rhythms through Dressage

Lefebvre asserts that most rhythms are determined by dressage or the breaking in of human beings. Subjects deemed 'deviant' or 'different' are brought 'under control' by the state and the mainstream by teaching them to behave in a certain way and to accept strictures without objection.

To enter into a society, group or nationality is to accept values (that are taught) . . . but also to bend oneself (to be bent) to its ways. Which means to say: dressage. Human break themselves in. They learn to hold themselves. Dressage can go a long way: as far as breathing, movements, sex. It bases itself on repetition . . . One presents them with the same situation, prepares them to encounter the same state of things and people. Repetition . . . is ritualized in humans. Thus, in us, *presenting ourselves* or

presenting another entails operations that are not only stereotyped but also consecrated: rites. (Lefebvre 39)

The migrants in *Roman Stories* are repeatedly exposed to the same circumstances and experiences of marginality, so that racial attacks and discrimination, constitute the ‘everyday’ and not the ‘extra-everyday’ for them. The mother in “Notes” remembers the bus rides to the school as “a pleasant memory,” (Lahiri 162) despite the discrimination she faces in the bus. Being exposed to xenophobia on a daily basis, she learns to bend herself to suit the interests of the mainstream. The dressage that occurs through repetition makes her a docile subject, obedient to the state and the mainstream. She “has no desire to file any kind of report” (167) regarding the xenophobic notes she receives, precisely because she has been conditioned to accept racial discrimination as ‘normal.’ Neither her sons nor the school protects her since her migrant status renders her a ‘*homo sacer*,’ who can be persecuted with veiled legal sanction. Agamben describes the *homo sacer* as “one whom the people have judged on account of a crime,” (71) the crime here being the mere fact of the subject being a migrant who is within, and at the same time, outside the law.

Again, in “The Delivery”, the maid does not object to the rudeness of the employee in the post-office; nor does she express any visible anger or resistance. Instead, she “feels terrible and hopes the *signora* won’t be too angry” (130). The young man who shoots her dismisses his friend’s objection to his act, saying it was “only to scare her” (134). The perception of the migrant as a *homo sacer*, who can be attacked with no threat of legal action, becomes evident here. Such acts are passively accepted by the migrants as ‘normal,’ indicative of the way in which they are ‘broken in’ to accept any kind of treatment and any kind of opportunity available to them. In Lahiri’s work, there are innumerable instances of migrant subjects passively accepting menial jobs despite their educational qualifications. Lahiri mentions a man who had studied Chemistry in his homeland but worked in a pizzeria in Italy. Most of the migrants engage in menial jobs or assist Italian shop-owners for low salaries. The only instance in the work where a migrant raises his voice against the injustice meted out to his family is in “Well-Lit House” where he discusses the issue with the media and attempts to get the legal system involved. The newspaper

does not publish his interview and the police gradually withdraw from the site of trouble, pointing to the modes in which the dominant rhythms subdue the voice of the migrant, condemned by his dressage.

The state colludes with the citizens in order to bring the pathological figure of the migrant under control. S/he is broken in with complete sanction from the state and the law, with violence against migrants being tolerated, and even encouraged by the mainstream, who are aware of the latter's status as subjects within, and at the same time, outside the purview of the law. The biopolitical power of the state extends to the psyche of the migrant, who is forced to accept her/his dehumanisation as 'normal.' Any possibility of resistant or visibly discordant rhythms are thus crushed by the mainstream, through the dressage of the migrant.

Conclusion

Rome, as depicted by Lahiri, in *Roman Stories*, thus functions as a polyrhythmic site inhabited by subjects from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, who negotiate with each other and with the city, creating multifarious rhythms in the process. Migrants, being perceived as 'sanctioned trespassers' by the state and the mainstream, are exposed to and forced to accommodate the rhythms created and maintained by the mainstream to protect their interests. The violence that would ordinarily be perceived as the 'extra-everyday' for the normative subject, becomes the 'everyday' for the migrant, forced by her/his dressage to accept the norms of the new land without resistance. Rhythmanalyzing the migrant city inevitably involves an unearthing of the hidden rhythms of micro aggressive practices and discrimination directed at migrant subjects, who are valued for their labour power, even as they are rendered invisible and 'dirty' by the mainstream. The arrhythmic urbanscape thus becomes a dangerous site for the migrant, who is denied human dignity and basic rights within the city, becoming the "sacred (wo)man" or "the *homo sacer*," (Agamben 71) an ambivalent entity vulnerable to being persecuted, and even killed, with impunity.

Works Cited

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.
Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford UP, 1998.

- Alhadeff-Jones, Michel. "Beyond Space and Time – Conceiving the Rhythmic Configurations of Adult Education through Lefebvre's Rhythmanalysis." *Im Fokus*, vol.42, 30 Apr. 2019, pp. 165–81. *SpringerLink*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40955-019-0133-0>. Accessed 12 May 2024.
- Baudelaire, Charles. "The Painter of Modern Life." *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Translated by Jonathan Mayne, Phaidon P, 1964, pp. 1–40.
- Brighenti, Andrea and Mattias Karrholm. *Territories, Environments, Politics*. Routledge, 2022.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. U of California P, 2011.
- Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowicz. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22–27. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>. Accessed 30 May 2024.
- Koshy, Minu Susan. *Mapping the Postcolonial Domestic in the Works of Vargas Llosa and Mukundan: Tales of the Threshold*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021.
- . "Rhythmanalysing New York through Diasporic Lens: A Study of Nikhil Advani's *Kal Ho Naa Ho* and Karan Johar's *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*." *Ars Artium*, vol. 4, no.1, 2016, pp.125–30.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Roman Stories*. Knopf, 2023.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythmanalysis: The Production of Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.
- McIntyre, Gwyneth. "Rome as a City of Immigrants." *Rome: A Study in Urban History*, BCcampus, 12 Aug. 2019, <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/unromantest/chapter/rome-as-a-city-of-immigrants/>. Accessed 30 May 2024.
- McLeod, John. *Global Trespassers*. Manchester UP, 2000.
- Panayi, Panikos. *The Migrant City: A New History of London*. Yale UP, 2020.