

OCCASIONAL PAPER

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND): Reinterpreting Oppression in the 4IR

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Abstract: Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND) offers a contemporary theoretical framework for understanding the pervasive and cyclical nature of oppression in modern society. Emerging in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), this approach reinterprets oppression beyond the confines of historical colonialism, proposing that power dynamics infiltrate all realms of human existence—ranging from intimate personal relationships to global political and economic systems. At its core, PND frames oppression as a binary between the Oppressor and the Oppressed, present in both direct and subtle forms across technological, social, emotional, and cultural domains. PND situates oppression within the globalized landscape of the 4IR, where technological and corporate entities, alongside societal constructs like gender, love, sex, and economics, serve as new forms of domination. The approach critiques how power is exercised through digital, psychological, and economic control rather than direct territorial authority, emphasizing the emergence of "Neo-Dominionism" as a global, multifaceted structure of control. The lens calls for the re-contextualization of colonial relationships, extending them into contemporary settings such as familial ties, corporate environments, and even personal relationships, arguing that these areas are rife with unequal power structures. In examining literature through this lens, PND reveals how texts embody the dynamics of oppression, as seen in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The relationship between Pozzo and Lucky exemplifies ultra-colonialism, wherein the oppressor dominates both physically and intellectually, while the oppressed is reduced to a subjugated, dependent state. This analysis of Beckett's play highlights the cyclical, pervasive nature of oppression and its manifestation in both public and private spheres. Through its exploration of power dynamics in diverse contexts, Panoptic Neo-Dominionism offers valuable insights into how oppression operates in the 21st century, urging a critical examination of how both historical and post-modern forms of subjugation shape our lived experiences.

Keywords: Panoptic Neo-Dominionism, oppression, power dynamics, Fourth Industrial Revolution, ultra-colonialism

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism provides a powerful lens through which to understand the widespread and insidious nature of oppression in modern society, revealing how power dynamics extend into all aspects of human life. In the contemporary landscape of literary theory, the conceptualization of “OPPRESSION” has evolved alongside the expanding societal narratives of power, colonialism, and structural inequalities. Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (2020-Present) seeks to reframe these longstanding issues through the lens of Panoptic Neo-Dominionism and Ultra-Colonialism dynamics in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), a context where technology, economics, gender, love, sex and societal structures reshape the nature of oppression.

The core tenet of Panoptic Neo-Dominionism is that oppression in all its forms — from the most intimate personal relationships to grand societal systems — can be understood through the binary relationship between the Oppressor and the Oppressed. This dynamic is not limited to historical imperialism or colonization alone but extends into the cultural, technological, intellectual, sexual, emotional and economic realms of the modern world.

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND) theorizes that oppression exists as a pervasive force in every aspect of human interaction and organization, from family structures and corporate settings to state governance, romantic relationships, and, notably, life and literature. This lens offers a framework that seeks to explain the dynamics of power and subjugation that operate across diverse texts, historical moments, social and global contexts.

Key Features of Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND)

1. **Omnipresence of Oppression:** Oppression is not confined to traditional colonial history but is a structural condition that affects every facet of life. Whether it's the control of knowledge, manipulation of labor, or imposition of ideologies, Panoptic Neo-Dominionism insists that oppression operates endlessly and cyclically from the personal to the global stage.
2. **Re-contextualization of Colonial Relationships:** Panoptic Neo-Dominionism reinterprets the role of the colonizer and the colonized, expanding it beyond the historical context of empire to include any form of dominance. The lens argues that even love, family relationships, and corporate interactions can embody these same structures of control, subjugation, and dependency.
3. **Technological and Economic Forces as New Colonizers:** With the rise of the 4IR, technological and corporate entities as well as the social media gain an unprecedented level of power, exploiting workers, information, media, human psyche and culture. This leads to the modern form of Panoptic Neo-Dominionism Lens, where

control is exerted not just through physical domination, but through economic, digital, psychological and cultural hegemony.

4. **Deconstruction of Oppressive Narratives in Literature:** Every text, according to PND, can be read through the lens of Panoptic Neo-Dominionism Theory. Literary works like Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* exemplify the complex relations between the oppressor and the oppressed, demonstrating how power dynamics are often masked by social roles, ideologies, and apparent stability.

Key Concept: Neo-Dominionism

"Neo-Dominionism" blends the concept of "neo" (new) with "dominion," reflecting the idea of modern, pervasive forms of dominance and control that extend beyond traditional colonialism into all facets of human interaction, including relationships, politics, economics, love, sex and culture. Like Ultra-Colonialism, Neo-Dominionism highlights the existence of hierarchical power structures, but with an emphasis on how these structures have evolved in the context of the 4IR, where power is maintained not through direct territorial control but through technological, economic, love, and oppressive ideological domination.

Dominion suggests control, ownership, and sovereignty over others, which aligns with the lens that the dominant force, whether it be an individual, corporation, or state, exerts a similar kind of colonial control in various spheres of life.

The "**Neo**" aspect signifies that these forms of domination are not bound by traditional colonial borders but are global, technological, and deeply embedded in modern social systems, emphasizing that these power dynamics permeate personal, corporate, and even intimate relationships in contemporary society.

Thus, Neo-Dominionism captures the essence of modern, pervasive, and multifaceted oppression and control, reflecting both the legacy and the evolving nature of colonial-like power structures in today's world.

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism Lens offers a compelling framework for understanding the pervasive influence of oppression in contemporary life. By reading literary texts through this lens, we might gain new insights into the ways in which power dynamics manifest across different spheres of existence — from literature to politics, from economics to personal relationships. The PND challenges us to rethink the ways in which oppression is ingrained in every aspect of human interaction and how it operates through both old and new forms of ultra-colonialism in the 4IR.

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism Theory and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett

Waiting for Godot is an ideal text through which to apply the Panoptic Neo-Dominionism. The characters of Pozzo and Lucky represent a microcosm of the ultra-colonial relationship — one that transcends traditional boundaries of empire, reaching into the domain of interpersonal power struggles and dependency.

Pozzo as the Ultra-Colonialist Oppressor: Pozzo is the archetype of the colonizer. His authority is evident in his treatment of Lucky who is bound to Pozzo in a dynamic of both servitude and subjugation. Pozzo possesses power and control, not just over the material world (as he controls food and drink) but also over the intellectual and emotional aspects of Lucky's existence. Pozzo represents the economic, and cultural forces that dominate the oppressed, rendering them subservient not just through brute force, but also through manipulation and control of ideas, labor, and value.

Lucky as the Philosopher and Ultra-Colonized Subject: Lucky, once a master of knowledge and wisdom, is now reduced to a mere instrument of Pozzo's will. This is emblematic of how knowledge itself can be colonized and commodified in modern capitalist society. Lucky's ability to think and articulate his philosophy is overshadowed by his material dependency on Pozzo. The philosopher, once an autonomous agent of knowledge, becomes a mere tool of the Ultra-Colonizer, symbolizing the way intellectualism and creativity are often commodified under capitalist structures.

The Reversal of Roles: The cyclical nature of their relationship—where Pozzo dominates and controls Lucky, and Lucky, in turn, is compelled to serve—mirrors the repetitive patterns of oppression found in colonial structures. Pozzo's dependence on Lucky for intellectual output also hints at the paradoxical relationship between colonizer and colonized: the oppressor often requires the oppressed for survival, whether materially or intellectually.

Through this lens, *Waiting for Godot* is not just a philosophical examination of existence but a critique of the pervasive Ultra-Colonial dynamics that manifest in all levels of human interaction, from the personal to the political and global. The play's cyclical nature reflects how oppression, even in its most intimate forms, is perpetuated and repeated.

In conclusion, Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND) provides an indispensable framework for understanding the modern complexities of oppression, emphasizing the omnipresence and cyclical nature of power dynamics in both

personal and global contexts. As the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) reshapes societal structures through technology, economics, and social constructs, PND redefines oppression, extending beyond the historical confines of colonialism to include familial, corporate, and intimate relationships. This theoretical lens highlights the contemporary role of technological and corporate powers, asserting that domination today is enacted not through territorial control but through digital, economic, and cultural hegemony.

The significance of PND lies in its ability to reveal the subtle, often invisible mechanisms of control that shape our daily lives. The concept's application to literature, exemplified by the analysis of *Waiting for Godot*, exposes the enduring nature of oppression, where the roles of the oppressor and the oppressed continually shift but remain entrenched within systems of subjugation. Whether in the form of corporate exploitation, gender inequality, love or digital surveillance, PND challenges us to critically examine the subtle ways power structures infiltrate every facet of human existence.

The call to re-contextualize colonialism within modern frameworks is not merely academic; it is a necessary step toward confronting and dismantling the various forms of oppression that perpetuate inequality. PND urges both individuals and societies to recognize the importance of understanding and addressing these dynamics, ensuring that the fight against oppression remains relevant and active in the face of rapidly evolving global structures. In essence, Panoptic Neo-Dominionism demands that we confront the ubiquity of oppression in its contemporary forms and take responsibility for reshaping a more just and equitable world.

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND) to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*

When applying *Panoptic Neo-Dominionism* (PND), Rahman M. Mahbub's theory, to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*, we can analyze how both plays engage with complex power structures—personal, political, and social—that fit within the theory's lens of oppression. These works, while historically distant, reflect the kinds of hierarchical control, dominance, and dependency that resonate with the cyclical nature of oppression in modern contexts. By examining themes of political ambition, colonization, gender dynamics, and the use of power through PND, we can uncover deeper insights into how oppression functions not only within the realms of monarchies or empires, but within the very structures of personal relationships, morality, and survival.

Macbeth: The Corruption of Power, the Surveillance of Fate, and the Panoptic Gaze

In *Macbeth*, the central theme revolves around the destructive pursuit of power and the impact of unchecked ambition. Applying Mahbub's theory reveals how the play's characters live within a surveillance system defined not just by political structures, but also by personal fears, psychological manipulation, and destiny. The *oppressor-oppressed* binary plays out in the shifting dynamics of power between Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and the supernatural forces that seemingly control their fates.

1. Omnipresence of Oppression: Power as a Constant Watcher

At the heart of *Macbeth*, we see a character consumed by ambition, but also by paranoia and guilt, which are key aspects of Mahbub's concept of omnipresent oppression. Once Macbeth has slain King Duncan and usurped the throne, his rise to power is accompanied by an increasingly panoptic sense of surveillance. Macbeth is not only watched by the supernatural (the witches, the ghosts), but also by his own psyche. His guilt and fear of being overthrown reflect a panoptic form of self-surveillance—he constantly watches himself and is aware of his moral decline. In this way, oppression is internalized, and Macbeth becomes both the oppressor and the oppressed.

The idea of panopticism is expanded here, where Macbeth is both the subject and object of surveillance. The role of the *witches*—who can foresee and manipulate future events—adds another layer. Their cryptic prophecies act as an omnipresent force, as though Macbeth is perpetually under observation by cosmic powers that shape his destiny. These forces, which echo the mechanisms of neo-dominionist control, strip him of agency, making him both a participant in and a victim of his fate.

2. Re-contextualization of Colonial Relationships: Macbeth as a New Monarch, Yet Still a Tool of Oppression

Macbeth's ascent to the throne and his subsequent rule can be seen through Mahbub's lens as a re-contextualization of the colonial relationship. While Macbeth replaces Duncan, the new ruler is merely another figure of power that continues to maintain oppressive structures. Initially, Macbeth's rule appears to be an opportunity to free Scotland from the old regime; however, it soon becomes clear that his reign is not liberatory but is instead characterized by terror, violence, and fear—similar to the way colonizers impose order through fear, manipulation, and exploitation.

In this way, Macbeth's reign is emblematic of the cyclical nature of power. Even after overthrowing one "oppressor" (King Duncan), he becomes an oppressor himself, exploiting and terrorizing others to secure his rule. The shifting roles of "oppressor" and "oppressed" within the play demonstrate the destabilizing effects of ambition and unchecked power, much like the shifting relationships between colonizers and colonized in a colonial context.

3. Technological and Economic Forces as New Colonizers: The Control of Fate and Power

Macbeth's dependence on the witches and their prophecies demonstrates how external forces control the personal, emotional, and economic spheres of his existence. Rather than ruling through direct physical coercion, he is influenced by the witches' technological knowledge of the future—essentially controlling the *economic* and *political* system of the play through foreknowledge. This mirrors Mahbub's idea of the modern "colonizer" controlling not through territorial conquest, but through the manipulation of information, knowledge, and fate. Macbeth's actions are determined not by his own free will but by his manipulation of the future that is dictated to him.

His economic gains (securing the throne) come at the cost of his moral degradation and the destruction of those around him. This can be seen as a form of modern *dominionism*, where economic or political power is wielded not just through brute force but through controlling the flow of information (prophecies, psychological manipulation, etc.) and the exploitation of the oppressed (the murder of Banquo, Macduff's family).

The Tempest: The Colonization of the Self and the Other, the Dynamics of Master and Slave

The Tempest explores themes of colonization, power dynamics, and the self-imposed exile of its main character, Prospero. Using Mahbub's *Panoptic Neo-Dominionism* theory, we can analyze how the play critiques colonial

relationships, the psychological oppression of others, and the oppressive forces of control, both external and internal, that shape relationships between master and servant.

1. Omnipresence of Oppression: The Invisible Watcher and the Master-Slave Dynamic

Prospero's control over the island and its inhabitants, especially Caliban and Ariel, serves as an exemplary microcosm for analyzing neo-dominionism. While Prospero is the obvious "oppressor," the power dynamics between the colonizer (Prospero) and the colonized (Caliban) reveal deeper layers of manipulation, subjugation, and self-deception.

Ariel, the spirit who serves Prospero, is the idealized servant who exists in a state of surveillance and subjugation, but also with an awareness of the freedom that comes after fulfilling Prospero's commands. Caliban, in contrast, is an embodiment of the oppressed, yet his oppression is not simply a result of Prospero's physical dominance, but a psychological domination that aligns with Mahbub's notion of Panoptic surveillance. Caliban constantly feels the gaze of Prospero, who controls his life by limiting his knowledge of the outside world and keeping him on the island, where the promise of escape is always just out of reach.

2. Re-contextualization of Colonial Relationships: Prospero as the Colonizer and Caliban as the Colonized

In the play, Prospero represents the European colonizer, who imposes his knowledge, culture, and authority on the native inhabitant of the island, Caliban. The process of colonization in *The Tempest* goes beyond the physical occupation of land; it is also an imposition of language and ideology. Prospero attempts to "civilize" Caliban by teaching him language, yet Caliban rejects this, arguing that the language of Prospero is a tool of oppression rather than enlightenment. This dynamic exemplifies the cyclical nature of colonial oppression, where the colonizer enforces his culture, values, and system of knowledge onto the colonized, and in turn, the colonized is rendered subservient through the denial of their own culture and identity.

The relationship between Prospero and Caliban, when viewed through Mahbub's PND lens, is a stark representation of colonial oppression—where language, cultural superiority, and economic dependency maintain the colonizer's power, while the colonized (Caliban) is reduced to a dependent, oppressed figure. In this sense, even though Caliban is the literal "native" of the island, the control Prospero exercises over him mimics the modern form of "neo-colonialism" where the colonizer's power is embedded in psychological and cultural dominance.

3. Technological and Economic Forces as New Colonizers: Prospero's Magic as a Form of Control

In *The Tempest*, Prospero's magic serves as a metaphor for technological and ideological control. His power over the elements, his ability to manipulate time and space, and his use of the spirit Ariel all reflect the use of advanced technology or knowledge to subjugate others. Through his magic, Prospero not only manipulates the people on the island (especially Caliban) but also controls the very reality of the island's environment. This mirrors Mahbub's argument that in the modern world, those with control over information and technology are the true colonizers. Prospero uses his magical knowledge (similar to the technological control in the 4IR) to manipulate those around him, ensuring that they remain in a state of dependency and subjugation, just as modern colonial powers manipulate economic, technological, and informational resources to maintain their dominance.

Power Dynamics Beyond Traditional Colonialism

Both *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* reveal how Mahbub's *Panoptic Neo-Dominionism* theory can illuminate the multifaceted nature of oppression—whether through psychological manipulation, political domination, or control over knowledge. In *Macbeth*, the omnipresent fear of surveillance, fate, and ambition creates a panoptic system of oppression that traps its central characters. Meanwhile, in *The Tempest*, the complex relationships between Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel echo colonial dynamics of domination, resistance, and self-deception, while the control of knowledge and magic mirrors the modern mechanisms of power in the 4IR. By using PND, we understand that oppression is not a static or isolated force but one that permeates all levels of human interaction, whether in the personal, political, or supernatural realms.

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND) to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Applying **Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND)** to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* offers a nuanced and powerful lens to explore how systems of oppression—ranging from colonial domination to modern patriarchal control—are embedded in the social, economic, and cultural structures of both societies. Through Mahbub's theory, we can examine the power dynamics of *Things Fall Apart* and *The Handmaid's Tale* as systems of subjugation and control that transcend the boundaries of historical colonialism and into the complexities of contemporary societal structures.

Things Fall Apart: Examining the Intersections of Colonizer and Colonized, and the Cycles of Oppression

Things Fall Apart is often analyzed through the lens of colonialism, as it chronicles the disintegration of Igbo society in the face of British imperialism. However, when read through Mahbub's *Panoptic Neo-Dominionism* lens, the text not only critiques historical colonial oppression but also highlights how modern power structures (whether through religion, patriarchy, or economic systems) operate in ways that resemble colonial dynamics.

Omnipresence of Oppression: The Internalization of Power Structures

In the society of Umuofia, we see the dynamics of power as ingrained and omnipresent within both personal and public spheres. The characters, particularly Okonkwo, are not simply subjugated by external forces (like the British colonizers) but also by internalized, patriarchal systems. Okonkwo's view of masculinity, for example, is a direct result of the societal norms that dictate rigid gender roles. His self-hatred and fear of being perceived as weak or effeminate—emotions rooted in the colonial cultural discourse of "manliness"—show how colonial power is internalized in the colonized subject. His tyrannical treatment of his family, especially his wives, aligns with what Mahbub would call the "*oppressor and oppressed*" binary, where patriarchal norms enforce domination and subjugation in intimate spaces.

In Mahbub's theory, this concept of *omnipresence of oppression* is important. Even within the confines of the village, a subtle form of colonial oppression exists in the form of gender inequality, economic hierarchy, and the rigid maintenance of power through violence. These systems function like a panoptic surveillance mechanism, constantly reminding individuals of their place in the social hierarchy—whether through fear of failure or the threat of punishment.

The Binary of the Colonizer and Colonized

The arrival of the British colonizers introduces an overt colonial power structure, but the dynamics of oppression are not limited to the historical imperialism of the West. The Igbo community itself is structured around a complex hierarchy of power. For instance, the *egwugwu* (ancestral spirits) represent the colonial-like figures of authority within the traditional society, perpetuating power through ritual and fear. When the British arrive with their new forms of governance, laws, and religion, the dynamic between the "colonizer" (represented by the British and their cultural impositions) and the "colonized" (the Igbo people, including Okonkwo) becomes even more apparent.

Okonkwo's tragic fall can be viewed as the result of his inability to adapt to the new system of colonial rule. His resistance to the new power structure leads him to both personal and collective ruin. From a PND perspective, the arrival of the British in Umuofia represents not only the force of external oppression but also a shift in the internal structures of power. As Okonkwo's

society starts to embrace the new colonial order, old forms of power—such as the traditional judicial system—are replaced by European institutions. The colonial powers thus reconfigure local power dynamics, shifting the relationship between the *oppressor* (the British) and the *oppressed* (the Igbo), while at the same time further embedding the systems of patriarchy and social hierarchies.

In Achebe's novel, the British colonizers bring with them not just physical force, but a new economic system that is enforced through taxation, conversion to Christianity, and the creation of European-style markets. The power of the British colonizers lies not only in their military might but in their ability to monopolize resources and restructure the social fabric. The British manipulate economic dependencies, offering converts material rewards, such as land or protection, while stripping the Igbo of their autonomy and traditional values.

This reflects Mahbub's assertion that the *modern colonizer* is not just an imperial power but an entity that controls resources—land, labor, and ideology—through economic coercion. The Igbo's encounter with colonialism is thus an economic colonization, further entrenching the binary between the colonizer (British) and the colonized (Igbo).

The Handmaid's Tale: Gender, Surveillance, and the New Forms of Dominion

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* explores the dystopian regime of Gilead, a totalitarian state where women are stripped of their rights and subjected to systematic reproductive control. The power dynamics in *The Handmaid's Tale* align strongly with the concepts of oppression, dominance, and dependency explored in Mahbub's *Panoptic Neo-Dominionism* theory.

Omnipresence of Oppression: Total Surveillance and Control

In Gilead, oppression is systemic and ever-present, influencing every aspect of daily life. The Handmaids, who are the primary victims of the regime, exist in a constant state of surveillance and subjugation. The use of technology—surveillance cameras, eyes everywhere, and the rigid control of speech, behavior, and bodies—functions as a form of panoptic oppression. The totalitarian nature of Gilead's surveillance state echoes Mahbub's concept of how power works today: through the control of information, resources, and bodies.

In this sense, Gilead operates under a continuous and ever-watchful *panopticism*, where citizens are constantly aware of their roles and their

proximity to punishment for any perceived disobedience. The male elite, embodied in figures like the Commanders, exert power through this omnipresent control. The Handmaids, like the oppressed in Mahbub's theory, are subject not just to physical control but also to the manipulation of their desires, beliefs, and sense of self.

Patriarchy as a New Form of Domination

Although Gilead is not a traditional colonial power, Atwood's portrayal of a patriarchal dystopia mirrors the structures of oppression found in both colonial and modern capitalist societies. The Commanders and their Wives are akin to the *oppressor*, while the Handmaids and the lower classes are the *oppressed*. This binary relationship is underscored by the commodification of women's bodies. In a *neo-colonial* sense, Gilead's society can be seen as a reflection of modern forms of control that function as an extension of colonialism but through the manipulation of gender and reproductive autonomy.

The Handmaids are not just physically controlled; their identities are erased and redefined by the state, reducing them to mere vessels for reproduction. The system works to commodify them in a way that mirrors colonial exploitation, where the body of the oppressed is not their own but is subject to the will of the colonial or patriarchal master. The oppression is not just in the physical control of the Handmaids' bodies, but also in the mental and emotional manipulation, creating a sense of dependency and compliance.

Much like the British colonizers in *Things Fall Apart*, the regime of Gilead controls not just the people but also the means of reproduction and labor. The economy of Gilead is dependent on the exploitation of women's reproductive labor, a modern iteration of colonial extraction. The technological tools used in Gilead, such as surveillance, restricted access to knowledge, and medical control over reproduction, echo Mahbub's idea of how technological and economic forces operate as new forms of domination.

In Gilead, the Commanders and the ruling elite, like colonial powers, control the resources of knowledge, religion, and economics. They manipulate religious ideology to justify their actions, while simultaneously exploiting the women they control as reproductive commodities. This economic control mirrors how modern corporations or states control labor and intellectual resources, a key point Mahbub makes about the 4IR.

Both *Things Fall Apart* and *The Handmaid's Tale* serve as poignant examples of how Mahbub's *Panoptic Neo-Dominionism* framework can be applied to understand systems of oppression beyond traditional colonialism. Through these novels, we see how power dynamics—whether through colonial conquest, patriarchal subjugation, or technological surveillance—operate on multiple levels. These power structures do not simply oppress through physical means but work through ideological, economic, and emotional

control, continuously shaping the lives of the oppressed. By reading these novels through the lens of *Panoptic Neo-Dominionism*, we uncover the omnipresent, cyclical, and multifaceted forms of domination that persist in both historical and modern contexts, urging us to rethink the ongoing struggles of the oppressed in the world today.

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND) to Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2007), a novel that explores the life of Yeong-hye, a woman who renounces meat and, in doing so, begins an increasingly radical transformation of her body and mind, offers a powerful narrative for examining the pervasive and insidious nature of oppression in modern society. Through the lens of **Rahman M. Mahbub's *Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND)***, the novel becomes a complex map of how power dynamics extend into all aspects of human life, including the personal, familial, societal, and even the body itself. As a work that critiques the social, political, and gendered control exerted over individuals, *The Vegetarian* can be interpreted as a reflection of the broader dynamics of oppression that Mahbub's theory seeks to address in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

By applying PND, we can explore how oppression in *The Vegetarian* operates across multiple dimensions: the family, society, gender, the body, and even the mind. This analysis reveals how traditional power structures are reframed in a modern context, dominated not by brute force but by a complex web of surveillance, economic control, gendered expectations, and technological advances. Ultimately, the novel illustrates how the evolution of these mechanisms of control shapes the self and the body, reflecting the central tenets of PND in the 4IR era.

Omnipresence of Oppression: Control Over the Body, Mind, and Choices

One of the central themes of *The Vegetarian* is the body's role as both a site of personal identity and a medium for societal control. Yeong-hye's decision to stop eating meat becomes a symbol of her resistance to the norms and expectations placed on her by her family and society. However, as *PND* suggests, oppression is omnipresent, embedded not just in overt acts of violence or domination, but in subtler, more insidious ways that restrict autonomy and choice. Yeong-hye's renunciation of meat is interpreted as a

rejection of conventional norms surrounding consumption, gender, and family. But, as the story progresses, her attempt to exert control over her body is met with increasingly oppressive forces that seek to "correct" her behavior.

Surveillance of Personal Autonomy

Yeong-hye's bodily autonomy is scrutinized by every character in the novel, particularly by her husband and her father. Her decision to stop eating meat, a deeply personal choice, becomes an act of rebellion that the characters cannot understand or accept. This reflects a key aspect of **Panoptic Neo-Dominionism**, where personal actions are surveilled, not only by institutions but by familial and social structures that seek to impose conformity. Just as the panopticon operates as a mechanism of surveillance and control, the gaze of her husband, father, and society at large acts as a form of surveillance on Yeong-hye's every action. Her resistance to societal norms is framed as something unnatural, and the system around her seeks to break her down through shame, coercion, and manipulation.

This surveillance is not just psychological but also physical. For example, Yeong-hye's body undergoes a transformation that society and her family members perceive as pathological. This mirrors the **technological and economic forces** in PND that dominate modern lives, controlling the body's autonomy through medical, psychological, and social systems of normalization.

Family Dynamics as Colonization

In *PND*, the idea of colonial dynamics extends beyond the historical context of empire and into personal and family relationships. Yeong-hye's familial interactions are a reflection of how power dynamics shape intimate relationships and how the body itself becomes a site of colonialism. Within her family structure, Yeong-hye is subjected to the patriarchal control of her father and later, her husband, both of whom represent oppressive forces that seek to control her autonomy and self-expression.

The Father as the Ultra-Colonizer Oppressor

Yeong-hye's father represents the patriarchal, authoritarian figure, exerting control over her life in a way that parallels colonial power dynamics. He embodies the dominant force in the family, whose authority extends into every aspect of Yeong-hye's existence. His desire to maintain the family's status quo, embodied through control over her decisions, eating habits, and behavior, mirrors the way colonial powers would impose their values on subjugated populations.

When Yeong-hye refuses to conform to societal norms—particularly with her rejection of meat and the physical alterations she makes to her body—her father's response is one of violent domination. This dynamic is not based on

external violence but on emotional, psychological, and ideological subjugation. Her refusal to align with patriarchal expectations marks her as "other," a deviant who must be brought back into the fold.

Husband as the Domestic Colonizer

Similarly, Yeong-hye's husband, who initially appears to be a passive observer, becomes complicit in the cycle of oppression by seeking to dominate her physically, emotionally, and sexually. His growing obsession with her body, particularly when it becomes an object of desire and frustration, reflects how power is exerted in intimate, even sexual, contexts. In PND, the "colonization" of the body in relationships, particularly through the lens of gender and sexuality, demonstrates how control operates not just through political or economic power but through personal and intimate spaces.

Her husband's attempts to control her body through sexual fantasy (as seen in his obsession with her "unfleshed" image) exemplifies how gendered and sexual dynamics are used as tools of subjugation. His obsession with Yeong-hye's body transforms her into a colonial subject, a figure whose autonomy is erased by his desire to dominate and possess her.

Social and Psychological Control

While Yeong-hye's family serves as the immediate vehicle for oppression, the broader societal and psychological mechanisms at play in *The Vegetarian* can be understood through the lens of technological and economic forces as colonizers. The novel takes place in a modern, industrialized South Korea, a society heavily influenced by capitalist ideologies, consumerism, and the commodification of bodies. In this context, societal pressures and expectations shape individuals in subtle yet powerful ways.

The Capitalist and Medical Systems as Forces of Oppression

Yeong-hye's psychological transformation—her rejection of meat, her gradual disassociation from human society, and her ultimate detachment from reality—can be understood as a response to the oppressive systems of capitalism and technological control. The commodification of bodies in capitalist economies is reflected in Yeong-hye's own objectification. Her physical transformation, which is initially seen as a personal act of rebellion, is then pathologized by the medical and social systems that attempt to "correct" her. Medical professionals, in particular, represent a form of technological control over the body, attempting to define and "fix" Yeong-hye's condition through diagnoses, treatments, and medications.

This mirrors how modern capitalist systems rely on the regulation of individual behaviors through technology (e.g., medical systems, pharmaceuticals) to ensure conformity. Yeong-hye's transformation becomes

a metaphor for the dehumanizing forces of a society that seeks to mold individuals into compliant, productive units, stripping them of their agency and autonomy in the process.

Deconstruction of Oppressive Narratives: Yeong-hye's Radical Resistance

The most significant element of *PND* as applied to *The Vegetarian* is the deconstruction of traditional narratives of resistance. Yeong-hye's actions, especially her decision to stop eating meat and her rejection of societal norms, cannot be seen as simple acts of defiance. Rather, her rejection of the norms surrounding consumption, gender, and family reflects a deeper, more insidious form of resistance to the omnipresent, all-encompassing systems of oppression that pervade modern society. However, in line with the cyclical nature of oppression described by *PND*, Yeong-hye's resistance ultimately becomes part of a larger, more complex system of power dynamics that she is unable to escape.

In a sense, her bodily transformation is both an act of freedom and an act of submission. Her self-destruction can be read as a metaphor for the ways in which oppressed individuals are often trapped by the very systems they seek to resist, ultimately perpetuating the cycles of oppression rather than breaking free from them.

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism in the Context of the 4IR: Gender, Technology, and Control

PND, as applied to *The Vegetarian*, highlights how the forces of modern oppression extend into new realms, particularly with the rise of the **Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)**. In the 4IR, technology, gender, economics, and societal structures interact to create new forms of control over the body and mind. Yeong-hye's attempt to free herself from the control of societal expectations (particularly regarding her gender and body) ultimately underscores the ways in which technology, capitalism, and gender norms intersect to shape the modern individual.

Her transformation is an attempt to resist these forces, but her inability to escape them fully highlights how, in the 4IR, oppression is no longer just about colonial territories or patriarchal domination; it is about the pervasive and all-encompassing systems of control embedded in every aspect of modern life, from the commodification of the body to the psychological control exerted through social expectations and technological advancements.

The Relevance of Panoptic Neo-Dominionism in the Present Era

The Vegetarian exemplifies the ways in which oppression manifests in contemporary society, particularly in the realms of gender, family, and body politics. By applying Rahman M. Mahbub's **Panoptic Neo-Dominionism (PND)**, we gain a deeper understanding of how power dynamics, rooted in

ultra-colonial systems, shape individual experiences and societal structures in the 4IR. Through surveillance, economic control, and gendered expectations, oppression becomes a pervasive force that extends into all aspects of life, from the personal to the global.

In a time when technology, capitalism, and ideological control permeate every corner of society, PND offers a framework for understanding how modern forms of oppression persist and evolve, highlighting the significance of this theory not just in literature but in real-world applications as well. By reframing the colonial dynamics of the past and applying them to the 4IR, PND illuminates the insidious nature of oppression that continues to shape human lives today and in the future.

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism Lens Beyond Literature: A Social and Political Critique

Panoptic Neo-Dominionism can be applied beyond literature to explain a wide range of societal dynamics, especially in the context of the 4IR. The modern colonizer is not just a colonial power that controls physical territories but also a corporation or state that controls digital information, labor, and access to knowledge. Much like Pozzo's control over Lucky, these entities exercise power by monopolizing resources — from data to technology — and exploiting those who are economically and socially dependent on them.

Family Dynamics: In the family unit, we often see oppressive dynamics where one member — be it a parent, partner, or sibling — assumes a position of control, limiting the autonomy and freedom of others. This is a microcosm of the broader colonial relationships that Pro Colonialism seeks to expose.

Corporate Structures: In the corporate world, workers often face similar colonial dynamics, where their labor is commodified and their autonomy stripped away by corporate structures that hold economic and technological power. This mirrors the power relations seen in historical colonial contexts, where the colonizer extracted resources and labor from the colonized.

State Power and Surveillance: The state, as a modern colonizer, exerts control over its citizens through surveillance, economic policies, and the regulation of public and private life. This colonialism is not overt, as it was during the imperial era, but operates through subtler mechanisms like control of information and public opinion.

The Dynamics of Love and Sex Through the Lens of Panoptic Neo-Dominionism

When we apply **Panoptic Neo-Dominionism** to intimate relationships, particularly love and sex, Mahbub's theory reveals that these dynamics, often perceived as private and personal, are deeply influenced by the same structures of power and control that govern broader societal and colonial relationships. In relationships, the key dynamic of **oppressor** and **oppressed** can be translated into the roles played by partners, where the one with more resources — whether in terms of money, influence, or emotional leverage — assumes a position of dominance.

- **Economic Power and Oppression in Love:** Much like in the corporate or societal structures, individuals with financial independence or power often hold the reins in romantic relationships. The one who has access to economic resources can dictate the terms of the relationship, manipulating emotional and social dynamics to maintain control. This mirrors the ways in which colonizers in the traditional sense imposed their power, using resources as tools of domination. In Pro Colonialism, the person with financial or social capital becomes the "colonizer" of the relationship, shaping the dynamics to serve their own needs, while the one with fewer resources is positioned as the "colonized," often subjugated to the will of the more powerful partner.

Gender and Power Dynamics: Pro Colonialism also sheds light on how power works within the context of gender in love and sex. Whether it's a man or a woman who holds more power, their ability to control the relationship shifts the dynamic. A partner who has social status, beauty, or influence — qualities that can be seen as forms of currency in a capitalist world — can manipulate the other into dependence, both emotionally and physically. This is not merely a negotiation of affection or desire; it becomes a form of colonialism, where the "lesser" partner is absorbed into the world view and desires of the dominant one, potentially losing their agency or autonomy.

Sex as a Tool of Control: In sexual relationships, **Panoptic Neo-Dominionism** can explain how intimacy itself may become a tool of oppression. The partner with power can dictate the terms of sexual engagement, objectifying or dominating the other. This dynamic is not restricted to any specific gender or orientation but is more rooted in the balance of power. The ultra-colonist uses sex to reinforce dominance in the name of love, making it a transactional mechanism to keep the oppressed party in a dependent or subordinate role.

Through the **Panoptic Neo-Dominionism** , love and sex are not seen as purely romantic or emotional exchanges, but as complex, multi-layered relationships where the power dynamics at play often reflect broader systems of control and subjugation. These relationships, in their most extreme forms, resemble colonial systems of oppression, where one partner's needs, desires, and autonomy are overshadowed by the other's power and manipulation.

By examining love and sex through this framework, Mahbub highlights how deeply ingrained these **Panoptic Neo-Dominionism structures** are, not just in the political or economic systems of society but in the very private, personal spaces where power dynamics continue to shape human interaction. Even in the most intimate of exchanges, Pro Colonialism asserts that the forces of oppression and control are ever-present, guiding and defining the relationship between individuals.